

Public Forum

Many Groups, One People: The Meaning and Significance of Multicultural Education in Modern America

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Abstract

Multicultural education is still one of the most controversial and misunderstood concepts, because it means different things to different peoples. This paper is intended to exploit the meaning and significance of multicultural education in a global context on the basis of recent cross-cultural research in anthropology.

Meaning of Multicultural Education

The historical reality of ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic and cultural diversity seems to take a different character not only in non Western societies, but even within the various Western democracies. The nature of the relationships between mainstream populations and immigrants, refugees or other underrepresented “minority groups” (“minorities” not necessarily in the numerical sense) is determined by each country’s political and economic histories. Definitions of multicultural education respond to the people’s philosophy about interethnic or interracial relations between mainstream groups and refugees, immigrants, aborigines, guest workers, and other outsiders. Thus, in a very broad and generic sense, in some countries the education of those “others” is often called “multicultural” education, and it is a process of cultural and academic socialization of these outsiders to function effectively in mainstream societies as they play the expected roles ascribed to them: “guest worker,” immigrant, refugee, etc. Groups of outsiders representing unfamiliar (often non Western) cultures are being educated in schools to become temporary workers in industries or other employment. However, these persons are not educated in the same schools or through the same process. Consequently,

multicultural education, in this sense, does not mean that all groups, including mainstream persons, know of, or are concerned about the preparation of all students (minority and non minority) to participate actively in the social, political and economic institutions of a society. A de facto plural society may indeed reject its plurality by claiming ethnic purity and developing policies of extradition of outsiders, at least those who are less acceptable to the public (people of color and people of other religions).

In other societies, such as the United States and Britain, there is a more precise and encompassing notion of multicultural education. It is the preparation of all persons to live productively in a single plural and democratic society, sharing the same rights and obligations. Multicultural education in this latter sense is the most important instrument to implement a particular type of democracy; one in which all children are educated to co-exist peacefully, to jointly construct their future by pursuing national goals of independence, freedom, or of sound economic, technological and military development, for example. This type of democracy presupposes a fundamental agreement on certain cultural values (individuality, respect to differences, equal opportunity for all, freedom of discourse, opportunities for upward mobility regardless of ethnic, racial and other differences). Thus, the two fundamental factors determining the unique character of multicultural education in Western democratic societies are: (1) the type of democracy and (b) the socio-cultural and racial composition in each society.

What does it mean that American society claims to be a democracy that values the diverse linguistic and cultural heritage of its population, fully committed to the goals of equal opportunity for all citizens regardless of differences in race, religion, ethnicity, culture and political philosophy? It means that American society makes the commitment to all legal immigrants, refugees and other minorities that they will have the same rights and obligations of other citizens, and therefore they will be equal under the law; in other words, that they will truly belong in America. The meaning of commitment, especially given the large numbers of newcomers, revolves around newcomers' ability to adapt to American society and to belong by participating in our political, social and economic institutions. It is not a trivial challenge.

The challenge facing all Americans, but especially immigrant families is enormous. According to Dorothy Waggoner (1988, p. 79-81) in 1980 there were in the U.S. 34.6 million speakers of other

languages than English, that is 15% of the total population (one in seven). Of them, 2.6 million were children under age 5, and approximately 8 million were school-age children. The largest group in 1980 was the Spanish speaking with 15.5 million people (45% of all language minority people). Waggoner points that in 1980, the French, German, Italian and Polish groups had at least 1 million people in the U.S., and that 30 other language groups had at least 100,000 each. She also states (1988, p. 80) that in the same year 4.2 million children of Spanish language background constituted 52% of the 8 million school-age children living in language minority families. The next in size was the French group with 685,000, the German with 594,000, and the Italian with 437,000. Groups that counted between 100,000 and 200,000 were Filipino, Polish, Native American, Chinese, Greek and Portuguese.

In 1980, of the 8 million school-age children who were members of language minority families, 1.6 lived in California, 1.1 million in Texas, and 926,000 in N.Y. Overall, 16 states had at least 100,000 language minority school-age children (Waggoner, 1988, p. 81). Since 1980, at least 824,000 legal Spanish-speaking immigrants have come to the U.S. to join the 15.5 million (Waggoner, 1988, p. 105), and I would guess that by 1990 the total Spanish-speaking population, putting together estimated additional legal and illegal immigrants, was at least 20 million. Spanish-speaking children are only 11% of the total U.S. school-age population, but they represent 55% of the total increase in child population in this country. Spanish-speaking children in America live in families with incomes that barely permit them to subsist. In the last ten years one more million Latino (Hispanic) children joined the ranks of the poor (in a family of four members with less than \$10,000). In 1989, 2.6 million Hispanic children (out of the total 4.2 million Hispanic children) were poor, and most of them lived in urban and suburban areas (not in rural areas). In 1989, 48.4% of all Puerto Rican children were poor, 37.1% of all Mexican children were poor, and 26.1% of Central and South American children were poor. The number of Hispanic children in poverty will continue to grow. They have either willingly given up or traded off their language and culture in hopes of pursuing the "American Dream." Without their home language and culture they lack a bridge to reach the new language and culture of American schools and society.

