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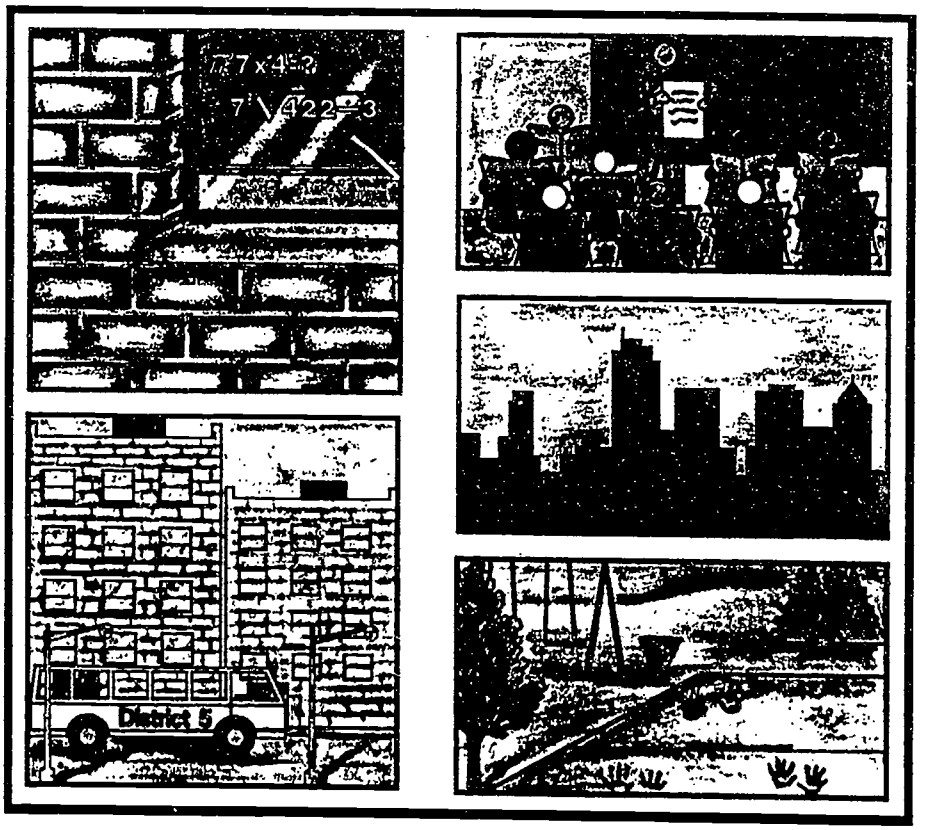
ABSTRACT

"Academic Achievement, Culture, and Literacy: An Introduction" by John Attinasi provides a framework for the title paper. Multiculturalism requires not only a change in curriculum, but a change in school climate and pedagogy. Communication is critical, given the centrality of language and the variety of linguistic expression in homes and schools. "Multicultural Education: Challenges to Administrators and School Leadership" by Carol D. Lee reviews the difficulties in implementing multicultural education and its implications. Whether multicultural education is cast as promoting human relations, finding ways to teach effectively, or reconstructing society, administrators must take a critical look at their goals and consider alternative approaches. The debate about multicultural education should be framed by the tenets that there are demands on schooling dictated by the fundamental principles of democracy and that the fundamental demand of schooling is to prepare students to participate actively in civic debate. Changes are required in curriculum and instructional practice and in assessment practices in order to implement multicultural education of real meaning. (Contains eight references.) (SLD)

