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The Challenges
of Multiculturalism
A perspective for school principals

Multiculturalism is a regrettably long word for a simple if
hard concept, one that Canada has seriously undertaken to make
its own. Implementing that concept runs slap up against human
ignorance - elevated by rationalizations into prejudice and
hardened into stony durability by the habitual procedures of
institutions. Sullivan concerns himself chiefly with Nova Scotia,
and points out that the principal of any school catering to
minority groups, faced as he or she must be with the
undertaking to implement a national policy, must begin by
clearing the ground of ignorance - his or her own ignorance
about groups in the school's community, and theirs about each
other. Bridges must then be built between the cultures
represented there, by involving the groups in leadership. With
the assistance of that leadership, the principal must make a
major effort to reconcile school practice particularly with those
goals in the curriculum that are consistent with the national
aim. Finally, he or she must take the exceptional steps
necessary to obtain the exceptional teaching that the presence
of a mix of cultures demands.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to address in one paper
the challenges that multiculturalism poses to all the aspects of
educational administration in Canada. There are many types of
educational administrators, from superintendents to department
heads, and Canada's cultural complexity changes from one region
to another. Therefore the administrative issues raised here will
be directed to the functions of the school-based administrator,
the principal or vice-principal, because school leadership at
these levels is often a key in implementing educational change.
The content is decidedly Nova Scotian, although attempts have
been made to make the material national in scope.
   The problems associated with multiculturalism are basically
conceptual in nature. To be able to implement a multicultural

curriculum effectively, the principal must have the ability to perceive "The school, the district, and the total educational program as a whole". (Sergiovanni and Carver, 1980:13)

Working in a multicultural society places additional stress on an administrator in three main areas of functioning: working with the school community, educational planning, and the process of teaching. This paper addresses each of these issues in the light of the additional challenges posed by working in a society which endorses the rights of all ethnic groups to maintain their culture.

School community

Multiculturalism is a relatively new concept in public school education in Canada. Although a few education programs presently attempt to deal with it, most educational administrators have not had the benefit of these classes, and must clarify issues for themselves.

First, the educational administrator must clearly understand that Canada's national policy of multiculturalism in a bilingual framework implies an acceptance of the egalitarian view toward all cultures in the nation. Pierre Trudeau (1981) recently stated that all Canadians "have the right to preserve their cultural heritage and to share this heritage with their fellow Canadians... I would like to reiterate our pledge to protect and support the free choice of all Canadians to maintain their cultural roots."

To apply this policy at the school level, maintain a position as curriculum leader, and be the major link between home and school, the educational administrator must know the demographic characteristics of his or her community, characteristics not only of the immediate school community but of the province and nation as well. Statistics Canada (Census of Canada, 1981) can assist the school administrator by supplying information on demographic characteristics, both on the provincial and national levels and on the local level - for small geographic sections called Enumeration Areas. Few schools serve less than one Enumeration Area. For example, small towns of four or five thousand people, such as Kentville and Windsor in Nova Scotia, have five to seven Enumeration Areas. Information is available for each Area on 22 variables, such as type of labour force, number of people by age and sex, families by family structure, husband and wives in husband/wife families by mother tongue, occupied private dwellings, average number of family persons per private household, and level of schooling.

Unfortunately, Statistics Canada does not provide information on the cultural heritage of persons in the Enumeration Areas, forcing administrators to seek other sources by designing and administering relatively simple questionnaires for members of the community, or by having students interview them. Administrators should also attempt to understand the

different values held by various cultural groups, which may best be accomplished by meeting with them as well as by participating in related graduate study, in fields such as sociology and anthropology. However, with few university courses available for these purposes, administrators will often be forced to use their own resources, such as reports written on local cultural group problems and concerns, as has been done most notably in Nova Scotia through the Saint Mary's International Educational Centre series.(1) Finding the time and energy for concerted effort to study the different cultural aspects of the school's community, and placing it in perspective with the provincial and national multicultural scene, is one of the greatest challenges for administrators today.