What specifically is multicultural education in the United States? What are the educational policies that determine the instructional

mechanisms to maximize minority children's adaptation to this country and their effective functioning in our institutions? How do these policies affect the use of languages other than English, the structure and content of curriculum, and the preparation of teachers are congruent with this notion of multicultural education? Here is an area where we find remarkable inconsistencies between the democratic ideals of the many, and the pervasive ignorance (or even bias) regarding the role of home languages and cultures in the adaptation of children to a new cultural environment and their academic achievement (Trueba, 1989; Trueba, Cheng & Ima, 1993; Trueba, Rodriguez, Zou & Cintron, 1993). Current literature often focuses on the academic underachievement of minorities (cultural ecologists led by John Ogbu, 1974, 1978, 1989, and Gibson & Ogbu, 1991), rather than on the nature of the educational reform needed in order to make the instructional process more conducive to minority achievement. Part of this reform, as understood by many theorists, demands more active participation of minority students in their own education, and more active involvement of minority communities in the social, economic, cultural and political institutions of the country. Later on, I will return to the issue of minority underachievement as discussed by cultural ecologists. At this point, however, it would be beneficial to examine the nature of different societies in which "multicultural education" is posing serious dilemmas. A comparative perspective is always useful. One of the obvious comparisons is that between the United States and European countries such as England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany or Sweden. The case of Britain is particularly interesting and similar to the United States. Historically, the research in England has been of interest to Americans, and vice versa.

Europe is indeed a very important and complex setting for the existence of multicultural education (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). In England, for example, the debates on multicultural education in the last three decades have been extremely alive:

In Britain, the educational achievements and performance of ethnic minority children and young people have attracted an unprecedented amount of research over the past thirty years, but despite the volumes of evidence it is still hard to draw firm conclusions. The results of research have been used to fuel political debates, with input from both left and right, about the intellectual capabilities and educational

achievements of different minority groups, their likely socioeconomic destination, and the amount and nature of racism in the education system (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 121).

Intensive migration during the 1950s to the early 1980s coming from New Commonwealth and other countries, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, East Africa, Cyprus and Malta (Greek and Turkish), and others, resulted in 2.2 million minorities by 1981. The largest groups coming from India (673,704) and the Caribbean (545,744). Far East immigrants from Hong Kong, Bangladesh, and small groups of West Africans and Vietnamese are the most recent immigrants to Britain (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 123). The debate about the use of languages other than English has been as intensive in England as in the U.S., and the issues of differential adaptation strategies of immigrants to mainstream cultures are, once more, a common denominator for these two countries:

Much of the pre-1980 research on the achievement of minorities is now outdated. The use of a blanket category "Asians" obscured differences between pupils of different Asian origins, and different religions. However, from 1960 to the early 1980s, there was a general consensus among researchers, practitioners and minority parents that pupils from minority groups, particularly Afro-Caribbean, Turkish-Cypriot, and Bangladeshi origin, "underachieved" at school. Minority pupils tended to be allocated to lower tracks, to attain less well all through school, and to leave with fewer or lower-level examination passes (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 124).

After 1980, fortunately for minority groups in Britain, in contrast with the research conducted by cultural ecologists in the United States (see our discussion later in this article), researchers came to the conclusion that second-generation minority children made progress, "There is convincing evidence that second-generation minority children have higher attainments than those born abroad and that in the 1980s the attainments of ethnic minorities is improving overall (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 126). In both Britain and America, school is seen as the most important instrument of minority acculturation.

Belgium is another interesting example. When it was founded in 1830 the only language used in schools was French (Roosens, 1989, p. 128). Both French and Dutch speakers (the Walloons and the Flemings), motivated by the demographic expansion of the Walloons and institutional democratization of the country over a period of time, arrived at political compromise whereby each language was the primary language within specific geographical areas, while both had equal use in Brussels, the capital. The small group of German speakers in that country did not claim the right to speak German, but nobody opposed to their use of the German language. What is common to these three groups, Flemings, Walloons and Germans, is that all of them are White, European and Christian or Jewish.

What happened when the Belgians began to attract large numbers of North Africans, people of color, Muslim, speakers of other languages, who practice laws unfamiliar to Belgians, and who began to demand the right to use their native languages in schools, in factories, in public? As their numbers grew, their very presence, their religious and social life began to be seen as a threat to "European" cultures, common values and traditions. Indeed, guest workers coming from Spain and France, were well-treated and permitted to become mainstream Belgians (with some restrictions). Muslim, Black and White, immigrants who come from non European countries, and their children born in Belgium, are seen as outsiders, with suspicion, look down as a burden, and often abused by police without cause.