Urban Monograph Series

Multicultural Education: Challenges to Administrators and School Leadership

URBAN EDUCATION PROGRAM



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NCREL

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Lynn J. Stinnette

Lynn J. Stinnette
Director, Urban Education

Preface

This paper, "Academic Achievement, Culture, and Literacy: An Introduction," by John Attinasi, provides a framework for a series of four papers presented at the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory's 1993 Urban School Leadership Mini-Conference in Lisle, Illinois. The authors of these papers, John Attinasi of California State University, Rosalinda Barrera of New Mexico State University, Barbara Bowman of the Erikson Institute in Chicago, and Carol Lee of Northwestern University, served on a panel discussing the topic, "Language, Literacy, and Culture in Urban Schools." "Academic Achievement, Culture, and Literacy: An Introduction," adapted from the author's speech at the mini-conference, introduces the concept of multiculturalism and multicultural education. In *Multicultural Education: Challenges to Administrators and School Leadership*, Carol Lee identifies key issues in implementing multicultural education and discusses implications for curricula and instructional practice. Barbara Bowman, in *Cultural Diversity and Academic Achievement*, guides our understanding of how students' differences in culture and language affect student performance and achievement in school. She offers recommendations for changing programs and practices starting in early childhood. In her forthcoming paper, Rosalinda Barrera discusses how school-community partnerships promote literacy development among culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Academic Achievement, Culture, and Literacy

An Introduction

by John Attinasi
Professor, Department of Teacher Education, and Director,
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"Respect for Diversity is the Hallmark of Democracy"

Providing universal public education has always been considered a function of U.S. democracy and a leaven of the society. For urban school educators, schooling has many new roles within the broad democratic concepts of instruction and equity. We are committed to educating all children and believing that all can learn and achieve. As the noted scholar Asa G. Hilliard III has said, "Respect for diversity is the hallmark of democracy," (Hilliard. 1991/1992). Students of diverse backgrounds and social conditions, languages and dialects now populate our schools, a situation that we would have thought unusual a few decades ago. The graduating class of the year 2010 is already born and two years old. Demographics tell us that most of these children are culturally and linguistically unlike the majority of teacher candidates, teachers, and administrators.

As educators, we have to balance overwhelming new information, new demands, and new technology with the ways we know how to teach young people. We cannot do it all. But being unaware of innovations in child development and in educating culturally and linguistically diverse students is like ignoring the polio vaccine. It is time to take the most crucial aspect of our professional mission, leadership in educating the children in urban schools and communities—who are more culturally diverse than ever—and to renew and advance our attention to their achievement in the stressful urban setting. This challenge may be discomforting.

Opening the Debate about Multiculturalism

I used to love the word "closure." I liked the end of a course, finishing data gathering, closing the debate before a vote, completing an article, picking the last tomato, and washing the last dish. Because I relate to products more than process, it has taken me many years to appreciate the process of things. A conversation with a sociolinguist colleague, Ngure wa Mwachofi of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, changed my mind about having "closure." He told me about post-modern philosopher Michel Foucault's analysis of the term. Foucault said that closure illuminates a

practice that has always exhibited a dangerous tendency: the need that many people have to label and dismiss, to feel good and stop thinking. This meaning of closure has bothered me. It relates to how we think of politics and multiculturalism.

In politics, we are so confused by the end of the Cold War that we want closure on whether or not the Russians are our friends. How we use language is also political. In language, closure means that we can change a word to create a "politically correct" phrase. Should we say Hispanic or Latino? Asian, not Oriental? Closure enables us to have comfort. It puts a label on a box—a label that inhibits us from opening the box to see what is really inside.

Many people have sought closure in the process of defining multiculturalism and multicultural education. Once we get past the disuniting debates about what books or knowledge should be required (and those debates are necessary for every person to go through in order to establish a foundation of common knowledge about issues of cultural diversity in curriculum), we then need to engage in multicultural awareness, learn to appreciate diversity, and take action. Having closure often ends in "doing multiculturalism" this year, like we "do dinosaurs" in second grade. What is discomforting is that the definition of multiculturalism is unsatisfying, because it does not provide the closure that most people seek. They would be disappointed to hear James Banks, key scholar in the field of multicultural education, say that multiculturalism is a concept, a movement, and a process, and, as such, there can be no closure.