Relations with community members

Much research evidence points to the importance of community support for schools, making it difficult for administrators to remain isolated from the cultural diversity of their communities and still claim that a school has effective leadership. Some time ago, Gordon (1967) found that for the student to have a successful experience, a school curriculum must be valued by the family. Mounting evidence suggests a positive relationship between educational determination, involvement in educational tasks, and participation by the parents in school activities. Other evidence shows that students' educational goals appear to be formed at home and in peer groups rather than in the school environment (Cohen, 1981; Peniston, 1975; Rhodes, 1968). These results indicate that the school administration must develop strong ties with members of the community and provide opportunities for the community to participate in both the curriculum and in educational decision-making.

It is the administrator's challenge to devise appropriate committee structures to encourage people of all cultures to participate in local educational decision-making. However, another problem arises from encouraging representatives of minority groups to participate on educational committees. Educators may expect community members to have the same level of sophistication about committee protocol as they themselves have, in knowledge about agenda, motions, and similar matters.

This expectation often intimidates minority members and contributes to their verbal or physical withdrawal from participation in the meetings. In the event of such withdrawal, the behaviour is usually interpreted as a lack of interest, and so reinforces the belief that educational planning and decision-making should be left to the educators.

When school boards, the official mechanism for community involvement in education, are examined, minority groups are not well represented, especially when they are non-white. In 1979,

a study to examine the characteristics of Nova Scotia's school board members showed that only 0.5% of the 183 board members responding to the questionnaire were non-white (Sullivan, 1979). A larger white representation could hardly be imagined, yet that would be the predicted trend because this study was conducted at a time when all the board members were appointed by either the Municipal Council or the Governor-in-Council. Recently, legislation has been enacted to allow one-third of the board members to be directly elected, with another third of the members appointed from the elected municipal councils. An analysis of any generally elected body in Nova Scotia would indicate that a non-white person is rarely elected to a public governing committee.

In the same school board study, a question concerning minority groups asked whether the school-board members perceived a problem with the school's program dealing with minority groups. Responses to the question "In your opinion, do minority group children (black, Indian, etc.,) in your jurisdiction have the same educational opportunities as White children?" were 83.2% "yes", 6.1% "no", and 10.6% "not applicable". These responses do not reflect the opinions of many minority group leaders in Nova Scotia, who contend that the public school system does not address their problems well (Moore, 1981:18).

It seems important to emphasize that school administrators should develop ties with community members to obtain frequent feedback on the relevancy of the school's curriculum, and to influence the educational goal setting which goes on at home and in peer groups. It is more difficult to interact with people of differing cultures than it is with those of the same culture, because more effort is needed to understand and appreciate the varying beliefs and philosophies (Bruno and Doscher, 1981:95). However, if a school is to obtain support for the concept of multiculturalism, the principal must identify and contact people of all cultures in the community, and encourage them to maintain their cultures while participating with teachers in school activities and decision-making.

Educational planning

The most difficult, high-level activity in which educational administrators must be involved is developing a conceptual plan for the entire school program. Unfortunately, this activity has rarely been stressed with school systems and individual schools. Educators seem to have a strange unspoken agreement that "Although we know differently, we will pretend either that we all know what we are doing and why, or that we don't know what we are doing and it is too difficult to try to sort out." B.F. Skinner (1968:v) may have been correct when differentiating between the terms "training" and "teaching": "If you know what you are doing, you are training, and if you don't know what you are doing, you are teaching."

Why are goal studies important?

