



## **What Effect Does A Communities Attitudes/Values/And Beliefs Effect Student Behavior And Influence Curriculum**

Curriculum Unit 92.01.04  
by Kenneth B. Hilliard

### **Introduction**

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On May 17, 1954 by a unanimous decision the Supreme Court rendered a verdict on a case that would forever change the complexion of public education as we know it. The case *Brown v. Board of Education* (which was an appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Kansas) originally argued on December 9, 1952 then reargued on December 8, 1953 had finally come to an end. The case would spotlight a new Chief Justice Earl Warren, a very prominent up and coming attorney Thurgood Marshall, and New Haven native attorney Constance Baker Motley. In this case the plaintiffs, a group of negro children in the elementary schools of Topeka, sought to attend a previously segregated school within their own community. Their argument based upon the Fourteenth Amendment, with references to *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was only one of many cases appealed to the Supreme Court at this time pertaining to the issue of segregation. (The other cases on the court docket involved the states of South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware).

When all was said and done the Supreme Court ruled that separate school facilities for negroes and whites was unconstitutional. Once the smoke had lifted the Courts were faced with the issue of how to offer relief or remedy this situation. This of course lead to what is now known as *Brown II* reargued on April 11-14, 1955 with judgements rendered on May 31, 1955. Little did the Supreme Court know then that it was setting America up for decades of protest, violence, and death over the issue of segregation. (This issue is yet to be resolved today some thirty eight years after the initial ruling).

The battles would be fought in cities and towns all over this country involving men, women, and children, many of whom were too young to fully understand the fundamental principles involved, but still willing to go to jail or die for this cause.

The root of the problem, racism is a problem too enormous to discuss in this type of unit, but many of the issues involved are crucial to the development of the theme of this unit. Simply stated culture is one of the common threads that holds a race together.

Culture is present everywhere and in everything in our society. It has a direct effect on how our students behave because of the many different values that are taught at home, in the community, and in our schools. Culture is also a part of the assimilation process that each American citizen goes through. Lastly, it (culture)

very strongly effects the type of curriculum that is taught in our public schools. It is to these central issues that this unit is written.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this unit will be to explore how a communities attitudes, values, and beliefs effect student behavior and influence curriculum within a given school district. The topics to be explored include racism, attitudes, the court system, the U. S. Constitution, bilingual education, and school desegregation. All of these topics will be examined as factors which influence our students daily lives and have impacted the educational philosophy of every school district in the United States today.

My rational for discussing this material is to gain a deeper understanding of this program for myself, other educators, and my students at Roberto Clemente Middle School. It is anticipated that the acquired knowledge and the activities created can be used in any classroom in the New Haven Public Schools, to help bridge the gap between cultures and stimulate parental involvement and initiate cultural exchange programs in the classroom.

This unit can be taught in any discipline but is explicitly linked to the Social Problem Solving curriculum in grades six, and seven which examine the issues encompassing culture and seek to apply the principles to everyday life. This unit can be taught at any particular time during the school year.

### **Objectives Upon completion of this unit and its activities the learners will be able to;**

1. Define culture and the components that are synonymous with this term.
2. Discuss the differences in ethnicity of students that attend our school.
3. Examine how race relations effect the kinds and amount of educational resources individual schools receive within a school district.
4. Expand the role of parents in their own school.
5. Distinguish the term integration from desegregation.
6. Construct a model for understanding and appreciating multicultural education in public schools.
7. Comprehend the purpose of bilingual education and how it fits into today's public school setting.
8. Rediscover racism and realize that it still exists in our society and schools in many new ways and in many different areas.

This unit is divided into four different subtopics. I will begin this discussion with the root of many of the social injustices in our society today, racism.

## ***An Overview of Racism in America's Educational System***

Racism is a term that has become synonymous with American culture and its public educational system. It is simply <sup>1</sup> a way of classifying individuals, establishing a caste system, and providing a natural pecking order in our society. Racism can be measured and is very functional in our society. This concept is based on a few simple premises and has many stages of progression.

In its first stage <sup>2</sup> racism exists simply because cultural and racial differences exist. The need for expressions of cultural identity are innate and should be explored. In minority students their rights and ability to obtain a traditional education, a need for greater motivation, and a positive approach by educators is paramount. Education should be based upon an understanding of cultural and racial differences.

In its second state racism becomes <sup>3</sup> operational, meaning it is a direct result of an action that one individual exhibits towards another that results in a negative outcome. It is usually controlled by those of power in our society and it can be found everywhere (eg. schools, neighborhoods etc).

In its third stage racial attitudes exist simply because <sup>4</sup> most people have negative attitudes toward other racial and cultural groups. This type of behavior needs to be addressed and corrected at home, in our society, and especially in schools.

What is needed to change the tide of racism as it applies to American public education?

In our schools the differences between racial groups and their cultural heritage must be addressed. This issue can no longer be ignored by anyone. Our educational system should emphasize the positive aspects of each cultural group.