The type of multicultural education offered in many countries of Europe (Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, etc.) is not intended to create a pluralistic society where all groups have the chance to participate in the social, economic and political institutions of the country. Indeed, the education of some groups is intended to keep them isolated or send them back to their countries of origin. In contrast, the education of minority groups in England and the United States is, to lesser or greater extent, intended to make all immigrant and ethnic groups active participants of societal institutions.

Western European and American societies retain a common cultural bond and similar values related to the nature of their democracy, though one can argue that Britain and America are much closer to each other in their policies regarding non European immigrants and refugees if compared with other European countries who reject the integration of some minorities to the European

community. If we compare Western societies to other societies, the treatment of ethnic and cultural minorities is vastly different. The cases of Russia and China should be looked into. It would be premature to examine the ethnic and political crises of the former USSR. But it is very pertinent to examine the ethnic and political trends in China, and the search for a type of multicultural education that can facilitate the modernization of China.

China alone has a total population of at least 1,103,900,000; from them, in 1982 about 93.3% (some 937 million) belong to the Han (Chinese who speak Mandarin as lingua franca; at least ten other major languages are spoken by the Han peoples who have considerable cultural diversity among themselves). The Han people settled in the north where the lower Yellow and Wei Rivers spread the cradle of Chinese civilization. The rest of the population (167 million) belong to a number of ethnic groups or nations. It is estimated that there are at least 55 formally recognized national minority groups totalling over 100 million--of them 15 groups have populations of over 1 million each: the Zhuang 13.4 million, the Hui 7.2 million, the Uygurs with 6 million, the Yi with 5.5 million, the Miao, ancestors of the Hmong, with 5 million, the Machus 4.3, the Tibetans 3.9 million, the Mongols with 3.4 million, the Tujia with 2.8 closely related to the Tong with 1.4, the Buyi 2.1 millions, Koreans, 1.8 million, Yao 1.4, Bai 1.1, and Hani 1.1 (Yuan Tien, 1989, p. 501-503). With the increasing democratization and economic development in China, the rise of ethnic consciousness will surely break its silent submission in the 21st century.

The emphasis of minority education policies has been on their integration to the rest of Chinese mainstream Mandarin speaking groups. The stringent control over these groups is obtained by preparing rural teachers who are native speakers of the various languages, and by placing them in minority schools. The preparation of these teachers focuses on basic skills and the dominant ideologies inculcated in mainstream populations. There are relatively few studies on the achievement of minority groups, and the Institute on Nationalities placed in Beijing is in the process of gathering substantial data on groups such as the Miao, the ancestors of the Hmong who migrated to Indochina and to the United States and other Western societies (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990).

In searching for an appropriate understanding of multicultural education in the United States, we must emphasize a type of

education that will permit all American children, minority and mainstream, immigrants, refugees, African American, American Indian, Hispanics, and other underrepresented groups (politically disempowered) such as low-income and handicapped children, to participate fully in their own development, in their preparation to act as first class American citizens in our social, economic, political and cultural institutions, fully aware that they are genuine member of American society with all rights and obligations that mainstream persons have. This type of education will entail, therefore, not just tolerance for diversity, but commitment to respect it, pride in our collective rich ethnic heritage, and the ability to use in the development of children's talents. It is precisely this diversity that has given America a unique advantage in the practice of democracy, and a unique capacity to overcome national and international crises. Newcomers who arrived in the United States during the last two decades (particularly Hispanic and Indochinese) have embraced the commitment to share on the American dream and to recreate for all of us the reality of democracy. Because multicultural education in this country is rightfully seen as one of the key instruments to maintain American democratic principles of equal treatment for all under the law, it should include two key elements:

- (1) An understanding of the nature of American society, which is quintessentially pluralistic, democratic, respectful of racial, ethnic, religious, social, linguistic and cultural differences.
- (2) A deep commitment to education as the means to prepare all Americans to live in peace with each other, and to inculcate in all children the value of our racial and ethnic plurality.

If we accept the above, then multicultural education is not only the education of minority groups, but of all Americans to learn to respect and appreciate each group and their collective richness in languages, cultures and traditions. Equally important, is the inculcation of the principle of responsibility of all citizens to treat all persons, regardless of their diverse background, with the same respect. To accomplish this end, much has been written about ethnic and racial hatred, and about the need to heal; hatred hurts not only the victims, but also all of us who are members of this democratic, pluralistic society. Misunderstanding, lack of respect,

and hatred of the ethnic cultures and values of minority persons can lead to oppression, and ultimately to their disenfranchisement and castification (or disempowerment). Recent research on the processes of disempowerment has been the focus of controversy, yet instrumental in helping the public understand adaptive mechanisms of minority groups in America and other countries.

Perspectives on Multicultural Education

Obviously we cannot avoid inter-ethnic conflict, degradation incidents and violence. But we can learn something from those unfortunate incidents that will help all of us to build effective multicultural instruction. Reflections based on recent anthropological research (especially research focused on cultural ecology and the transmission of cultural values), can provide a stronger theoretical support to multicultural education.

