

Interpersonal Effectiveness and Learning by Kirk Widra M.Ed.

Introduction

Education in America is at a critical juncture. America's multicultural landscape has become one of the central issues effecting education today. With an increasing number of the population whose second language is English and the unfortunate socioeconomic divide ever widening education is poised to directly affect the future of our country.

Historically, curriculum shifts and adjusts to the needs of society and is also quite susceptible to the political climate of the times as evidenced by the passing of the NCLB act. Whether the goals are to meet the individual's, needs or society's needs, curriculum has swung like a pendulum typically moved by the political forces. Looking at our present curriculum, can we say that curriculum is addressing the individual's needs and the needs of society? Are we able to offer a balanced approach that meets both the needs of the individual and society's needs?

Can we say that curriculum is addressing the individual's needs or society's needs?

As mentioned above, historically curriculum shifts and adjusts to the needs of society and is also quite susceptible to the political climate of the times. Many of the curriculums used throughout the country are attempting to address primarily the individual's needs (perhaps motivated by funding) in the hope (or under the pretense) of addressing the needs of society. In doing so many feel that education is losing site of the needs of society as a whole and individuals are losing site of the need for education. "Nonetheless, the demands persist, focusing on curriculum- planned experience provided through instruction and curriculum is continuously modified as education goals are revised, student populations change, social issues are debated, and new interest groups emerge (Levine, Orstien pg. 413). The fear is however all of this could be creating a larger problem concerning the development of curriculums in classrooms throughout the country. As noted by author Christopher T. Vang, the emergence of what he calls the "hidden curriculum" is the by-product of overburdened and unprepared public institutions inability to address the needs of the exploding multicultural population. He writes, "The hidden curriculum is an underlying agenda that affects students of low socioeconomic status, particularly language-minority students. It is based on the attitude that non-English-speaking students are not capable of the same academic achievement as native speakers. English language learners (ELLs)--students whose first language is not English--are classified as either limited-English-proficient (LEP) or fluent-English-proficient (FEP). LEP students are generally placed in bilingual classrooms and FEP students in regular courses of studies. From this vantage point it could be said that schools and curriculums are neither addressing the needs of the individual or society, they are reacting to it."

Are we able to offer a balanced approach that meets both individual and society's needs?

We ask the schools to teach children to think, to socialize them, to alleviate poverty, and produce intelligent, patriotic citizens (Levine, Orstien pg. 413). When schools are forced to deal with situations far beyond there capabilities and are charged with teaching such things as basic responsible behavior (which it is widely believed should be should be taught at home) how effective can they be regardless of the quality or scope of the curriculum? To propose that the school should have to teach basic moral and ethical behavior, a new language (in some cases), develop different teaching models and curriculum to address the vast diversity of the student body, is far too much to ask. All of these issues are made all the more difficult to accomplish in light of the ever widening socioeconomic divide and inadequate resources made available in America today.

It would be really difficult at this point to offer a truly balanced approach that meets the needs of the individual and society. Individuals would need to be on a level playing field from the start, currently that is simply not believed possible by many educators given the immense amount of diversity present. Language, socioeconomics,

cultural identification, stratification, and prejudice are all major hurdles to this. We are simply not ready or able at this point in our collective history to move beyond these issues. Education is first and foremost designed to give people the tools and opportunities to function and participate in society; it should be ultimately the great equalizer sadly today it is the one thing that divides us all.

References

Christopher T. Vang. "Hmong-American K-12 Students and the Academic Skills Needed for a College Education: A Review of the Existing Literature and Suggestions for Future Research." Hmong Studies Journal, Vol 5, 2004-05.

Ornstein, A. & Levine, D. (2007). Foundations of Education (6th ed.). Houghton Mifflin Company

***Reflections on Interpersonal Effectiveness Learning**

The preceding paper was provided to demonstrate the ability to look closely at an issue that has far reaching implications as a result of educational law. The idea of interpersonal learning is at the heart of the educational experience but when hampered by the unrealistic expectations of governmental policy and little in the way of funding it gets more and more challenging for educators to meet the needs of all the students under their charge. Presumably the NCLB, and the barrage of subsequent laws enacted in support of it, were designed to meet the needs of a country whose ethnic diversity is growing exponentially however due to the many issues surrounding the implementation of NCLB many fear that more harm has been done than good. The example above from Vang is but one aspect of diversity that is not being met, but what of others yet to come?

The preceding paper also touches on an important issue that stems from the diversity issue, what is the, or should be the, purpose of education? In light of the numerous social problems and socioeconomic inequities how can we educate students and support the fostering of citizenry? The idea of smaller class sizes and a more interpersonal approach to teaching and learning, ... continues to be at the forefront of the educational and political agenda for schools, school districts, and school boards. Since the late 1970s, research has indicated that reduced class sizes (15 to 18 students) are associated with increased student achievement in specific situations, particularly when small classes are implemented in the primary grades and students participate in small classes for more than one year (The Center for Public Education, 2010). Yet for many schools this is simply not an option.

As mentioned in several previous submissions the real issue is that of leadership and school culture. Everyone must participate in building a culture around the educational process and take ownership of the definitions and outcomes. In our diversity lies our greatest strength yet unfortunately many use this divisively to ensure we stay separated and sorted into our socioeconomic and demographic tribes.

Reference

The Center for Public Education. (2010). Key lessons: Class Size and Student Achievement Retrieved on March 30, 2010 from http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Key_lessons_Class/

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