

ED 345 Multiculturalism, Bilingualism, and Diversity in
Elementary School
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The standards-based reform direction is generally discussed as new to American education, getting us caught up with other major industrialized countries in the world. We should all exert caution every time we hear that something relating to schools is *new*. It usually means that those speaking of the new haven't chosen to examine the historical record. Our need for historical perspective is always large. Otherwise, we lose sight of the larger context, the roots of our work. We also lose, I believe, the potential for genuine reform. In addition, we should worry when the motivation to do something educationally is to help us catch up with some other country—a stance that seems to look right past the students most of us see day in and day out, almost as if they aren't there. I envision here a group of six- or seven-year-olds being told that they have to study hard to make sure we stay ahead of the Japanese. Why would any of these children care about competition with Japan? Why should their teachers even have that in mind?

—Vito Perrone

The large themes that constitute the best traditions in education are sites for investigation rather than settled dogma, a series of challenges to engage. The first is the challenge of democracy itself: What is democracy? What does schooling in a democracy look like? How might we build democratic communities in our classrooms? There is a mismatch between increased standardization and the tightening of bureaucratic control over schools, especially at a time such as this, a moment of unprecedented immigration, movement, and dislocation, a time when the need to model living democratically is at its zenith. The greatest American poet of democracy, Walt Whitman, wrote that democracy “is a great word whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten because that history has yet to be enacted.”

Another challenge involves “the ecology of childhood”—the task of making schools and other settings good environments and communities in which children develop as whole and healthy people—not test factories where kids get evaluated in one-sided ways. The classroom, then, should align to the child, and not the other way round.

This means there must be a focus on the quality of children's lives, and on opportunities for imagination, expression, and experimentation in a safe and buoyant space.

A further challenge is for inclusion, the democratic goal of educating all students for participation in intellectual and academic complexity. This means both breaking down the barriers to full participation of historically oppressed or excluded groups, and offering everyone "an intellectually ambitious education."

And joined with these and at the center of things is the challenge to see the larger society as it really is, not avoiding the difficulties, but facing issues of injustice, racism, imperial ambition, with the schools at least partially disfigured when they become sites that reinforce inequalities of class and race and gender. The teacher's ambition might be to link democratic possibilities in education to fresh possibilities in our larger social life.

If democracy is a special social arrangement, how would we describe its specific character? And if education in a democracy requires something different from the requirements of education, say, in a totalitarian or royal society, then what is that different something?

The short answer is obvious: totalitarianism demands obedience and conformity, hierarchy, command and control. Royalty requires allegiance. Democracy, by contrast, requires free people—coming together voluntarily—who are capable of both self-realization and, at the same time, full participation in a shared political and economic life. Democracy is a form of associative living in which people embrace a level of uncertainty, incompleteness, and the inevitability of change. There simply are no immutable, fixed standards, the same for all, that will ultimately serve democratic purposes.

Teachers in democratic classrooms cannot be mechanical cogs in a bureaucratically-driven machine, nor place-holders in an impersonal system, but rather must think of themselves becoming highly-trained and well-rewarded professionals afforded a large degree of flexibility and autonomy in order to attend to and support the growth of children. In a democracy teachers must be models of thoughtfulness and care, exemplars of problem-solving and decision-making, people capable of asking deep questions, drawing necessary connections, incorporating the surprising and the unexpected and the new, as it occurs, into classroom life.

Assessment in democratic classrooms, then, must be transparent and public, collectively decided upon, and rooted in ongoing student work. It cannot be a separate and isolated event, above and beyond teachers and students; rather, assessment becomes a broad, relevant and connected part of classroom life, an exercise providing an ongoing look at progress and need.

Look for a moment at most schools as they actually are—all the commonsense assumptions, the broad commonplace features and activities, the reality beyond the rhetoric. What is expected of us—teachers and students, parents and administrators? What have we become accustomed to? The simplest, most eloquent answer I've seen comes from the mouths of James Herndon's young students, locked in a segregated ghetto elementary school. Whenever they were asked why they were *kowtowing* to some arbitrary or particularly maddening and inane school custom—begging permission and then lining up to use the toilet, for example, or spending hours on mindless, repetitive tasks—their response was, always the same: because that's "the way it spozed to be."