Recent studies emphasize the impact of both social structural patterns and minority cultures on the castification or disempowerment of oppressed minorities. Not all conflict between mainstream and minorities (those seen as “underclass” or “castelike” ethnic groups), nor conflict among ethnic groups with unequal power, necessarily results in castification. Some conflicts seem to have the functional value of maintaining political power balance. Ethnic group boundaries ultimately resulting in conflict are a worldwide phenomenon, unfortunately one that frequently brings violence confrontations, as has been the case in Northern Ireland, Chad, and Lebanon; of warfare in Burma, Bangladesh, the Sudan, Nigeria, Iraq, and the Philippines; of the Somali invasion of Ethiopia; of the Turkish invasion of Cypress; of the killings in Uganda, Syria, India-Pakistan, Burundi, and Indonesia; of Sikh, Basque, Corsican, and Palestinian terrorist activities; of the expulsion of Chinese from Vietnam, or of Asians from Uganda (Horowitz, 1985, p. 3). Ethnic and racial composition takes different turns in different countries, and is met with different responses. In some instances, however, according to various scholars (Ogbu, 1974, 1978, 1989; Ogbu & Gibson, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1987, 1989; Gibson, 1987, 1988) oppressed people (especially people of color) have become “castified,” that is members of low-ranking castelike groups in America and other societies. Castification is fundamentally an institutionalized way of exploiting members of social groups, such as ethnic, racial, low-income, or other less powerful groups, and thus reducing such

persons to the status of members of a lower caste (oppressed) who cannot enjoy the same rights and obligations of other members of society. The most effective way of disenfranchising undesirable social groups is castification. For example, Indians were called "gente sin razón" ("people without reasoning ability") by Europeans, meaning, people not having a level of intelligence necessary to perform difficult cognitive tasks; and Blacks were labeled "lujuriosos descontrolados" ("uncontrolled lascivious people"), meaning individuals who should not be trusted to execute tasks requiring moral integrity (Morner, 1990, p. 29-43).

One of America's oldest but least empowered "ethnic/racial" community is that of the African-Americans. This population is poorly understood and highly stereotyped because of its unique 250-year history of slavery and post-slavery segregation and deprivation. In general, miscegenation in the United States has been less acceptable socially -- even hypergamously (i.e., where higher status males marry lower status females) than in the Latin American countries such as Brazil or Mexico where large numbers of African slaves were also brought and their descendants experienced some mobility because of a wider experience of exogamous marital choices. In America, racial discrimination against African-Americans and Asian-Americans -- the latter entered the U.S. labor market as cheaply paid "sweat laborers" or "coolies" in the 19th century and came to be stigmatized under discriminatory immigration laws at the turn of the century -- has continued to be manifest today against these "unmeltables" in America's melting pot. Particularly vulnerable given their historic deprivation and the bleak contemporary employment picture are African-American males between the ages of 15 and 25. Like Latino and Asian-American young men, they are at risk because of both limited life chances and limited education. For example, the socialization of black males in ghettos, exposed to the adverse impact of multiple generations of poverty, social isolation, and the lethal dangers of the contemporary drug "culture" often results in aggressively anti-mainstream collective behavior, gang activity, violence and incarceration. Indeed, there are more school-age Black youngsters in jail than in higher education. Meanwhile, the rate of teen-age pregnancy and gang activity among young African-American females is raising their social vulnerability to levels approaching those of young males.

Kozol records the comments by a psychiatrist commenting on the violence and crime in Roxbury and Dorchester, Boston, where most nonwhite people live:

When they hear of all these murders, all these men in prison, all these women pregnant with no husbands, they don't buy the explanation that it's poverty, or public schools, or racial segregation. They say, "We didn't have much money when we started out, but we led clean and decent lives. We did it. Why can't they?"..."They don't have it." What they mean is lack of brains, or lack of drive, or lack of willingness to work. "This is what they have become, for lots of complicated reasons. Slavery, injustice or whatever." And they don't believe that better schools or social changes will affect it very much. So it comes down to an explanation that is so intrinsic, so immutable, that it might as well be called genetic (Kozol, 1991, p. 192).

Kozol narrates an interview of a woman who knew the life of a boy who eventually became disenfranchised and a destructive member of our society:

An eight-year-old, a little boy who is an orphan, goes to the school to which I've been assigned. He talks to himself and mumbles during class, but he is never offered psychiatric care or counseling. When he annoys his teacher, he is taken to the basement to be whipped. He isn't the only child in the class who seems to understand that he is being ruined, but he is the child who first captures my attention. His life is so hard and he is so small; and he is shy and still quite gentle. He has one gift: he draws delightful childish pictures, but the art instructor says he "muddies his paints." She shreds his work in front of the class. Watching this, he stabs a pencil point into his hand. (p. 194)

A few years later he is out in the streets, becomes an alcoholic, has a child he abandons, and is seen in front of the rich stores with a long leather coat and hat as "the embodiment of evil." Kozol continues:

He laughs at people as they come out of the store; his laugh is like a pornographic sneer. Three years later I visit him in

jail. His face is scarred and ugly. His skull is mapped with jagged lines where it was stitched together poorly after being shattered with a baseball bat. He does not at all resemble the shy child that I knew ten years before. He is regarded as a kind of monster now. He was jailed for murdering a white man in a wheelchair (Kozol, 1991, p. 194-195).