Expressions of racial and cultural identity are not only necessary but are also healthy for cultural and racial minorities in our society. With that in mind educators should design educational experiences based upon an understanding and respect for cultural and racial differences. This process must involve the total school community (teachers, staff, administrators, and parents) in order to be successful. This process will include research, planning, training, and a totally new nontraditional approach to education. It is these values upon which education must build on and move forward to try and resolve this bitter conflict. This process will take more than the educational system to complete, it will also require our entire society to come together, something that to this day has not happened. A problem of this magnitude is something that as individuals we cannot control but as groups we must gain control.

The next section will discuss the many issues associated with a groups attitudes, values, and beliefs, simply put its culture.

### ***Attitudes of Individuals and Groups***

Culture is defined as <sup>5</sup> a group of people whose members speak the same dialect and share common activities, values, and interests. Culture is different from but somewhat related to the concept of race. Racial characteristics are more biological in nature and relate more to social interactions and the lifestyle of a particular group of people. In general racial groups are usually very proud of their cultural identity and ethnic heritage. Ethnic heritage or pride influences how well our students assimilate and get along together in classrooms.

America's educational system has "forced" <sup>6</sup> all who attend to find new ways of existing and coexisting cooperatively. In spite of the various tribal, racial, ethnic, religious, and national divisions in our society, it is up to educators to address all of these issues in their classroom on a daily basis.

Whether people want to admit it or not cultural and racial differences do exist. To be more specific cultural differences among classes of people within the same racial group exists. Hatred and bigotry still exist despite legal constraints and growing public outcry. The fight to achieve racial equality is the same, the area and the number of people involved has just grown larger.

Another interesting aspect of American culture is the way in which people are ascribed status in our society. People in America <sup>7</sup> are not judged by their class, money, or education but are ascribed status determined by race, color, religion, and national origin. For some members of minority groups, status is not measured by their level of education, or monetary possessions but rather by the color of their skin or their nation of origin.

Americans all of whom arrived here from foreign lands (except for the Native Americans) have always had an uncanny way of alienating the newest members of our society who did not fit in with what is considered by many as the "mainstream culture."

This entire process began many years ago with the alienation of the Native Americans and has continued in some form for over five hundred years with the exclusion of Catholics, Jews, Irish, Italians, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and others in its path. What has happened for some racial groups is that the gap between the races has widen leading to tension and discord. In order for all races to survive and get along, a mutual respect and acceptance of differences between and among people must be achieved. <sup>8</sup> This vision can only be achieved when what ethnic groups hold in common outweighs what keeps them apart.

America <sup>9</sup> the melting pot is visualized as a giant vat into which all varieties of people are poured into as they arrive, all intended to come out the other end as the same. However, some of the ethnic values of individuals are unmeltable. Others tend to bend but seldom do they break. In general this vision is sometimes very unrealist to many Americans.

The next issue that needs to be addressed is what really makes up an American?

An American is the result of the mixing and blending of different cultures within our society. This includes the survival of their own biological and cultural heritage along with the amount of time and elements that have gone into the melting process. This process includes the "American experience", which is <sup>10</sup> the effects of coming up generation after generation in a new and ever changing culture. This process happens to all who come to America and seek permanent status. In some cultures it occurs more swiftly than others. For blacks who have throughout history been at the bottom of society, it has taken a much longer time. Blacks became biologically and culturally removed from their African roots and only recently (within the last twenty to twenty-five years) have come into contact with descendants of their African heritage.

They became Afro-Americans, different from Americans but similar to the discovery made by Italians (Italian-Americans), and others. The feelings associated with this inferiority status is shamefully leading to a new measure of pride and realism. This is how Americans are made.

The problem with this new "American" identity is that it does not meet the deepest needs of the people. There is a need today for ethnic groups to connect with their ancestors and immerse themselves in their own culture. This is one of the keys to making life better in America.

It is possible for ethnic groups to organize a core of activities for their life (determined by racial, religious, and other cultural factors) within their own private domain.

Private domains exist in our society except we know them by different titles. Churches, social clubs, and other organizations have existed in our society for long periods of time without too much public objection.

Ethnic separation (of races) is still apparent today by many different groups. Many blacks are a part of a “back to Africa” movement or other types of separatist activities. Hispanics seek a separate state, Puerto Ricans want independence from America, and Native Americans are fighting for the land that has been taken from them throughout American history.

Some groups like the Amish have accomplished this goal. Most groups want to maintain their ancestral identities within the American system. Some however do want a separate state and seek public support for their separateness. <sup>11</sup> They want their separateness to be incorporated into the legal and political structure, to have them become part of the public domain.

Given all of these factors it is easy to see why so many parent and community groups (on behalf of students) fight so hard to preserve their cultural identity and protect their constitutional rights. It is therefore not uncommon for differences in values and goals of education to occur. When this does happen and a legal interpretation is needed, the United States Judicial system is usually called upon.