The way it spozed to be is characterized by division and isolation—students against teacher, teachers against the administration, the union versus the board. Worse, school divides students against one another—each a little one-man skiff on his or her own bottom—through mechanisms of grades and tests and rankings. It divides and alienates students further within themselves—the arbitrary demarcation of experience and knowledge into disciplines and subjects, the disconnection of interest and relevance, initiative and courage from school-sanctioned success. And those tests and grades and scores: a reductive shorthand that turns kids into stick-figures, lifeless and brittle; they trumpet the triumph and unambiguous wonder of objectivity, when in fact objectification itself is the greatest problem and weakness of the standardizing tests. All this disunity and disengagement, all the segregation and isolation—where does it leave us?

The way it spozed to be bows before numbers, genuflects to the values of quantification. Schools promote a flattened world where things get counted, or, as one of my education professors told us years ago, everything that exists exists in some amount, and so everything that exists must be measurable. We asked him about love, hope, beauty, joy, imagination, and possibility, and he said we were being foolish. Teach only what you can test, he said, and test only what you've taught. The "measure of man" is the impossible ideal of a scholar like that, and the *mismeasure of humanity* the inevitable outcome.

The way it spozed to be requires testing, sorting, labeling, ranking. I remember the eccentric and always amusing A.S. Neil, founder of Summerhill School in England, when pressed by twelve-year-olds to give them an examination because... well, you

know, it's *the way it spozed to be*. He sat his charges down and administered a "real test." Here's a sample question:

Where are they following: Madrid, Thursday Island, yesterday, love, democracy, hate, my pocket screwdriver?

I'm always a little skeptical when reformers come forward with schemes to "integrate the curriculum" or to "create real-world projects and internships." Why was the curriculum segregated in the first place? I ask. When did the unreal world get such a mighty foothold in our classrooms? Why does the student feel walled off from society and the earth anyway?

If we peek for a moment beneath the official high-sounding justification for compulsory schooling—to create good and productive citizens, say, or to allow students to reach their full potential, or to unlock the talent and energy of each little darling—there's a truth that dares not speak its name: *the way it spozed to be* is designed to mold and control the herd, to engineer and shape-up the unruly crowd, to grind potentially free people into obedient soldiers, servile and efficient laborers, mindless consumers. Our rulers were not always so wimpy, so reluctant to say it plainly and out loud. In 1909 Woodrow Wilson shouted out, to no one's amazement, that "We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class, of necessity, in every society, to forgo the privileges of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks."

The way it spozed to be is designed to sort youngsters into these classes, to find for each a proper role in the existing social order. Schools reward conformity and mindless habits of obedience with a vengeance, but not without reason; they punish deviance relentlessly and sometimes ruthlessly, but with a clear purpose. In this sense,

and with this aim of education noted explicitly, schools are doing one heck of a job—they are terrifically successful sorting machines.

If you envision the whole enterprise as a vast pyramid, with the elite perched atop the groaning masses at the base, entire schools and whole districts will produce all winners, and others mostly losers. And it's true: Jonathon Kozol has brilliantly documented the "savage inequalities" that result in two high schools, for example, separated by only a few miles, one of which has a beautiful campus and modern buildings, teachers with advanced degrees and a deep commitment to teaching these particular students, and a budget that allows them to spend an average of \$20,000 per student, per year. The other has less than \$5,000 to spend on each student, and kids attend overcrowded classes manned by people who deep-down think *these kids can't learn*, and work with a crumbling curriculum in a dilapidated building. The message is clear to all. It's another dimension of *the way it sposed to be*.

It goes beyond this. Marty Haberman describes a "pedagogy of poverty" which practically guarantees failure for students stepping into a larger world. According to Haberman the teaching acts that constitute the pedagogy of poverty are these: "giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing noncompliance, marking papers, and giving grades." All quite familiar.

There are other teacher responsibilities, of course—staff meetings, parent conferences, monitoring and record-keeping—but this basic menu of teaching practices

constitutes a common experience and expectation. Undergirding this practice are four principles:

1. Teaching is what teachers do. Learning is what students do. Therefore, students and teachers are engaged in different activities.
2. Teachers are in charge and responsible. Students are those who still need to develop appropriate behavior. Therefore, when students follow teachers' directions, appropriate behavior is being taught and learned.
3. Students represent a wide range of individual differences. Many students have handicapping conditions and lead debilitating home lives. Therefore, ranking of some sort is inevitable; some students will end up at the bottom of the class while others will finish at the top.
4. Basic skills are a prerequisite for learning and living. Students are not necessarily interested in basic skills. Therefore, directive pedagogy must be used to ensure that youngsters are compelled to learn their basic skills.