Why have so many people of color been failed in their pursuit of the American dream? Why instead of becoming acting members of a democratic nation have they become "caste-like," disempowered disenfranchised, and completely unable to pull themselves out of their misery? Why cannot schools do anything to help some children from their underclass status? More importantly, why do some immigrants, refugees, or other minority groups become caste-like and others do not? How do you combat the fear of ethnics, or the advocacy of monolingualism, monoculturalism or of vigilante raids against poor immigrants?

The castification of low-status immigrants, refugees and other minorities, as discussed by cultural ecologists (Ogbu, 1974, 1978, and 1989; Suarez-Orozco, 1987, 1989; Gibson, 1987, 1988; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986, and others) seems to be composed of two complementary powerful components, one related to the social structure of the host society, and the other to the cultural values of the ethnic, racial or minority group. Typically, "castelike" minority groups (more recently called "involuntary") are described as groups incorporated against their will to a society, who see themselves as inferior in comparison to the mainstream (White persons), and who, for historical reasons, develop oppositional self-identities. Castelike minorities fail in schools and other social institutions precisely because their cultural perspective forces them to reject mainstream values of school success. The examples given by Ogbu of castelike minorities are Mexicans, African Americans, Hawaiians, American Indians, and others. In contrast with these minorities, there are successful groups (such as the Chinese and European immigrants) who keep a self-identity with a point of reference to their home country, and who are committed to succeed. These groups (often called the "model minorities" because they are presented as universally successful) are called "voluntary immigrants," and are similar to other voluntary minorities (previously called "autonomous" groups, on account of their presumed political and economic power--such as

the Jews--in that both groups succeed in schools. The position of cultural ecologists has been attacked on the basis of lack of empirical evidence and its stereotypic qualities for entire groups; indeed, it may explain the failure of many, but does not explain the success of others who, belonging to the castelike groups, manage to do well in school and society (Trueba, 1988; Foley, 1991).

From the outset, one of the most confusing issues is the terminology used. While Ogbu's work had, until 1989, retained the triple classification of minorities into autonomous, immigrant and castelike, in 1989 Ogbu decided to adopt a dichotomy of "voluntary" (immigrant and autonomous) and "involuntary" (castelike) minorities. Yet, statements in another more recent source (Gibson and Ogbu, 1991, p. 3-33) refer to "nonimmigrant" minorities, and attempt to provide a framework via a general statement about anthropological research:

Anthropologists have become actively involved in the application of their knowledge to the solution of various problems faced by minorities in school. Yet, upon close inspection, there appears to be at least one important reason for caution: most anthropological research has focused on the school experience of minority groups who are not particularly successful in school--usually nonimmigrants. That is, we have been concerned primarily with the school experience of those minority groups who did not choose to come voluntarily to the countries in which they now reside in order to improve their social, economic and political status or to achieve other desired ends (Ogbu, 1991, p. 3-4).

In other words, according to Ogbu, there are two types of minority groups: immigrant and nonimmigrant; furthermore, immigrant are "voluntary" and "nonimmigrant" are "involuntary" minorities. The lack of clarity stems not only from the difficulty of providing an empirical basis for inputting a "willingness" to come or to stay to an entire social group, but also from the lack of a clear notion of what an immigrant is, and for how long the status of immigrant is retained. In other words, is it possible to an involuntary immigrant, or a voluntary nonimmigrant? These concepts of being "involuntary" and "nonimmigrant" cannot be interchangeable because they can be mutually exclusive (at least in theory). Dichotomies have an inherent limitation because they

divide the entire universe in two parts, and consequently, they soon become heuristically inadequate as they constrain reality into two camps. The inadequacy of the term “involuntary” or “nonimmigrant” when applied to Hispanics, for example, is immediately detected by studying Hispanic groups, by observing them across the country, and by examining their ethnohistory. Those individuals who have crossed the border illegally time after time after having been deported, abused, threatened and rejected, and who finally find their way to become a legal resident or citizen, demonstrate the complexity of putative willingness or unwillingness to belong in this country. Once children are born in this country and earlier immigrants adapt to this country, their putative initial unwillingness to become Americans is weaker in the face of their family’s decision to belong here. Relative and permanent unwillingness to establish residence and to become a citizen in the U.S., is not empirically demonstrable, and it has not been documented in the studies of cultural ecologists. The willingness of most recent comers from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries is genuine, but initially based on economic and social needs. They take a calculated risk of losing their lives, of being abused and exploited, of not finding a job, of being deported, of losing their family, or worse, losing their language and culture. Yet, survival, physical, economic and emotional, provides them with an incentive to seek a better life in the United States. It is not easy to place them all in any single category, and certainly, they are genuine immigrants and they are not involuntary.