The Evolution of Multiculturalism

The concept of multiculturalism itself has evolved. There was first the notion that only culturally and linguistically diverse people need multicultural education. Then came the human relations idea that everyone's uniqueness and feelings should be acknowledged. Next, the ethnic studies movement advocated the study of excluded minority groups and world literatures. There are now proponents who attempt to combine all three of these perspectives to help enhance self-esteem, enable positive interaction, and raise global awareness. Among scholars in the field, the goals behind education that is multicultural and socially reconstructionist are to improve academic outcomes; promote equity among gender, ethnicity, and exceptionality; and effect change in the society beyond the school.

This is merely the *concept* or group of concepts about multiculturalism. As a *movement*, multiculturalism affects school leaders, parents, community members, and society as a whole. Multiculturalism challenges the vertical view of cultural development as the refined production of an elite (mostly white men of leisure and power) and recognizes, from an anthropological

perspective, that all cultures have resources and value. Paulo Freire worked to develop literacy in marginalized people by initiating dialogue with them to help them recognize that the ideas, actions, values, and objects of everyday existence are cultural and worth reading about.

As a *process*, multiculturalism obviously does not provide closure. Change is the only constant. This concept is what philosophers say and how calculus students solve problems. Viewing multiculturalism as a process should return us to a larger sphere of schooling as a function of U.S. democracy and a leaven of our society. The process of multiculturalism should connect our school learning to the elements of authentic learning—including critical inquiry and other higher-order thinking—rich multidirectional conversation and other linguistic modes, social engagement and support for learning, and, most of all, real world applications in classroom instruction, all of which are essential to principles of democracy. In this regard, multicultural educational processes serve to open opportunity for learning to all students by stimulating students to engage in different forms of inquiry. For instance, students can pursue different forms of inquiry when addressing societal issues (e.g., the environment, politics, and social reform) across the curriculum—in mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, and so on.

Multiculturalism: Implications for School Climate and Pedagogy

Multiculturalism requires not only a change in curriculum, but a change in school climate and pedagogy. In addition to implementing a higher-order, multicultural curriculum, schools need to address affective issues. Schools and the people in them need to invite diversity, eradicate stereotypes, enhance self-esteem, encourage all members of the community to have a voice, and demand educational achievement. The central practice in schools is communication, where there is equal emphasis on spoken, written, and nonverbal forms. The focus on communication in urban classrooms is critical, given the centrality of language and the variety of linguistic expression in homes and schools.

Without looking deeply into multiculturalism, the need for closure becomes a thin veil for a tendency toward exclusion of underrepresented cultural groups. All of our practices and conceptualization require critical examination and change. We must begin where each child and each adult is at the moment. We cannot ask for action from a person coming to first awareness. We need to communicate so that awareness matures into making changes and taking action appropriate for our work, our place in the culture, and our place in the social system.

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John Attinasi is professor in the Department of Teacher Education and director of bilingual credentialing at California State University at Long Beach. From 1990 to 1993, he was associate professor and director of the Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) at Indiana University Northwest in Gary. UTEP is a multischool district and university consortium for school-based professional preparation and development serving Northwest Indiana. It is one of the few programs that prepares teachers for the urban context. Classroom teachers and university faculty work in instructional teams as co-instructors and co-researchers, and parents and community members are involved in program decision-making. Attinasi's extensive written work includes articles on teacher preparation for language and cultural diversity and language attitudes, discourse, and development in the Latino community (and particularly the Puerto Rican community). He received his doctorate in anthropology from the University of Chicago and is a fluent speaker of Spanish, French, and Chol Maya.