"Of the many aspects of school system planning and evaluation, perhaps the most critical and elusive is that of goals and objectives. Until the aims of the school system are stated and evaluated, there is no way of telling how well this system is performing its mission - or even knowing what its mission is". (Doherty and Peters, 1981:687)

Few school systems have stated goals that have been systematically established with representatives from interested parties in the community. Even fewer school systems try to link curricula and budget directly with the pursuance of their goals. Most individual schools follow the text and handbooks prescribed by the Province, irrespective of the type of community which they serve. Even if provincial guidelines were more sensitive to developing multicultural attitudes, provincial goals would have to reflect the cultural diversity of the broad provincial context, and such goals alone could never present the type of information capable of solving problems of self-respect and equality that are local and specific in nature. In Nova Scotia as in the rest of Canada, minority group educational situations are each unique and require different sets of goals needing curricula peculiar to those communities. It is a challenge for the school-based administrator to devise a workable plan for the staff and community to first conceptualize the goals of education for the school, and then relate development, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum to those stated goals.

What do Canadian goals studies suggest about our attitudes toward multiculturalism?

Most goal studies have included some type of needs assessment, where respondents are asked to indicate what importance **should be** placed on the goals and what importance **is actually** placed on the goals. The **need** is the result of the difference between the goals as they should be and as they actually are.

How do existing goals relate to multiculturalism? Some goals relating directly to multicultural policy or action are included in most studies. In three goal studies from the Atlantic Institute of Education, two such goals were "Learn to respect and to get along with people of varying life styles and beliefs" and "Learn about ourselves through Canadian studies." In the City of Sydney goal study (Murphy and Hughes, 1981) the former goal was ranked from sixth to tenth (out of 23 goals) in **preferred** importance by students, community members, teachers, and central office personnel and board members, and was ranked fourth to fourteenth as to the **actual** importance in the school curriculum. The latter goal was ranked a disappointing twelfth to eighteenth in **preferred** importance, with a slightly better

ranking as to the **actual** importance in the schools.

In the predominantly Micmac community goal study in Eskasoni (Murphy, 1981), the goal of "Learn to respect and get along with people of varying life styles and beliefs" and an additional goal of "Learn about ourselves through Micmac studies" were ranked in the top third of 23 goals. Again the goal dealing with Canadian studies was ranked low in importance, i.e., twenty-first of twenty-three goals. These two studies raise another concern which should be highlighted. There appears to be a lack of concern for learning about ourselves through a Canadian framework. It seems as if the respondents wanted to learn about themselves, but were not keen about relating this to other Canadians - an attitude which runs counter to the policy of multiculturalism.

In a goal study involving community leaders from the Nova Scotia Acadian, Black, non-Status Indian, and Status Indian communities (Sullivan, 1982:45), the goal "Learn to respect and to get along with people of varying life styles and beliefs" was ranked from first to seventh in importance. The Canadian studies goal was ranked in the top ten goals by each group except the Black leaders.

Of the 13 goals adopted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (1980), four dealt with multiculturalism. They were stated as follows:

1. The fundamental aim of education is the intellectual, aesthetic, physical, emotional, and ethical integration of individuals into complete persons to realize self-respect, self-fulfillment and their relevance in society.

2. It is essential that all students have the opportunity to learn the history, literature, culture, government and heritage of Canada. A secondary but important stress must be placed on learning about the international community.

3. All children must be educated in the spirit of tolerance, friendship, peace and universal understanding.

4. It is essential that educational programs for native children include instructions in native tongue, customs and heritage.

Another type of goal relates to the very essence of multiculturalism, and has consistently been ranked in the top two or three in importance in almost all goal studies completed in Nova Scotia by Atlantic Institute of Education personnel, namely "Develop a sense of personal worth and competence." Yet there is little evidence that school systems are designing and evaluating their curricula and teachers with this type of

goal in mind, as schools still tend to emphasize failure and to de-emphasize any positive behaviour of students (Sullivan, 1975; Van Houten, 1980:103).

To the knowledge of this author, few of the studies, or of the stated goals, have resulted in organizations making any considerable effort to relate curriculum or budgetary requirements to the goals and needs established. For example, in an analysis of the Nova Scotia Department of Education curriculum, a major concern was "the lack of any attempt to link the stated Departmental Aims to the subjects as outlined in official Departmental documents". (Sullivan, 1982:65) The Saskatoon Board of Education Annual Report entitled "Your Schools in 1977-78" is a notable exception, because it focused on the six specific goals of education in the Saskatoon public school system and attempted to relate services to these goals (Saskatoon School Board of Education, 1978). Generally, however, Canadian goal studies do not indicate that education systems emphasize positive attitudes toward multiculturalism or have a systematic plan for introducing the concept into the curriculum.