The willingness of other “involuntary” groups to remain in this country is still a difficult issue to resolve. For example, African Americans, if they are asked whether they want to go somewhere else, they would reply “no.” They are definitely nonimmigrants; they may be four, six or tenth generation American, born in this country from an African slave family, but they have, for generation, become an integral part of America, and they feel so, in spite of their economic problems (those of low-income) or racism in American society.

The main contribution of cultural ecologists is to provide the reader with a comparative, cross-cultural approach to the study of differential achievement of minorities. Ogbu and some of his associates have consistently argued that a theoretical explanation of differential achievement of minorities in school should be based on “historical and wider societal forces that can encourage or

discourage the minorities from striving for school success... and a group's collective orientation toward schooling and striving for school success" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 6). Ogbu clearly discards as significant other factors, and criticizes other scholars who "assume that school success is a matter of family background and individual ability and effort" (Ibid.). Ogbu, and rightfully so, focuses on the meaning of schooling for minorities in their real-life contexts. What ultimately constitutes a minority group as an "immigrant" group is that they are incorporated into the dominant societies voluntarily: "Those who have been incorporated voluntarily are immigrants" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 8). One can ask: who makes the decision to incorporate them? Or, do they incorporate themselves? How? Ogbu states that "they believe that the move would lead to more economic well-being, better overall opportunities or greater political freedom" (p. 8). This is exactly why ALL minority, refugee and other newcomers take the risk to come and try to stay. In terms of sheer numbers, to argue that there is a significant number of minority persons who remain in the U.S. against their will, would be nearly impossible. If the argument is that several generations behind, some of the ancestors of these minority groups were brought against their will, and consequently, their descendents today are against their will here, is a big leap in logic.

The outcome of this debate is that while most scholars view racism and ethnic hatred as a type of oppression similar in outcome to the economic and social exploitation recorded in the history of Western societies, both success and failure of specific groups must be documented in detail. Overextended conclusions from macro-sociological or macro-psychological theories are faulty because the failure itself in school or other institutions can be accounted for by intermediate agencies (family, socialization processes, specific interventions of organizations, etc.), rather than by factors that are historically remote and undocumented. But even the impact of present day racism can vary a great deal within groups if other intermediate factors occur, such as the action by mentors and parents, by teachers and by scholars through books and other pedagogical instruments of empowerment. It is precisely in this context of the possibility of empowering minorities that public schools, colleges and universities carve their role in healing multicultural America.

While we recognize the difficulties faced by schools and society with the arrival of low-income immigrants, refugees and with people

of color, we also recognize the difficulties these persons face in America as they try to adjust and survive. School is one of the most important institutions to help both mainstream and minority groups in the process of healing: healing from racial and ethnic hatred, healing from the traumas of leaving one's own country, healing from the cultural shock in a new country, etc., etc. Multicultural education must provide the foundations to create learning environments in which children from other backgrounds and cultures can learn to adjust and live together. Schools can help a great deal in understanding and suppressing ethnic and racial hatred.

In the view of right radicals and many of the public that believe them, the funding for education in languages other than English is unjustified. Also, in this view, the use of affirmative action criteria to implement fair employment policies (policies that reflect the ethnic composition of the labor force), or to provide remedial mechanisms for ethnic students, is equally unacceptable. There are many other instances of ethnic (often racially motivated) hatred; for example, the concerted efforts of private individuals to supervise the southern borders in order to stop undocumented aliens, or to prevent them from using public legal and medical services (Chavez, 1992). Many Americans see nothing wrong with the demonstration of ethnic hatred if there is a justification for it in terms of the "national" good. This is sad, but still more distressing is the fact that members of ethnic groups who want to be accepted by mainstream Americans display conspicuous support of policies and activities against members of ethnic groups who have arrived recently. Mexican American policemen in MacAllen, Texas, were shown brutally beating Mexican illegal aliens (women included) in the police headquarters. It is not uncommon in the Theater of Liberation genre (for example, as reflected in the plays presented by the Teatro Campesino in California) to denounce the "vendido" ("sold") Mexican who has betrayed his own "Raza" and has become the oppressor of his own ethnic group (Trueba, 1990, p. 122-143) It does not have to be that way; indeed, some Mexican immigrants have demonstrated that they can become empowered and thus participate fully in American society without losing their ethnic identity (Trueba, Rodriguez, Zou & Cintron, 1993).