Multicultural Education: Challenges to Administrators and School Leadership

By Carol D. Lee, Ph.D.
Northwestern University

Beliefs that Drive Implementation of Multicultural Education

One of the fundamental difficulties in implementing multicultural education in a school is its challenge to the many basic beliefs and assumptions held by teachers and administrators in schools and by parents and other members of the larger community being served. What multicultural education will look like in any individual school will be a function of the beliefs of key figures around a number of important issues. Among these issues are the following:

1. Beliefs about the demands of democratic citizenship
2. What it takes to succeed in America
3. Traditional motifs about key periods in the history of this country (such as the settling of this country by various waves of European immigrants, the westward expansion, the African enslavement)
4. Beliefs about what knowledge base is critical for learning in preparation for the twenty-first century
5. How children and adolescents learn
6. The role of language in learning and value judgements about different varieties of English and the languages of linguistically diverse immigrant groups

School communities must ask themselves difficult questions:

1. Whether implementing a curriculum that challenges the assumptions that they believe unify this country will result in further alienation among groups
2. Whether it is actually best for schools to attempt to unify groups by implementing a curriculum that emphasizes what different groups have in common as opposed to what makes each group distinct

Implications of Multicultural Education

There is also often much uncertainty among educators and parents about how to integrate multicultural considerations into the academic demands of a curriculum and whether such integration will result in increased achievement for

students, especially students who are not succeeding in our schools. All of these questions are heightened for schools that have ethnically, economically, and/or linguistically homogeneous student populations. Pressures from parents and community residents are often more virulent under such circumstances, with more conservative political interests in communities asking whether or not they have a right to have their interests and perspectives represented in the curriculum of schools they directly financially support, especially when those interests are in conflict with commonly accepted tenets of multicultural educational philosophies.

Conceptions of Multicultural Education

This network of conflicts and questions is complicated even further when one considers that we do not all share the same meanings about what multicultural education means and looks like. Sleeter and Grant (1987) point out three basic conceptions of multicultural education reflected in the literature up to 1987.

One view is multicultural education as experiments in **promoting human relations**. Under this framework, activities that provide opportunities for students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds to interact are sufficient. The basic curriculum of schools can remain relatively untouched under this umbrella.

A second view is multicultural education as **finding ways to teach effectively the culturally different**. Teaching strategies aimed at using culturally sensitive instructional strategies for African-American, Native American, and Latino students may be sufficient to fulfill the expectations of this view of multicultural education. The curriculum in schools that teach white students, particularly those from middle-class and affluent districts, is in no way challenged to change. Sleeter and Grant (1987) noted that most studies under both of these frameworks look at diversity primarily in terms of race and ethnicity and ignore differences in terms of gender, social class, and handicap.

The civic debate over which of these views of multicultural education will be the goal of a district's attempts at transformation is neither simple nor straightforward.

The third view is multicultural education as **social reconstructionism**. Under this framework, students are taught to challenge the assumptions and worldviews that inform the traditional content of schools' curricula, and in particular, history curriculum. Students are also encouraged to become social activists in their communities, to confront conflicts around issues of race, class, gender, and handicap. This view of multicultural education challenges schools to change the content and delivery of instruction, regardless of the racial, ethnic, linguistic, or economic class makeup of the student population. It is this view of multicultural education that is most radical and most

problematic to implement, especially in school districts where the student population is predominantly white, regardless of class. The civic debate over which of these views of multicultural education will be the goal of a district's attempts at transformation is neither simple nor straightforward. What set of criteria are appropriate for framing such debate and what role school administrators and other school leaders play in such debate and transformation are crucial issues to consider.

School administrators must first hold an internal debate with themselves ferreting through the maze of difficult questions inherent in implementing multicultural education.

The Role of School Administrators

School administrators are much like the coaches of professional athletic teams. The administrators are clearly the motivators and strategic leaders of the teams. The coaches are responsible not only to the teams, but also to the professional associations of which the teams are a member, to the owners of the teams, to the general managers, and to the general public. Similarly, school administrators are responsive not only to their teachers and students, but also to the local and state legislators and other governmental policy makers, to key political figures, to the general superintendent, to the district superintendent, to the general public, including parents and community members with active political and economic interests. This comparison is intended to make clear that school administrators cannot legislate change alone and are often constrained by forces external to the school. At the same time, realistically, school administrators are public servants and people who presumably want to keep their jobs. Still, what makes a super coach also makes a super principal: leadership.

