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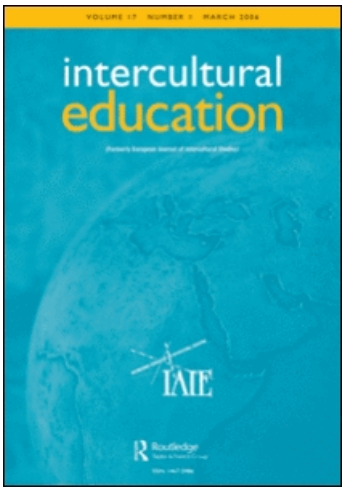

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The Leadership Role of School Administrators in Intercultural Education

PORTER L. TROUTMAN JR., ED. D. ZEHM
& STANLEY J. ZEHM

ABSTRACT *Implementation of effective school programs of intercultural education require the supportive leadership of school administrators. This article provides school administrators, especially those whose schools are being heavily impacted with the diversity resulting from immigration, with an action plan for providing culturally responsive learning experiences for all students. In addition to the four steps of this action plan, the article also provides examples and references to the literature to support school administrators in building more culturally sensitive learning communities.*

Communities throughout the world are experiencing the bewildering impacts and critical challenges of new waves of international immigration. Schools in these impacted communities face the crucial challenge of providing a culturally sensitive learning environment for all students, the native-born and children of immigrants. If this challenge is to be addressed adequately, school administrators must provide leadership in planning, implementing and evaluating culturally responsive curricula and learning environments aimed at meeting the learning needs of all students.

Additionally, school administrators must provide the leadership in building programs of faculty development that provide all teachers with the attitudes, skills and knowledge required to provide culturally sensitive instruction. The purpose of this article is to outline a plan of action that school administrators can adapt to address these crucial cultural diversity needs in their schools.

Action Plan for School Administrators

School administrators can demonstrate the leadership required to provide a culturally responsive curriculum in a culturally sensitive learning environment by adapting the following four key steps to fit their unique school communities:

1. promoting an understanding of the goals of intercultural education (ICE);
2. building an appreciation of the nature of ICE;
3. attending to all the dimensions of ICE; and
4. planning and implementing ICE in school programs.

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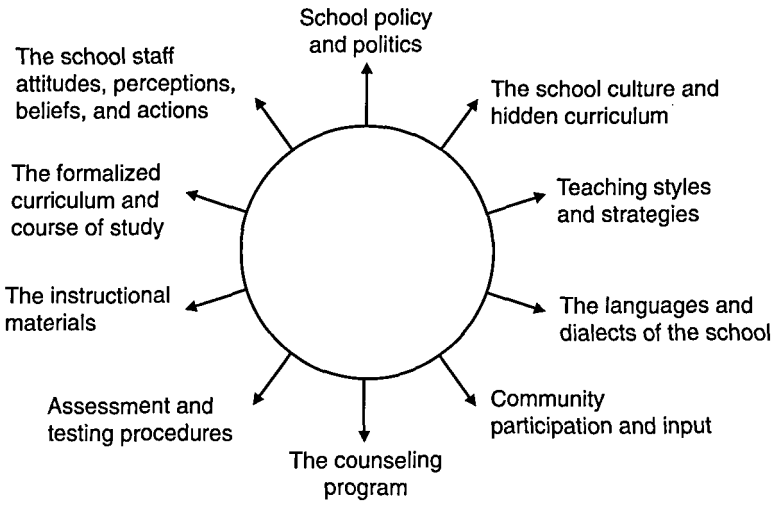

FIGURE. 1. Total school environment.

Step 1: Understanding the goals for intercultural education

Intercultural education is composed of at least three dimensions: (1) an idea or concept; (2) an educational reform movement; and (3) a process (Banks, 1994). Intercultural education incorporates the idea that all students, regardless of their gender, social class and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. Additionally, intercultural education is a reform movement that is trying to bring about change in schools and other educational institutions so that students from all social class, gender, racial and cultural groups will have an equal opportunity to learn. Intercultural education involves changes in the total school or educational environment; it is not limited to curricular changes (Banks & Banks, 1989).