Multicultural Education and School Reform

Bashing American education and searching for a "quick fix" of the educational problems facing our schools in low-income and

urban areas is as tempting as becoming infatuated with Japanese education. These strategies are often misguided and lacking substantive information about what is right and what is wrong with our schools, and how our educational system compares with those in other countries. Multicultural education, deeply rooted in our democratic foundations, can offer a better alternative. Educational reform must be inspired by the democratic principles on which pluralistic America rests. Our democracy protects rights not protected in other countries. Recent reformists attempt to follow the Japanese model without sufficient analysis of what Japan is going through. There is no question that American schools, especially those in low-income urban areas, need radical change. But does that justify the current infatuation with the total quality management “Japanese style” and the invasion of corporate market considerations into all schools? Are we selling short the genuine overall success of most American schools? Often we are pressed by figures of authority to recognize the presumed success of the Japanese schools. Chester Finn, for example, as the then Assistant Secretary of Education, after a short visit to selected Japanese schools said:

They’ve demonstrated that you can have a coherent curriculum, high standards, good discipline, parental support, a professional teaching force and a well-run school. They have shown that the average student can learn a whole lot more (Washington Post, October 19, 1985).

Other researchers going with Finn added that the Japanese system was portable and could help solve the educational problems in America: “Gumption and willpower, that’s the key”--Finn added. Do we know enough about our own school system? What we know about the Japanese school system? Greener pastures if seen at a close range turn out to be not so green. Let me give you some examples of Japanese and other newspapers cited from a study conducted by Professor David Berliner (1992, p. 2b), former President of the American Educational Research Association and current Editor of the *Educational Researcher*:

* In a typical year during the 1980s, minors aged 14-19 accounted for 43.4% of all criminal offenders; 54% of all murder cases involved jobless youth (“Youth Crime up 100% over 1976,” Japan Times, 8-23-87).

* High school girls turn to prostitution for entertainment, curiosity, and as source of revenue--police report their rate up 262%. ("Number of minors taken into custody for prostitution increases dramatically," Japan Times,, 1-30-86).

* A fourteen-year old student who was repeatedly tormented and beaten by school toughs hangs himself. ("Schoolland," Shoguns Ghost, 1990, p. 122).

* Because they didn't like a lecture on how they might lead a better life, eight junior high toughs demanded an apology from their teacher. He refused, so they hit him, kicked him, threw his papers around, and fought with ten other teachers as well. Finally the teacher knelt before the youths and apologized to avoid any further confusion ("8 junior high thugs attack 10 teachers," Japan Times, 3-2-86; "8 angry students hurt 10 teachers," Daily Yomiuri, 3-2-86).

According to Berliner, in Japan "Parents pay 'thank you' money for giving good grades and letters of recommendation to their children"(p. 3), and a teacher who was ridiculed by other teachers for being soft on students, (over a minor transgression--the student had used a hair dryer without permission), beat and kicked the student to death. At the trial the defense lawyer explained that teachers are supposed to use corporal punishment, so, the teacher obtained a lenient sentence (Berliner, 1992, p. 3). We know that in Japan today over 26,000 junior high school students and 4,000 elementary school students refuse to go to school at all because they know they will be tormented by teachers and bullied by their peers. Besides, another 47,000 students miss at least 50 days per year as a result of the abuse they suffer in school. Students with curly hair are required to carry certificates "attesting that their hair is not permed." Teachers in the middle school regularly kick and beat students. For example, a boy who missed Sunday soccer practice to go fishing with a friend was beat, kicked, and dragged by his teachers around the school yard (Berliner, 1992).

Berliner (1992, p. 13) goes on to argue that the much discussed "failure of American schools" is simply not true if we take into consideration a carefully calibrated comparative analysis of the results of tests given to students:

- (1) Average intelligence measured in decontextualized problem-solving settings such as in IQ tests, has risen dramatically over a generation, and our educational system is better than it ever was. The Advanced Placement tests for college credit has increased 255 between 1978 and 1990.
- (2) The decline in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) between 1965 and 1990 is only 3.3% on the raw score, which means that about five fewer items may have been answered incorrectly over 25 years. This is easily understood if we see that, during the same period, the number of students graduating from high school and of those taking the exam has increased dramatically. The average score of every minority group has been going up every year in the last 15 years.

Berliner argues (1992) that 17 year old students today know a great deal more than did their age peers in the past, and consequently we should refrain from adhering to the myth that education was better in the past. Excellence is an important goal to be advocated on its own merits.

According to Berliner (1992), some scholars feel that, in general, elementary and secondary education are doing fine, in spite of public criticisms, but that universities (particularly research institutions) are in trouble because they have rapidly moved to philosophical positions of elitist isolation where faculty members feel no accountability to the public. Can university faculty continue to ignore that 40% of all children live in poverty, or that unemployment, especially among minorities, is at all times high; that black male unemployment is the highest (38.4% in March of 1991, according to Giroux, 1992, p. 6); or that health care, gang activity, teen age pregnancies, substance abuse, violence, racial hatred, and many other problems are also affecting the daily life of the university and its ability to function?

Race and ethnicity, especially in Europe and America, are sensitive issues. The recent L.A. riots, or the frequency of hate-crimes such as the massacre of Indochinese children in Stockton, California, or the various attempts to deport peoples of color in France, Germany and other European countries, and the rapid growth of "neo-conservative" organizations in the U.S. such as the

National Association of Scholars and English Only, and the more conspicuous activities of the KKK, are clear manifestations of the deep racial and ethnic problems faced by modern Western societies. Look, for example, at the most recent outburst of collective anger in Los Angeles.