This means, among other things, that the school administrators must first hold an internal debate with themselves ferreting through the maze of difficult questions inherent in implementing multicultural education. School administrators must be prepared to take a critical gaze, considering points of view with which they may be uncomfortable, asking themselves what it means to take the difficult position and what is both positive and negative about such a position. Leadership means giving serious consideration to alternatives; being willing to take chances; and, above all, personally taking a principled position on the critical issues involved. Undertaking this role need not be a lonely journey, however. Serious discussions with administrators in similar positions, lead teachers in one's school, and with educational leaders with whom one does not necessarily agree can help to broaden one's thinking and force one to think critically.

Framing the Debate about Multicultural Education

I believe there are at least two fundamental tenets that should frame such civic debate about multicultural education. The first is that there are demands on schooling dictated by fundamental principles of U.S. democracy that supersede what may be distinctly local interests and points of view. Certainly the Civil War and the history of the civil rights movement in this country have laid down such a gauntlet. Individual districts (i.e., states or municipalities) do not have the right to deny citizens the right to vote or to have equal access to educational opportunities. Our court system and legislatures exist in order to provide a forum through which we may clarify the fuzziness of what such political rights may operationally look like. The ongoing political debate over abortion rights is an example. Note that I have not referred to the moral debate over a woman's right to abortion or an unborn child's right to life. The ongoing political debate in courts and legislatures is around how to balance the individual right to dissent with fundamental rights assured and implied within the Constitution. This civic debate is part of the necessary fabric of our democracy.

Thus, as a second tenet, it seems to me that a fundamental demand of schooling is to prepare students regardless of race, ethnicity, linguistic diversity, social and economic class, gender, or handicap to participate actively in civic debate. Civic debate, as opposed to name calling and political oratory, requires participants to respect differences, to be able to hear the points of view of others without necessarily having to give up one's own, to be willing both to compromise while at the same time actively struggling within the bounds of civic debate and political organizing to continue to push for one's position, and to learn to live with the consequences of one's decisions.

Confronting the hard questions both in preparation for transformation and in the implementation of the multicultural educational practices are part of our civic responsibility to our students, whomever they may be and wherever they may be.

These two core tenets, I believe, suggest that schooling should provide educational grounds for debate that include students, parents, teachers, community members, and governmental representatives. I am suggesting that confronting the hard questions both in preparation for transformation and in the implementation of the multicultural educational practices are part of our civic responsibility to our students, whomever they may be and wherever they may be. I recommend Amy Gutman's book, *Democratic Education* (1987) as an excellent example of the kind of civic debate that should frame our discussions. I am also convinced that having an open debate that includes *all* key parties, including students, will, in the end, approach a view of multicultural education that more closely approximates the

social reconstructionist view outlined by Sleeter and Grant (1987).

Guidelines for Implementing Multicultural Education

Banks (1991) discusses what he considers to be four fundamental pillars to the implementation of multicultural education. These include:

- Integrating examples and content from a variety of cultures into one's teaching
- Helping students "understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways that knowledge is constructed"

Transformation of a school to implement multicultural education places demands similar to those involved in any kind of whole school change.

- Teachers modifying their delivery of instruction "in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender and social-class groups"
- Creating a school culture that "empowers students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups" (Banks, 1991, p. 4)

While these dimensions are comprehensive and laudatory, they presume a diverse student population being served. In many rural, small town, suburban, and inner city schools, however, homogeneity of student population is a fact of life! Many of these communities do not question that homogeneity, but rather see it as a potential positive force. There are Native American, African-American, and Latino students in many urban districts who see homogeneous schools and communities as opportunities to reinforce issues of cultural integrity, heritage, and tradition as a bulkhead against the racism that plagues American history and culture and infiltrates common curriculum at all levels.