The total school environment (Fig. 1) consists of variables and factors such as the school culture and hidden curriculum; school policy and politics; formalized curriculum, course of study, learning styles of the school; language and dialects, community participation and input, counseling programs, assessment and testing procedures, instructional materials, teaching styles and strategies; the school staffs' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and actions. Any of these factors may be the focus of initial school reform, but changes must take place in each of them to create and sustain an effective intercultural school environment (Banks, 1994).

Intercultural education is also a process whose goals will never be fully realized. Educational equality, like liberty and justice, are ideals toward which human beings strive but may never fully attain. Racism, sexism and discrimination against people with disabilities will exist to some extent no matter how hard we work to eliminate these problems. When prejudice and discrimination are reduced toward one group, they are usually directed toward another group or they take new forms. Because the goals of intercultural education can never be fully attained, we should work

continually to increase educational equality for all students (Banks & Banks, 1989). Intercultural education must be viewed as an ongoing process, and not as something that we "do" and thereby solve the problems that are the target of multicultural education reform.

Step 2: Building appreciation for the full meaning of intercultural education

If school administrators hope to be successful in providing the leadership necessary to make their schools more sensitive to the cultural diversities of all students, they must begin to build an appreciation of the full meaning of ICE among all their faculty and staff members. Intercultural education refers to various social, cultural and ethnic groups that exist within the macro culture (total culture). A major concern for advocates of intercultural education is equity and excellence for all members of these groups (Davidman & Davidman, 1997). Intercultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students (Nieto, 1996). It provides a challenge to racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society.

Educators who believe in ICE appreciate the fact that ICE accepts and affirms the cultural pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, ethnic, gender, exceptionalities) that students, their communities and their teachers represent. Intercultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is grounded on democratic values and belief, which seek to foster cultural pluralism within cultural diverse societies and an interdependent world. Intercultural education is both a concept and deliberate process designed to: teach learners to recognize, accept and appreciate cultural, ethnic, social class, religion and gender differences, and instill in learners during these crucial developmental years a sense of responsibility and a commitment to work toward the democratic ideals of justice, equality and democracy (Manning & Baruth, 1996).

Finally, intercultural education is a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social class and cultural groups (Banks & Banks, 1989). When school administrators embrace a clear definition of ICE such as the one cited above, that can lead their teachers to an understanding and appreciation of the nature and utility of ICE.

Step 3: Attending to all the dimensions of intercultural education

Intercultural education is a broad concept with several different and important dimensions. School administrators can utilize the five dimensions as a guide to implementing intercultural education. These dimensions of intercultural are highly interrelated but conceptually distinct. The dimensions are: (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1994). They provide school administrators with a framework for understanding and implementing intercultural education.

Most scholars in the field of ICE agree that, for it to be implemented successfully, institutional changes must be made in the curriculum, teaching materials, teaching and learning styles as well as the attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of the teachers and administrators; and in the goals, norms and cultures of the school (Banks, 1992; Sleeter & Grant, 1988). A number of administrators and teachers exhibit limited understanding of intercultural education. They view it as only curriculum reform that involves changing the curriculum to include content about ethnic groups. Other dimensions of intercultural education must be reviewed, understood, and included in schools in order to unlock the future of minority children.

Content Integration

Content integration concerns the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations and theories in their subject area or discipline (Banks & Banks, 1997). Administrators must understand that content integration is only one dimension of intercultural education. Content integration must go beyond subject matter. Administrators can encourage teachers to integrate the total curriculum with ethnic and cultural content.

The Knowledge Construction Process

The knowledge construction process consists of methods, activities and questions teachers use to help students understand, investigate and determine how cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspective and biases which influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed (Banks, 1994). Administrators should make sure teachers help students understand how knowledge is created and how it is influenced by racial, ethnic and social class position (Code, 1991; Fargains, 1986; Giroux, 1983; Habermas, 1971).

Administrators must allow and insist that teachers assist students to analyze critically all knowledge, since it represents one or more perspective. In the application of the knowledge construction process, the administrator must insist that the curriculum is designed to allow students to analyze all perspectives of various issues. Students should be able to formulate their own perspectives and develop higher-level skills and opinions about historical events and political and social issues.