The riots started on Wednesday April 29. A year before, on March 3, 1991, Rodney King, an African American led the police on a high-speed chase that reached 115 miles per hour. When finally caught and surrounded by White policemen, he received 56 brutal blows in 81 seconds. The indignity of the beatings were flashed again and again on the T.V. screen. A year later the police officers involved were found not guilty. This set off 72 hours of rioting (from the night of Wednesday, April 29, to Saturday night, May 2, 1992). Rodney King himself on May first pleaded for peace and order. The verdict that was seen as a miscarriage of justice had left some 50 persons dead, more than 2,000 persons injured, and part of the city charred and in debt for over \$1 billion. President Bush finally felt compelled to send a team of Justice Department prosecutors to investigate possible violations of civil rights, and 5,000 troops from the National Guard. During the looting and violence, the L.A. police were charged with disorganization and negligence, especially at the beginning of the disorders. These were the worst riots in 25 years. The anger and senseless violence, captured by casual video owners, had a profound impact on all Americans, and a sense of a tragic loss of confidence in American democracy. Without an adequate resolution of conflicts such as the ones that caused the L.A. riots, the survival of America as a democratic nation is not possible. What is the role of academia in attempting to resolve these conflicts? If the resolution of these conflicts is crucial for the survival of our democracy, the role of universities in maintaining democratic principles is also of paramount importance. Universities are the main instrument that democratic societies use to generate and transmit new knowledge, and to inculcate democratic values and respect for ethnic and racial differences.

What can public schools and universities do to heal America? The simple answer is to promote multicultural education. Yet, our educational system is in a serious economic crisis. Universities, the institutions responsible for the preparation of teachers, are underfunded, hopelessly entangled in anachronistic isolation, misunderstood by the public, and unappreciated. Nevertheless,

academia has the responsibility to create a better understanding of the nature of race and ethnicity, to help solve racial and ethnic problems, to develop the necessary knowledge and strategies to heal ethnic and racial hatred in democratic societies, and to prepare educational leaders who can help protect the democratic values of America.

Public schools, colleges and universities in America have a special obligation to help heal multicultural America by advocating multicultural education, but such type of multicultural education that clearly accomplishes the following:

- (1) Help reconstruct American history in a way that we all can recognize the contributions of ethnic groups, refugees, immigrants and migrant workers, and that we all celebrate our rich multicultural heritage in music, art, theater, language, and folklore.
- (2) Increase our understanding of both individual and collective ethnicities, our roots, our differences, and our histories in ways that new generations of Americans can appreciate and respect these differences.
- (3) Integrate disciplinary knowledge and scientific efforts in a way that ALL Americans have an opportunity to excel in academia, thus abiding by the principles of equity that characterize American democracy.
- (4) Demonstrate their commitment to fair practices without disregarding principles of equity in decisions affecting admissions, hiring, promotions and rewards of all members of academia and all students.
- (5) Reform curriculum to reflect the rich linguistic and cultural traditions of ALL Americans, particularly the most recent immigrants and refugees.
- (6) Demonstrate their commitment to ALL children, especially those living in poverty and isolation, by investing substantial amounts of resources in improving their quality of life and their learning environments.

Public schools, colleges and universities, should provide leadership by teaching all students and all citizens the way to a "multicultural literacy." As Maxine Green says: "...educational leaders must offer existing and prospective administrators, teachers, and students multiple languages and diverse literacies so that they are able to communicate across borders of cultural differences, histories, and experiences" (cited in Giroux, 1992, p. 9). In other words, educational leadership must find its roots in "multicultural education" that translates into social equality, in such a way that cultural diversity and the principles of democracy co-exist and generate a true democratic society.

The children who will be in the next century's schools have already been born and, without their knowing so, their educational career may already be "at risk." Many of these children are recent immigrants and do not have a voice, at least not in English. They are still unaware of the price they will have to pay in school and society because of their linguistic and sociocultural differences. Their silence today about our tardiness to respond to their social, economic, emotional, and, especially their educational needs, and our misgivings regarding their place in public schools and their potential contributions to our society will speak eloquently tomorrow. In the twenty-first century, these children's voices will be heard as they ask for explanations and solutions, effective educational policies, and a fair share in the social and economic benefits given to other members of American society (Trueba, 1989, p. v).

In brief, multicultural education may well be the last opportunity for the survival of American democracy, and its most powerful tool for healing the racial wounds of our society. Multicultural education can help eradicate racial and ethnic hatred, bigotry and divisiveness. Multicultural education is also the most reasonable investment in our human capital, and the instrument to re-energize our technological and economic development. In the final analysis, multicultural education will help rebuild public confidence in our political, social and economic system, as a truly democratic system intended to benefit all of us, especially the low-income children.

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