Of course this pedagogy fails utterly to educate kids. It fails to engage their minds or their energies, fails to spark interest or commitment, and succeeds only in creating resentment and burn-out in every direction. A pattern of behaviors and beliefs ensures what Haberman calls the "ideology of non-work": each day, and every bit of work, is disconnected from anything that preceded or will follow it creating an inevitable sense of "nowness"; a willingness on the part of teachers to demand little beyond showing up—and to accept virtually any excuse for lateness or absence—as long as kids aren't too disruptive, guaranteeing that little sustained learning will be possible; relationships that are authoritarian and non-mutual, meaning that motivation to learn is severely limited if not extinguished outright. All of it adds up to a pervasive sense of passivity, cynicism, purposelessness, fatalism and despair, and the likelihood that "non-work"—unemployment, prison—awaits these youngsters. And that *the way it spozed to be*.

It doesn't have to be that way, of course, but that's the way it is. Haberman notes that:

The pedagogy of poverty requires that teachers who begin their careers intending to be helpers, models, guides, stimulators, and caring sources of encouragement transform themselves into directive authoritarians in order to function in urban schools. But people who choose to become teachers do not do so because at some point they decided, “I want to be able to tell people what to do all day and then make them do it!” This gap between expectations and reality means that there is a pervasive, fundamental irreconcilable difference between the motivation of those who select themselves to become teachers and the demands of urban teaching.

Here is an interesting and helpful guide for teachers who might have the courage to begin to construct an alternative. Good teaching is more likely going on whenever students are:

- involved with issues they regard as vital concerns...
- planning what they will be doing...
- actively involved...
- asked to think about an idea in a way that questions common sense...
- redoing, polishing, or perfecting their work...
- being helped to see major concepts, big ideas, and general principles...
- applying ideals such as fairness, equity, or justice to their world...
- reflecting on their own lives and how they have come to believe and feel as they do...

In other words—and this seems so plainly obvious—good teaching offers all kids opportunities to create and to build, to invent and compose, to follow their interests to their furthest limits, to be imaginative, curious, and venturesome. Good teaching is built on strong relationships—caring and authentic, challenging and real—and offers a curriculum that is both mirror and window to students, something both nourishing and demanding. All kids need to be themselves—uniquely, flexibly, autonomously—and

they need to be part of something beyond themselves. And it's imminently possible if they are in the company of grownups—teachers perhaps—who are themselves curious and adventurous, thoughtful, caring, competent, balanced. These teachers must begin by assuming their students are authors and artists and activists, not outlaws. This is what we might aspire to.

Granted, I've drawn this portrait of schools as they are, of *the way it spozed to be* in pretty broad strokes; granted, too, our perceptions and judgments of school are various, and school cannot possibly be painted as a single experience, the same for all. True, true, but is this picture impossibly opaque, impenetrable, incomprehensible? You decide, but for anyone who has spent any time in an American school, I think it's got the ring of authenticity. Don't you think that *the way it spozed to be* is recognizable?

Because teaching aims both to guide and to set free, to initiate *into* as well as to liberate *from*, teaching is one part prescription and another part permission. Great teachers walk this fault line consciously, with courage and confidence, working to move their students into thinking for themselves, awakening in them new awarenesses, igniting their imaginations and encouraging them to live awhile in possibility, spurring them to go further and further. And with all this teachers simultaneously provide students with access to the tools of the culture, the structures of the disciplines, the various languages and literacies that will allow them to participate fully and freely. This is possible when teachers present themselves as questioning, fallible, searching human beings themselves—identical in this regard to those they teach.

It is always a struggle for conscientious teachers to be true to students while keeping an eye on the world those students will inherit, and these broad ideas can act as guides:

- * See your own students as whole human beings with hearts and minds, bodies and spirits that must somehow be taken into account. We must find our way beyond the half-language of labels.

- * Be doubly serious in your efforts to teach students the various literacies that will allow them to become competent and powerful in their worlds.

