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Classroom Physicians: Multi - Ethnic Educators

by
Harold M. Bergsma, Department Head
Department of Curriculum Instruction
New Mexico State University

A vivid memory of childhood which still returns to me is the wall of my physician father's 'surgery', which was lined with pictures depicting the history of medicine. Hanging with these pictures was a copy of the Hippocratic Oath, describing the duties and obligations of a physician. Such dedication to humanity was, to a six year old, awe inspiring. My father explained that doctors were more than bone setters, surgeons, pill dispensers; they were physicians who held the concern for the total well being of patients—their bodies, their minds, their lives.

These memories live on and have been a part of the formation of my personal philosophy as an educator. The teacher's concern is similar to the concern of the physician and should be directed to the welfare of the child's body, his mind, his very life.

There are many teacher practitioners who are in schools today who are not in a real sense being physicians to their students. Some teachers simply lack training to deal with certain types of classroom problems, others lack broad life experiences and attempt to dispense education. The analogy to serving as a physician takes on special import when the teacher is faced with a classroom full of children from various ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Such multi-ethnic classrooms can present a real problem for teachers and teacher-administrators primarily because these people lack life prescriptions for those in their care.

A number of attempts have been made by individuals, by school boards, by teacher education programs in the universities to ameliorate this problem, but historically little planned change has occurred to better prepare teachers for multi-ethnic settings. Bilingual programs have been established all across the country, and the results are often most encouraging. Students from minority back-

grounds are able to cope, to adjust and to employ their dominant language in school. These results are certainly hope inspiring. Too often, however, classrooms which have a number of ethnic representatives are not places where both teacher and student mutually value each other and grow from each other. The multi-ethnic emphasis is often overlooked in favor of a bilingual emphasis. Yet most classrooms are in fact multi-cultural.

In 1969, the State of California attempted to structure multi-cultural teacher experience by means of legislation. In the California Education Code, Article 3.3, it states that every school district in the state with a quarter of the students who are of minority background must provide their professional staff with sixty to ninety hours of inservice training in culture, history and the current problems of ethnic groups. Hopefully, this program will help teachers develop respect for minority-group cultural traditions and help teachers understand that children from minority groups are special because they have unique talents and problems which many other children do not have. The emphasis will be multi-cultural and teachers will work with community boards in order to set up new curricula, and more importantly new process and structures in the classroom to help all children benefit from the rich traditions and cultures each represents.

The California experiment is not completed. Certain districts such as those in the Santa Cruz area have struggled to develop truly multi-cultural school settings and have worked closely with teachers in workshops so that they are part of the team of 'classroom physicians.'

The writer is encouraged by these experiments, but questions why such multi-cultural experiences are instituted only when a quarter of the students in a district are from a minority background. All teachers, including those in bilingual classes could greatly benefit by such multi-ethnic curriculum and program planning. The planning seminars, on which community representatives are present, become life seminars for learning to live and plan with persons of many backgrounds.

Districts which have significant multi-ethnic populations could become the focal points for change. It is suggested that there are a number of strategies which have not been well employed by many schools and universities which if employed in a unified fashion would help create better qualified teachers who are more knowledgeable, more humane and certainly more sensitive to the needs of their students.

The ideas listed below would certainly be in line with the new standards for accreditation recently set forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education which states in its first standard:

"Multi-cultural education is preparation for the social, political, and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters. These realities have both

national and international dimensions. This preparation provides a process by which an individual develops competencies for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and behaving in differential cultural settings. Thus, multi-cultural education is viewed as an intervention and ongoing assessment process to help institutions and individuals become more responsive to the human condition, individual cultural integrity, and cultural pluralism of society.

Provision should be made for instruction in multi-cultural education in teacher education programs. Multi-cultural education should receive attention in courses, seminars, directed readings, laboratory and clinical experiences, practicum, and other types of field experiences.

Multi-cultural education could include but not be limited to experiences which: 1) promote analytical and evaluate abilities to confront issues such as participatory democracy, racism and sexism, and the parity of power; 2) develop skills for values clarification including the study of the manifest and latent transmission of values; 3) examine the dynamics of diverse cultures and the implications for developing teaching strategies; and 4) examine linguistic variations and diverse learning styles as a basis for the development of appropriate teaching strategies.

STANDARD: The institution gives evidence of planned provision for multi-cultural education in its teacher education curriculum including both the general and professional studies component."

This writer suggests that the following strategies would be cognitively important and affectively meaningful if employed in all teacher education programs which are concerned with multi-ethnic preparation.

1. All educators should have opportunity to learn about basic comparative/anthropological methodology, theoretically and experimentally.
2. Each teacher should be given practical experiences in classrooms that are multi-cultural, and be given experience in working in planning and curriculum design with teacher and parent multi-ethnic councils.
3. Each educator should be provided a realistic opportunity to explore and write about his/her heritage or roots.
4. All teachers should be given the opportunity to explore in depth, at least two ethnic histories of major representative ethnic groups represented in this culture.
5. Every teacher of multi-cultural programs should be required to learn a second language, preferably one which would have immediate utility and applicability to his/her classroom assignment.
6. Each teacher should be given opportunity to explore research information about cognitive styles and social styles which relate to their students from various backgrounds.

These six objectives would provide a number of means of breaking

down stereotyping behavior and positively enhance understanding and empathic behavior.

Thomas Carter's work, *Mexican-Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970) makes a significant statement.

"The severest weakness of teachers is their failure to understand a number of concepts concerning culture, society, personality, and behavior. Teachers almost universally have little understanding of the effects of the first two or the latter two, or the interrelationships among the four concepts. Specifically, three areas of teacher deficiency are evident, the great majority: (1) fail to recognize the overwhelming influence of culture on personality and behavior; (2) have extremely limited knowledge of or contact with Mexican-Americans; and (3) do not grasp the role and function of the American school in general society, nor recognize its influence on the ethnically different child."

It is this writer's optimistic viewpoint that teacher education programs can be most beneficial especially in regard to preparing teachers to know themselves better, to know their students better, and to create humane environments where all students can value who they are and use this to go on to achieve and participate in this society.