Multicultural Education and the Future of America

Larry B. Harris
Kansas State University

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A child born in 1984 will graduate from high school in the year 2002. One has to wonder what the educational system will look like at that time. Will those of us in educational settings make the decisions and adapt the system of education to aid these persons in coping with life in the 21st century?

Alvin Toffler (1980) has suggested that our society is now in a transition stage between an industrial society and an information society. The vast majority of workers in the United States will no longer be involved in industrial occupations; instead, the dissemination of information will be the most important occupational category in the future. Much of the concern expressed in casual observations of the future deals with the rapid advances in technology. One only has to watch television on any night to see computers advertised which fifteen years ago were only envisioned by writers of science fiction. Today, these are a reality.

The technology of the future will change our society as drastically as the automobile did seventy years ago. For another example, one can look at the workplace. Robots will do many of the industrial jobs currently performed by human workers. In fact, they are already doing so. "A robot at the Charles Stark Draper Laboratory at MIT takes less than three minutes to put together a seventeen-piece automobile alternator and tighten all its screws. A Japanese robot called King Kong picks up a hospital patient, puts him a bathtub and picks him back up again to return him to bed" (Cetron and O'Toole, 1982). In fact, we have now entered the time when robots can be used to make other robots. Other changes, perhaps more dramatic, are going to shape the future of our society.

We know that we cannot accurately predict the future any more than we can accurately predict the

Larry B. Harris is a doctoral candidate in curriculum at Kansas State University, Manhattan.

weather. However, we can decide the kind of future we desire, and then create this future. The schools can provide a very viable tool for creating this future. Hopefully those of us in the profession of education are anxious to see a society in the future that will be positive and nurturing of the generations yet to come. It is our contention that the process of multicultural education is an important element in the creation of this society. No longer is it possible to live our lives in an isolated situation in our little communities and microcultures. We are rapidly entering a "world society" in which the ability to understand and communicate with other people will be a critically important skill. This world society will make new demands on the schools. The entire globe will dictate the cultural aspects of the society. Students in the future must be prepared to function in the dominant culture, as well as within the various microcultures.

Toffler (1974) stated, "Just as all education springs from some image of the future, all education produces some image of the future.' Education has been a concern of a variety of futurists over the past few years. Toffler, Naisbitt (1982), Cetron and O'Toole, and Ferguson (1980) have provided many different explanations and scenarios for understanding the forces which are shaping our future. They have not ignored education in their discussions. Education must be prepared to be a part of the changes which are coming. It appears that all of these writers have spoken to changes not only within the structure of our society but also to the attitudinal changes which will result from the other changes.

Daniel Hade (1982) has suggested that in the future, if a student is to be functionally literate, he must be aurally literate, visually literate, and computer literate in addition to the basic skills of the industrial society—reading, writing, and mathematics. A person must also be multiculturally and multiethnically literate. One must be able to communicate and understand others. A major function of multicultural education is to prepare culturally literate citizens who are able to function equally in their own microculture, the macroculture, and other microcultures (Banks, 1981). It is essential that teachers prepare students to achieve this potential. To prepare students who are culturally literate, we must be concerned with helping students develop (1) a good self concept, (2) sensitivity and understanding toward others, (3) the ability to perceive and understand conflicting interpretations of events, values, and behaviors, (4) the ability to make decisions and take actions based on a multicultural analysis, (5) open minds when faced with issues, and (6) an understanding of the process of stereotyping, a low degree of stereotypical behavior, and respect for others (Gollnick and Chinn, 1983). Educators face a tremendous challenge in this area. We must learn to effectively use the cultural diversity brought to the classroom by students. This may entail a great many changes in the educational setting as we now know it.