Prejudice Reduction

The prejudice reduction dimension of intercultural education describes the characteristics of students' racial attitudes and strategies that can be used to help them develop more democratic attitudes and values (Banks, 1994). Administrators should focus on the four types of intervention studies that have been conducted to help children develop more democratic attitudes. These are: (1) reinforcement studies;

(2) perceptual differentiation studies; (3) curricular intervention studies; and (4) studies that use cooperative learning activities (Banks, 1994).

Katz & Zalk (1978) examined the effects of these four different interventions on the racial attitudes of second- and fifth-grade children. Each of these interventions was effective in reducing prejudice but the vicarious contact and perceptual differentiation treatments had the most impact. They determined that curriculum intervention should utilize multiethnic materials. Trager & Yarrow (1952), in an earlier study, found that first- and second-grade students who were exposed to a democratic, intercultural curriculum developed a more positive attitude than did students who experienced a traditional mainstream curriculum.

Research on cooperative learning by Slavin (1987) focused on the effects of cooperative learning on academic achievement and racial attitudes of students from different ethnic groups. Slavin's research was based on the work of Allport (1954). Allport suggested that prejudice would be reduced if interracial contact situations have the following attributes:

1. They are cooperative rather than competitive.
2. The individuals experience equal status.
3. The individuals have shared goals.
4. The contact is sanctioned by authorities such as parents, the principal and the teacher.

Step 4: Planning and implementing intercultural education

The implications for school administrators are far reaching. Administrators must take the lead in planning and implementing intercultural education approaches that promote positive student and teacher interactions and cooperative learning activities. Two ICE approaches that are being implemented by school administrators to support the culturally sensitive learning of all students are: (1) the preparation of an equity pedagogy, and (2) the development of an empowering school culture.

Implementing an Equity Pedagogy

An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic and gender groups (Banks & Banks, 1995). It has been found by researchers that students from low-income families differ from students from middle-income families in some motivational orientations (Lefcourt, 1976). Students from low-income families tend to be external in their motivational orientation, which means that they often attribute their successes or failures to outside forces or individuals rather than their own efforts. Students from middle-income families, however, tend to be more internal in their orientation. These orientational modes of motivation have important implications for teaching. School administrators must insure that teachers are modifying their teaching strategies to increase academic achievement of students form diverse social class, gender and cultural groups.

Where attention is not given by school administrators to providing equity for students from low-income families, academic status disorders result which create barriers to equal learning opportunities. Cooperative learning approaches based on the "Complex Instruction" theory of Elizabeth Cohen are currently being employed by schools in the United States, Israel and the European Union to address this obstacle to educational equity for students from low-income families (Cohen, 1994; Batelaan & Van Hoof, 1995). School administrators need to provide more leadership in helping teachers learn how to use cooperative learning strategies to reduce academic status disorders that prevent student from low-income, immigrant families from having equal access to educational opportunities and benefits.

Building an Empowering School Culture

School administrators are providing leadership in restructuring their schools to provide a supportive school culture which guarantees that students from diverse racial, ethnic and gender groups will experience equality in their school activities (Banks & Banks, 1995). To become effective leaders in this arena, administrators must examine the entire school staff to determine if equity is fostered in daily interactions with students. Bus drivers, janitors, clerical staff and all school personnel must be included in this examination. The school should be viewed as a social system containing both the formal and informal curriculum, teaching strategies, teaching materials, counseling programs and rules and regulations. The school is also a cultural system with a specific set of values and norms, ethos and shared meanings (Bullivant, 1987). Norms, ethos and shared meanings sometimes impede the educational equity of minority groups. School administrators must examine tracking and grouping practices, labeling practices, sports participation, ethnic turf, cafeteria and gifted programs (Oakes, 1985) so they may create a school culture which reflects concepts of equity.

Conclusion

The school administrator must assume a key leadership role in the planning and delivery of intercultural education to make education more accessible to international students. If school administrators utilize an action plan with elements contained in the four steps we have described above, we are confident they will find their school making genuine progress in implementing a more culturally responsive curriculum for all students.

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