

Diversity Within Unity:
Essential Principles for Teaching and Learning
in a Multicultural Society

by James A. Banks

What do we know about education and diversity and how do we know it? This two-part question guided the Multicultural Education Consensus Panel that was sponsored by the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington and the Common Destiny Alliance at the University of Maryland. The Panel reviewed and synthesized research related to diversity during a four-year period. The Panel's work was supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The panel members are specialists in race relations and multicultural education.

An interdisciplinary group, it was made up of two psychologists, a political scientist, a sociologist, and four multicultural education specialists. I chaired the panel. The other members of it were Peter Cookson (Teachers College, Columbia University); Geneva Gay (University of Washington, Seattle); Willis D. Hawley (University of Maryland, College Park); Jacqueline Jordon Irvine (Emory University); Sonia Nieto (University of Massachusetts, Amherst); Janet Ward Schofield (University of Pittsburgh); and Walter G. Stephan (New Mexico State University). The panel was modeled after the consensus panels that develop and write reports for the National Academy of Sciences. In Academy panels, an expert group decides, based on research and practice, what is known about a particular problem and the most effective actions that can be taken to solve it.

The findings of the Multicultural Education Consensus Panel, which are called essential principles, describe ways in which educational policy and practice related to diversity can be improved. These principles are derived from research and practice. They are designed to help educational practitioners in all types of schools increase student academic achievement and improve intergroup skills. Another aim is to help schools successfully meet the challenges of and benefit from the diversity that characterizes the United States and its schools. The publication in which the principles are found in detail and on which this article is based, discusses each of the essential principles in detail and contains a checklist designed to be used by educational practitioners to determine the extent to which their institutions and environments are consistent with the essential principles.

The 12 essential principles are summarized below.

Teacher Learning

Principle 1: Professional development programs should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within U. S. society and the ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behavior.

Student Learning

Principle 2: Schools should ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and to meet high standards.

Principle 3: The curriculum should help students understand that knowledge is socially constructed and reflects researchers' personal experiences as well as the social, political, and economic contexts in which they live and work.

Principle 4: Schools should provide all students with opportunities to participate in extra- and cocurricular activities that develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase academic achievement and foster positive interracial relationships.

Intergroup Relations

Principle 5: Schools should create or make salient superordinate crosscutting group memberships in order to improve intergroup relations.

***Principle 6:** Students should learn about stereotyping and other related biases that have negative effects on racial and ethnic relations.

Principle 7: Students should learn about the values shared by virtually all cultural groups (e.g., justice, equality, freedom, peace, compassion, and charity).

Principle 8: Teachers should help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups.

***Principle 9:** Schools should provide opportunities for students from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups to interact socially under conditions designed to reduce fear and anxiety.

School Governance, Organization and Equity

Principle 10: A school's organizational strategies should ensure that decision-making is widely shared and that members of the school community learn collaborative skills and dispositions in order to create a caring environment for students.

Principle 11: Leaders should develop strategies that ensure that all public schools, regardless of their locations, are funded equitably.

Assessment

***Principle 12:** Teachers should use multiple culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills.

Conclusion

Diversity in the nation's schools is both an opportunity and a challenge. The nation is enriched by the ethnic, cultural, and language diversity among its citizens and within its schools. However, whenever diverse groups interact, intergroup tension, stereotypes, and institutionalized discrimination develop. Schools must find ways to respect the diversity of their students as well as help to create a unified nation-state to which all of the nation's citizens have allegiance. We hope these design principles will help educational policy makers and practitioners realize this elusive and difficult but essential goal of a democratic and pluralistic society.