

Accounts of efforts to promote the idea of multiculturalism in schools often overlook the fact that many of the ideas inherent in the notion of multiculturalism as cultural pluralism did not suddenly arise for the first time during the 1960's and 70's. The recent publication of Margaret Szasz' study of efforts to change policy in Federal American Indian Schools in the 1930's allows us to re-examine the issues of education and multiculturalism in historical perspective.

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Curriculum Innovation and Ethnicity: A Review Essay

The idea of multicultural education has developed in a number of countries as a positive response to the culturally pluralistic nature of school populations. It is an educational concept that, translated into curriculum and teachers' attitudes, recognizes, accepts and encourages people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to maintain and be proud of their cultural heritage.

Reviews of the literature, such as "Multicultural Education and Ethnic Studies in the United States," published in 1976, reveal the number and range of programs and materials in this area, and the extent to which many school districts have initiated policies relating to the curriculum and the education of teachers.¹ In England the work of the Education Division of the Community Relations Commission with respect to the education of West Indian and Asian children is well known.² And in New Zealand the curriculum development unit within the Department of Education has been producing a wide range of Maori studies and Maori language materials in recent years.³ A visitor to Canada is immediately aware from a reading of the literature in the professional journals and other sources that the concept of multicultural education is also very much alive in this country.

Many positive developments have undoubtedly taken place as a result of these activities. But despite the expansion of programs and materials a number of the leading advocates of multicultural education, particularly in the United States, have recently issued cautionary warnings about over-optimism with regard to the progress which is being made. James Banks, a Black American, Professor of Education at the University of Seattle, and one of the most prolific and respected advocates of multicultural education, has recently suggested that in the United States there is

widespread disagreement and confusion about what these reform efforts should be designed to attain and about the proper relationship which should exist between the school and ethnic identities. Educators and social scientists who embrace divergent ideologies are recommending conflicting school and curricular programs.⁴

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¹Washington, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, 1976.

²The Commission publishes a regular bulletin for schools with an emphasis on multicultural education.

³See Annual Reports of the Department of Education, Wellington.

⁴James Banks, *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975), p. 9.

Banks has also claimed that few of the recent attempts to implement ethnic studies programs have been successful because most of those which have been devised and implemented are "parochial in scope, fragmented and structured without careful planning and clear rationales."⁵ According to Banks many classroom teachers remain "puzzled about strategies to use in teaching ethnic studies"⁶ and frustrated in their efforts because there is still a "tremendous dearth of materials depicting ethnicity within a broad social context."⁷ Thomas Arciniega, Dean of the School of Education at San Diego State University, takes up this theme and suggests that in spite of a "recent flurry of reforms and innovations" and the expenditure of large amounts of Federal money "schools remain remarkably unchanged."⁸ Graham and Taylor, referring specifically to the education of American Indian children, have claimed that while a "great deal of talk has been circulating about the need for Indian students to learn Indian history in the schools only a few attempts have been made to implement anything."⁹ And Roger Wilson has suggested that several inadequacies exist in the training of teachers who teach in reservation schools. They often know nothing of the characteristics of reservation life, of the language and culture of their pupils, or of the best ways to teach children of non-Anglo backgrounds.¹⁰ Limited observations by the writer in Federal Indian schools in Canada suggests that a wide gap also probably exists between what is often written about the need to implement multicultural education and what actually goes on in schools and classrooms.¹¹

Given this situation the appearance of *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self Determination, 1928-1973*, by Margaret Szasz, is both timely and significant.¹² A former research assistant on the University of New Mexico's American Indian Historical Research Project, Szasz has written the first really adequate and fully documented account of American Indian education during the period from 1928 to the present day. The author's main focus is on the Federal Indian day and boarding schools and over half of her book is devoted to an intensive examination of policies from 1928 to the end of World War Two.

Most previous accounts of efforts to reform school systems in the direction of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism overlook or ignore the fact that many of the ideas inherent in these concepts did not suddenly arise in the 1960's. Szasz shows that efforts were made during the 1930's to move policy in the Federal Indian schools away from the earlier emphasis on assimilation by attempting to introduce aspects of Indian culture into the curriculum, to sensitize teachers to the different cultural backgrounds of their students, and to utilize the services of anthropologists. These efforts were obviously not successful,

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 28.

⁷Ibid., p. vii.

⁸Tomas A. Arciniega, "The Thrust Towards Pluralism: What Progress?" *Educational Leadership* 33 (1975), p. 164.

⁹P. E. Graham and J. H. Taylor, "Reservations and Tribal Customs, History and Language", in R. M. Deever et al. eds. *American Indian Education*, (Arizona: Arizona State University, 1974), p. 127.

¹⁰Roger Wilson, "Teacher Corps, A Model for Training Teachers", Paper presented at Native American Teacher Corps Conference, Denver, Colorado, April 26-29, 1973.

¹¹In one Federal Indian school the writer was taken by the Headmaster to a large cupboard inside which was kept the schools large quantity of Indian curriculum materials, including stories specially adapted to the local background and experience of the children. But the materials remained at a raw and unfinished stage, unable to be used. The grant made available to the outside consultant who had started to work had run out and the future of the whole project remained in doubt.

¹²Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974.

which is one of the reasons why a fresh start has had to be made in more recent times. But it is as a case study of failure in curriculum innovation that Szasz's book provides us with some important information which could have relevance for the contemporary situation.