Ferguson (1980) offers the following comparison between the assumptions of the old educational paradigm and the assumptions of the future educational paradigm:

OLD ASSUMPTIONS	FUTURE ASSUMPTIONS
Emphasis on content, acquiring a body of the right knowledge.	Emphasis on learning how to learn, how to ask good questions and evaluate new knowledge.
Learning as a product, a destination.	Learning as a process, a journey.
Hierarchial and authoritarian structure. Rewards conformity.	Egalitarian. Candor and dissent permitted. Students and teachers see each other as people, not roles.
Relatively rigid structure. prescribed curriculum.	Relatively flexible structure. Belief that there are many ways to teach and learn a subject.
Lockstep progress, emphasis on the appropriate ages for activities.	Flexibility and integration of age groups. Individual not automatically limited to certain subject matter by age.
Priority on performance.	Priority on self-image as the generator of performance.
Emphasis on external world. Inner experience often considered inappropriate in the school setting.	Inner experience seen as a context for learning.
Guessing and divergent thinking discouraged.	Guessing and divergent thinking encouraged as part of the creative process.
Emphasis on analytical, linear, left brain thinking	Strives for whole brain education.
Labeling (remedial, gifted, etc.) contributes to self-fulfilling prophecy.	Labeling used only in minor prescriptive role and not as fixed evaluation that follows the individual's educational career.
Concern with norms.	Concern with the individual's performance in terms of potential.
Primary reliance on theoretical, abstract book knowledge.	Theoretical and abstract knowledge heavily complemented by experiment and experience, both in and out of the classroom.
Classrooms designed for efficiency and convenience.	Concern for the environment of learning.
Bureaucratically determined resistant to community input.	Encourages community input, even community control.
Education seen as a social necessity for a certain period of time, to inculcate minimum skills and train for a specific role.	Education seen as a lifelong process, one only tangentially related to schools.
Increasing reliance on technology, dehumanization.	Appropriate technology, relationships between teacher and learner of primary importance.
Teacher imparts knowledge; one way street.	Teacher is a learner also, learning from student.

As can be seen from the above, there are many changes which will need to take place in the educational settings of the future. One of the most important concerns which must be addressed is how educators view students. We must become advocates for using a multicultural approach for educating all students. This can possibly be made easier if one teaches in a school which has a culturally diverse population. However, it must be done in the small, rural, majority-only schools. Multicultural education should permeate all curricula in all disciplines in all schools.

Gollnick and Chinn suggest four specific methods for incorporating multicultural education into the program within any school. First, they suggest that teachers examine all textbooks and other instructional materials to assess the amount of bias contained in these materials. Biases include invisibility of minority groups, stereotyping, selectivity, unreality, fragmentation, and language. They further suggest that the teacher may have to use other areas besides textbooks for incorporating multicultural education into the discipline. Bulletin boards can be constructed, films can be shown, persons from the community can be used as resource persons. Second, the curriculum of all schools should include areas such as ethnic studies, women's studies, bilingual education, human relations classes, and values clarification programs. It is important for teachers to know and understand the microcultures operating within the community. Teachers should examine current events from a variety of perspectives. Third, teacher behavior is also quite important in instilling a multicultural attitude in the classroom. Teachers can make a student feel worthwhile and competent or worthless and a failure. Teachers should be aware that they can transmit biases unknowingly to the students. It is im-

portant that teachers understand their own personal beliefs and values and attempt to overcome those which may have a detrimental effect on students. The fourth area concerns the total school climate. The entire school should make a strong commitment to overcoming the distrust and poor communications which often exist in many schools. The cultural diversity of the school population should be positively reflected in the atmosphere of the school. If the school is genuinely committed to a multicultural perspective, then the climate of the school will reflect this in every educational program.

The future of our society can be shaped and molded. We can create a variety of scenarios which will show society in the future as being either very positive or very negative. As educators, we are in a very powerful position to dictate how the future will look. In our classrooms we have the future of the world. It should be our overt intent to provide our students with the tools and the understandings for being open, caring, trusting persons. We need to guarantee that these persons will continue to build a society which can honestly speak to equality for all persons.

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