What are the educational planning challenges?

If educators are not clear about the goals followed by the schools, it is difficult if not impossible to determine their attitudes towards the self-esteem and recognition of cultural groups. If preferred goals, however, were established, the direction should become more evident for curriculum changes which will encourage positive cultural attitudes. Should community members and teachers not prefer to emphasize multicultural goals, a separate but extremely important concern then arises: how to change the attitudes of these people, who have a great deal of control and influence over the students.

The results of the goal studies discussed earlier provide a challenge for educational administrators to develop an effective strategy for determining goals and needs, and a curriculum to address multicultural and personal worth and competence problems. Once goals have been established, the next major step is to develop behavioral objectives to give practical guidance to classroom teachers and evaluate progress; this paper will not examine these aspects of curriculum planning.

Dorothy Moore's (1981) study on multiculturalism in Nova Scotia indicated that educational authorities "had not addressed the problems of special needs of the minority groups" (p.18). It is likely that no one, including minority group leaders, school-based administrators, and government officials, is clear on the major educational problems confronting the cultural groups of Nova Scotia.

The process of teaching

Teachers

     Schools that have a large proportion of minority students
often have a problem obtaining and retaining good teachers.
These schools, generally in inner cities or isolated rural areas,
tend to be the most difficult in which to teach and to need the
most immediate assistance.(2) Any administrator, but particularly
those in minority schools, must be clear about the type of
teacher needed and about the forces working against keeping
high-quality teachers in minority schools. There is evidence
that experience, starting salary, quality of undergraduate
institution attended, and verbal ability are all positively related
to teacher classroom achievement (Sewell, 1972; Winkler, 1973).
Yet teachers in minority schools generally have fewer years of
experience and lower degrees (and therefore lower salaries) than
teachers in predominantly white schools (Bruno and Doscher,
1981).
     Compounding the problems associated with such a staff, a
minority school principal must cope with the problem of teacher
transfers. A study of elementary teacher transfers in a large
U.S. metropolitan school district concluded "that a large
proportion of teachers requested transfers out of high-percentage
black schools". (Bruno and Doscher, 1981:106) They continued
by stating that since not all the requests were granted, it was
likely that only the most qualified teachers actually received
transfers, shifting the better teachers to the white schools and
leaving the poorer or inexperienced teachers in the black
schools. A preliminary analysis of the data showed that the
one-way flow of teachers to the predominantly white schools
would appear more pronounced if the study categories were
based on the percentage of minority students rather than that
of blacks only (p.104).
     How can administrators intervene to obtain and maintain
high quality staff in a minority school? Knoop (1981) believes
that one intervention should involve the way teachers perceive
the effectiveness of their school. In Ontario, he recently
investigated the relationships between teachers' job satisfaction
and the degree to which, in their estimation, the organization
achieved its goals. His findings showed that perceived school
effectiveness, expressed as degree of goal accomplishment, was
positively associated with their satisfaction with supervision and
fellow staff members (p.4).
     This author's experiences as an inner-city school principal
would support Knoop's findings, and lead to the suggestion that
the principal, as supervisor, must be able to help teachers
clarify their own educational objectives and positively reinforce
the teachers for accomplishing them. In a difficult school, with
most students working below grade level, the normal goals and
objectives of maintaining the school system average in grade
achievement, are not realistic. Yet many teachers in minority

schools implicitly subscribe to the normal "one grade per year" progress criterion. Even after four or five years of teaching in a minority school, these teachers hope to have their classes functioning at average grade level, forgetting that they receive new students in their classes each year who are well below grade level before entering their classroom. It is the administrator's challenge to assist the teachers to set more realistic objectives and reward them accordingly.