Attempts which were made to 'Indianize' the curriculum of Federal boarding and day schools during the 1930's extended to many areas of the curriculum and included the introduction of aspects of Indian culture, including Indian history, art and literature. Courses offered in Indian history at the Chilocco boarding school were, for example, extremely popular amongst the Indian students, while at the Santa Fe boarding school traditional Indian painting was taught as an important part of the Indian cultural programme. Bi-lingual pamphlets, prepared for use as texts in the Indian schools, used stories specially adapted to appeal to children of the Pueblo, Navajo and Sioux tribes, and included *Little Man's Family* (Navajo) *Field Mouse Goes to War* (Pueblo) and *The Hen of Wahpeton* (Sioux). Indian artists and writers translated and illustrated the stories. Rug weaving and silver making was also taught in boarding schools on the Navajo reservation, while pottery making was provided for Pueblo youths attending the Santa Fe boarding school. The assistance of skilled native adults was regularly sought to help promote these activities in the schools.

The main focus of this essay is on identifying the reasons Szasz gives for the failure of these curriculum innovations. But what sources precipitated the desire to bring about changes in the curriculum in the first place? One reason for the attempts which were made to move Federal Indian educational policies away from an emphasis on assimilation during the 1930's was the existence of the uniform curriculum, which was unrelated to the Indian child's cultural background and was not proving successful in terms of Indian children's academic achievement in schools. Many pupils dropped out and fewer reached the higher grades in comparison to national averages of attainment. A major report on the Indian Bureau by the Brookings Institution, published in 1928, (the "Meriam Report") was critical of the existing education system and drew attention to the opportunities which existed for more emphasis to be placed on "Indian geography as a substitute approach for the formal geography of continents, oceans and urban locations; for Indian history as a means of understanding other history and for its own importance in helping Indians understand the past and future of their own people. The possibilities of Indian art would make a book in themselves . . ." ¹³

The new programme was enthusiastically encouraged and supported by John Collier, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933, and by Will Carson Ryan and William Woolcott Beatty, the two Directors of Education for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. All these men believed strongly in the need for Indian culture to be an important part of Indian education and they were in a position to be able to do something about it. The influence of John Dewey and Progressive Education was also important as educators tried to adapt the concepts of Progressivism to Indian education. Ryan, Beatty and Collier had all been closely involved themselves in the Progressive movement in various ways. Beatty was a former Superintendent of Schools at Winnetka, and Bronxville, New York, and served as Vice-President of the Progressive Education Association, and Ryan was an Advisory Editor of the *Progressive Education Journal* during the 1930's. Developments in Indian education also coincided with a national resurgence of interest in, and appreciation of, Indian art and a

¹³Directed by Dr. Lewis Meriam, the report was published under the title *The Problem of Indian Administration*.

determination to preserve and expand it. It was a logical step to link up the Indian schools with this new interest.

Yet despite these developments the efforts to give the curriculum of the Indian schools a more 'Indian' orientation obviously failed, and Szasz carefully documents and evaluates the reasons for failure. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Most white teachers in Indian schools were unfamiliar with the aspects of Indian culture they were now being called upon to teach in the classroom situation.
2. Little attention was paid to Indian culture or language in the teacher education of potential teachers of Indian students.
3. Many of the older and more traditional teachers were unenthusiastic about new innovations such as Indian arts and crafts.
4. Few Indian teachers were employed so that the knowledge and skills of Indians themselves could not be adequately utilized to assist in the reform efforts.
5. The centralized nature of the Federal Indian school system was unsuited to the need for local relevance, history and culture which the new scheme required.
6. Real issues relating to cultural values and adjustment in an essentially European school setting were not faced up to by initiating courses in traditional Indian arts and crafts — weaving, beadwork, silverwork, and Indian history, i.e. a 'bits and pieces' approach to culture.
7. Little information or material was available in the Bureau of Indian Affairs which could be useful in the setting of schools or classrooms.
8. The Indian language, for many the heart of the culture, was not included along with the other aspects of Indian culture which were introduced.
9. Attempts at innovation coincided with a period of financial restraint and cut-backs in the expenditure available to the Education Division of the Indian Bureau.
10. An attitude of paternalism remained inherent in Indian Affairs policy and little attempt was made to include Indians in the decision making process with regard to what was trying to be achieved in the schools.
11. A considerable length of time usually elapsed between the initiation of proposals and implementation in the schools.
12. The Educational Directors of the Indian Bureau had to work within the framework and guidelines laid down by the Indian Bureau. This limited their independence when it came to attempting innovations in the schools.
13. Attempts to prepare bi-lingual books with stories relevant to Sioux, Navajo and Pueblo children were handicapped by the lack of written Indian languages and a shortage of qualified people.
14. Changing trends, including the decline of Progressive Education, a move back to a termination policy in Indian affairs and a revival of a policy of assimilation and training for urbanization, helped to diminish the more favorable climate and interest in notions of cultural adaptation which has existed during the 30's.

15. No really significant, large-scale change took place in the curriculum of the Indian schools in terms of incorporating aspects of Indian culture into the various aspects of the syllabus.

In the past there has been a tendency for most writers to ignore or overlook these aspects of Indian education during the 1930's, and Szasz has performed an important service by providing us with the first detailed account of this period. Despite the differences between the conditions in the 1930's and those existing today, some of the reasons she gives for the failure of this early attempt at curriculum innovation have a very familiar and contemporary ring about them. And if we are not to go on reinventing the wheel there are surely some important reminders here for contemporary reformers in the area of multicultural education.

RESUME

Le fait que beaucoup des idées inhérentes à la notion du multiculturalisme comme pluralisme culturel ne se présentaient pas tout d'un coup pour la première fois pendant les années 1960 et aussi les années 1970 est souvent ignoré dans les rapports des efforts de venir à l'appui de de l'idée du multiculturalisme dans les écoles. La publication récente d'une étude de Margaret Szasz sur les tentatives de révision de la politique dans les écoles indiennes fédérales aux Etats-Unis pendant les années 1930 nous permet de réexaminer la question de l'éducation et du multiculturalisme dans une perspective historique.