- * Provide opportunities for students to do and to make, to be authors and artists (not outlaws) and to become valuable and valued in their various communities.

- * Learn *from* rather than *about* the world—from work, not about work; from democracy, not about democracy; from nature, not about nature; from history, geography literature, maths, and so on.

- * Bring the community into the school and the school into the community. Classrooms are contested spaces, and the sooner we face that fact, the more effective we might become.

An education for democracy begins with the belief that each person has the right and responsibility to participate publicly, that each can and should make a difference. The principles of associative living—community, equality, liberty—must be brought to life in our classrooms.

This course deals with issues related to diversity in the classroom, including issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, culture, language and disability. Multicultural

and bilingual education are discussed as programmatic possibilities to create learning environments supportive of all children. Through observation, reflection, group work and class discussion of socio-cultural factors, students will discover teaching principles and processes that support learning in a diverse classroom. Topics include historical perspectives on diversity, anti-racist pedagogy and issues of social tolerance.

Class meetings will include varied activities such as short lectures, discussions, exercises, student presentations, technology-related activities and small group activities.

Course objectives

Through this course, it is expected that student teachers:

Will understand how issues of race, gender, class, ethnicity, disability language and culture influence teaching and learning.

Will learn about how membership in families and communities influence child development.

Will become aware of how cultural and social factors have influences their life and opportunities for learning and success.

Will acquire an appreciation and understanding of issues related to diversity in urban settings.

Will learn about first and second language learning and its relation to diversity in urban settings.

Will learn about first and second language learning and its relation to teaching and learning in school settings.

Will learn about program models and pedagogies that support learning for second language learners.

Will observe, examine and discuss strategies and teaching approaches which enhance the engagement of all students in diverse urban classrooms.

Will discuss ways to affirm diversity in their classrooms.

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans with Disability Act, students with a documented disability may request reasonable accommodations that they might need to participate fully. Students may be eligible for:

- Exam modifications
- Alternative print formats
- Sign language interpreting
- Real-time captioning
- Class relocations
- Assistance with academic modifications
- Access problem solving
- Advocacy and referrals
- And other reasonable accommodations

If you have questions or need help the Office of Disability Services is available to assist students at (312) 413-2183 (voice) or (312) 413-0123 (TTY only). The Office of Disability Services works to ensure the accessibility of UIC programs, classes, and services to students with disabilities. Services are available for students who have documented learning disabilities, vision or hearing impairments, emotional or physical disabilities.

OSS is currently revising and reformatting all COE admission and advising materials to include a similar statement regarding student access to reasonable accommodations. These materials will be sent to the Office of Disability Services in electronic format and hardcopy. If students need the materials in alternative formats, that office will provide the materials for them.

If you have questions or concerns, feel free to contact Richard Allegra in the Office of Disability Services.

Readings Required:

1. *To Teach*. William Ayers
2. *City Schools/City Teachers*. Ayers and Ford

Other:

1. *Of Borders and Dreams*. Chris Carger
2. *Holler If You Hear Me*. Greg Michie
3. *The Dream Keepers*. Gloria Ladson-Billings
4. *Black Teachers on Teaching*. Michele Foster
5. *A White Teacher Talks About Race*. Julie Landsman
6. *Subtractive Schooling*. Angela Valenzuela
7. *Taught by America*. Sarah Sentilles
8. *Teachers Have It Easy*. Moulthrop, Calegar, Eggers
9. *The Power of Their Ideas*. Deborah Meier
10. *Because We Can Change the World*. Mara Sapon-Shevin
11. *The Living Classroom*. David Armington
12. *A Kind and Just Parent*. William Ayers
13. *She Would Not Be Moved*. Herb Kohl
14. *Stupidity and Tears*. Herb Kohl
15. *Other People's Children*. Lisa Delpit
16. *Educating Latino Students*. Luis Moll
17. *The Light in Their Eyes*. Sonia Nieto
18. *Making Choices for Multicultural Education*. Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant
19. *Starting Strong*. Pat Carini
20. *The Good Preschool Teacher*. William Ayers
21. *City Schools and The American Dream*. Pedro Noguera
22. *Urban Injustice: How Ghettos Happen*. David Hilfiker
23. *Young, Gifted, and Black*. Theresa Perry
24. *White Like Me*. Tim Wise
25. *The Skin That We Speak*. Lisa Delpit