A second intervention involves incentives for teaching in difficult situations. On a questionnaire sent to 748 certified and tenured junior high and intermediate teachers from three southern California school districts, the following variables were ranked first to fourth as incentives to teach in the inner city (Sewell, 1972):

1.   Reduced class size
2.   Bonus salary
3.   Larger raises for inner city teachers
4.   One less class to teach

Each of these incentives seems reasonable, and would probably help maintain staff in minority schools. But in Nova Scotia, as in many other places in Canada, it is perceived to be politically unwise, both at teacher bargaining and school board policy levels, to recognize officially the major problems in minority schools by formally establishing special incentives for teaching in those schools, apparently accepting the premise that all teaching positions are equally difficult. Unfortunately, the school-based administrator does not have as much control of these variables as he or she does in the case of the first intervention.

Since few people would argue that minority schools do not present more difficult teaching situations, special incentives and motivators should accompany these teaching positions. It seems time for educational leaders to agree that this emperor has no clothes and move quickly into formally identifying schools which need extra assistance for maintaining good staff.

Teaching

An administrator should be able to identify and promote types of teaching which develop positive attitudes toward multiculturalism among students. Teachers should be directed away from models of instruction that encourage an egocentric or biased attitude toward different peoples.

The improvement of education for minority groups basically rests on theories regarding the acquisition of self and social esteem. Rossell (1981) suggests two theories relevant to education. The first suggests, and research supports, that where groups of different status interact, in order to change their expectations the lower status person must at some time be in a superior role (such as teaching a skill). The second theory and

its supporting research indicates that competitive classroom situations perpetuate the status order, because "losers" begin to internalize their failures and self-esteem declines (p. 96).

It appears that this effect can be altered in a co-operative classroom environment, by placing children in small groups where each child has the opportunity to teach the others. The two critical factors that provide motivation for students to learn seem to be the existence of co-operative structures and opportunities for success. These findings provide tremendous challenges to school administrators for restructuring schools so as to reflect a co-operative, successful environment. Major changes will have to be made in classroom activities, in marking patterns, and in the criteria used for rewarding students, in order to establish this type of environment.

Summary

This paper has addressed some major challenges that the Canadian policy of multiculturalism poses for the school-based educational administrator. To move from a "one culture, melting pot" attitude for students and curriculum, toward endorsing the right of all ethnic groups to equal status, will demand a re-evaluation of many of our present educational practices.

NOTES

1.   See also "Adjustment Problems of East Indians in the Halifax-Dartmouth Area" by S. Sandhu, and "The New Pioneers: Ethnicity and the Vietnamese Refugees in Nova Scotia" by M. Boyd.

2.   Of course, many Canadian schools having large percentages of minority groups are rewarding and pleasant schools in which to teach. However, it seems that schools in this category often have first-generation-Canadian minority group children who have a tremendous desire to move ahead socially. It is not to this type of minority group school that I refer.

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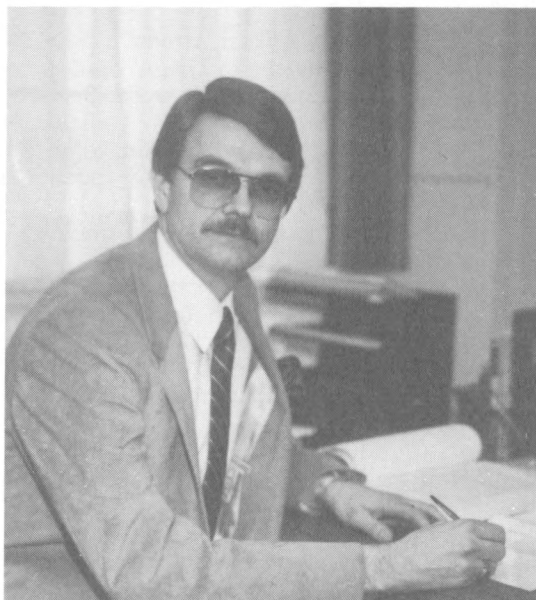
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