Thus, while many may see as an ultimate goal schools and communities that are diverse and integrated, what each of these dimensions of multicultural education outlined by Banks may look like in individual schools and school districts will certainly be different. The wide gulf between America's goals for social integration and the reality of the makeup of so many communities may mean that the broadest challenges to the implementation of multicultural education may lie in the areas of content integration and knowledge construction as outlined by Banks. In addition, what effects transformations in each of the four dimensions will have on student achievement remains to be seen.

Whole School Change and Multicultural Education

In many ways, the transformation of a school to implement multicultural education places demands similar to those involved in any kind of whole school change. The differences may be related to the quality of change in teacher beliefs required. Certainly, the research on teacher change has supported the commonsense idea that how a teacher teaches in his or her classroom is influenced not only by curricular mandates, forms of assessment, and textbooks, but also by personal beliefs about how children learn, the nature of the discipline being taught, and the capacities of groups of children to learn.

The challenge to administrators to locate financial support and time for teachers to make a full investment in multicultural education is a crucial cornerstone of this and any whole school transformation.

Changes in Curriculum and Instructional Practices

As with other schoolwide curricular and instructional changes, administrators must locate time and resources to support teachers in gaining additional knowledge and strategies to implement and develop the new curriculum they are to teach. Few examples of wholesale curricular packages across all disciplines exist in multicultural education. In addition, our experiences suggest that teachers are much more likely to implement effectively, and buy into, curriculum that they themselves develop. By curriculum, I mean specific units of instruction and the material support needed to implement them. By instructional practice, I mean teaching strategies aimed at using culturally sensitive approaches. This process is slow and time consuming. Thus, the challenge to administrators to locate financial support and time for teachers to make a full investment in multicultural education is a crucial cornerstone of this and any whole school transformation. Implementing multicultural education may well require changes in or additions to existing staffing in order to bring on teachers whose knowledge base can contribute to the change effort. It may be necessary to increase the diversity of the teaching staff along racial, ethnic, and gender lines, and include teachers with physical handicaps.

Changes in Assessment

Another critical cornerstone of major whole school transformation is assessment. Assessment includes more than gathering data on standardized achievement measures. It also means collecting data on a wide variety of variables that can influence the effectiveness of implementation of multicultural educational approaches as defined by the school. This may include data on the makeup of the teaching and counseling staff, distributions of student achievement (grades, course enrollments, attendance, awards, leadership functions, as well as standardized achievement measures) according

to race, ethnicity, gender, and family income. Assessment should include a serious look at the articulated goals around student learning and how those goals may be operationalized in terms of student outcomes. If, for example, the ability to articulate and evaluate competing perspectives around issues in the humanities and social sciences is an objective, then portfolios using writing scales for evaluating persuasive writing may be a necessary part of the whole school assessment process. If, for example, the ability to articulate the contributions of diverse cultures to knowledge in mathematics and science and the ability to discuss the impact of those contributions on U.S. and/or western civilization and technology are objectives, then initiatives involving implementing scientific and mathematical principles in social contexts (either historical or contemporary) may be a necessary part of the whole school assessment process. It is a well-accepted adage in school reform that assessment (along with textbooks) drives what happens in the classroom to a significant degree.

Conclusion

Thus, while it is important to consider the many dimensions of multicultural education, we must also recognize the enormity of the challenge to integrate the content of instruction, but to create opportunities for students to understand, question, and investigate how knowledge is socially constructed to reflect specific interests and points of view.

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Dr. Carol D. Lee, is currently assistant professor in the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University and director of the Mary McLeod Bethune Teacher Training Institute of the Institute of Positive Education in Chicago. Her research interests include cultural contexts for acquiring, teaching, and practicing literacy. Dr. Lee also investigates the consequences of specific characteristics of competence in African American English for instruction in reading and writing. Among her publications that address multiculturalism and literacy are the book, *Signifying as a Scaffold for Literary Interpretation: The Pedagogical Implications of an African American Discourse Genre*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English in the Research Report Series, and the article, "Literacy, Cultural Diversity, and Instruction," published in the February 1992 issue of *Education and Urban Society*. Dr. Lee has extensive teaching experience at the high school and elementary school levels.

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