Many times the parties involved (in the case) may not be satisfied with the initial ruling rendered by a lower court. They often choose to appeal that decision and seek out a higher court for a ruling. Often the final decision may rest with the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court usually renders decisions based upon its interpretation of the Constitution. On occasion other factors could come into the picture.

These factors could include:

- a. the prevailing values and political climate of the community in which the initial ruling was made,
- b. the mood of the country and the court at the time of the decision and,
- c. the impact of lobbying by special interest groups.

At this time it may be beneficial to examine some of the values of the court system that apply to public education.

### ***Values, Courts, Constitution, and Public Education***

The courts have had the responsibility of interpreting the laws in our society. Most people know that things are unjust but, they alone do not have the authority to correct these issues.

Courts can express the basic social values in society and have done so throughout American history. Courts

normally interpret the laws that politicians and society mandate.

Laws <sup>12</sup> traditionally determine wrongs and require that they be righted. Desegregation is a constitutional principle in this country. Harmony among groups is paramount in public education, therefore pursuing mixed schools is a value, and one significant enough to commit to daily by political activity and community participation. But, unfortunately this issue is not a constitutional value.

Schools are desegregated but our cities and suburbs are not. When people live together homogeneously the need for heterogeneous schools will diminish.

Education must be deemed relevant and fundamental. It is a way of civilizing, and socializing people in our society. It is an experience that is commonly shared by all. When this commitment falls short the federal government takes over. This leads to what is commonly called "Constitutional Adequate Education."

This principle came into effect with the enactment of <sup>13</sup> The Elementary and Secondary Education Act. When passed in 1965 it provided additional funds for education which took a burden off the state and local governments. Since then state and federal governments have assumed more authority over public education. Unfortunately, Washington cannot prescribe textbooks and curricula, but it does reinforce professional views about the appropriate means to do things. It also underwrites several specific services (hot breakfast, lunch, vocational training, bilingual education and more). By accepting the money local school systems prescribe to spend it on appropriate materials.

Today many new rulings are brought before the Supreme Court by two main groups, the handicapped, and those who do not speak english. They are (both) beginning to make up a new minority group.

Individuals on the other hand seek the Constitution at different times throughout their lives. Public education is inherently communal, it depends on the teacher, supplies, but most importantly the children's ability to share their space with one another.

Children learn from one another. American society is based on neighborhoods, which are regulated by economic and racial constraints. Thus a child's education is greatly influenced by the <sup>14</sup> interaction of parental choice of neighborhood with the simultaneous choice of thousands of others, all bounded by income, housing cost, policies of lending, and institutional and racial discrimination.

Education impacts children who have not chosen their circumstances in life, and its availability under satisfactory arrangements is essential to our intellectual structure for justifying other social arrangements.

My final section will discuss some of the obstacles that bilingual education and school desegregation have encountered in our society.

### ***Bilingual Education vs School Desegregation***

Bilingual education is viewed by some hispanic parents as the means to overcome discrimination against hispanics, while desegregation is viewed as the way for blacks to achieve equality. At times desegregation is viewed as a hindrance to hispanic goals.

Some hispanic communities fear integration will destroy bilingual programs and dissipate hispanic influence, in some cases they prefer segregation. This could possibly be viewed as a black and white issue with hispanics getting lost in the shuffle, losing their objectives.

The foundation for this belief in hispanics is that bilingual education is in conflict with school desegregation based upon many court decisions.

First of all the right to have bilingual education is a distinct right derived from statutes, regulations and case law. <sup>15</sup> Plans for bilingual education as a right must be developed in conjunction with desegregation plans. Bilingual education is not subordinate to desegregation, they must exist together. The major statutory source of rights to bilingual education are in <sup>16</sup> Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and states “each limited-English-speaking student is entitled to an education program in a language he or she understands taught by a teacher who is competent in that language.”

Society should reach a compromise between the approach to equal educational opportunity for bilingual and desegregation programs, everything else leads to tension and irreconcilable conflict.

The principles seem to work against each other with desegregation seeming to break up or disperse students in order to achieve racial harmony, while <sup>17</sup> bilingual education seeks to cluster students of similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds together in order to achieve the fundamental objectives of this program.

Serious problems arise when children who need bilingual programs are arbitrarily dispersed without any consideration. When the numbers of students are low, random dispersing cannot ensure adequate bilingual education. Needless to say there is also a shortage of qualified bilingual education staff.

In the Morgan v. Kerrigan case the court sought to <sup>18</sup> resolve the tension between bilingual education and desegregation by attempting to accommodate both interest in its pupil-reassignment plan. This was based upon the percentage of minority and nonminority students enrolled in each school.

The Tenth Circuit’s ruled in Keyes that <sup>19</sup> retention of entirely segregated schools cannot be justified in the name of bilingual education. These schools need not pose a threat to ethnically identifiable bilingual classrooms in otherwise desegregated settings.

School districts need to identify students who are actually in need of bilingual instruction. Then, programs can be designed for them or reassignments can be made to facilitate desegregation. Schools with a high concentration of bilingual students need not run segregated bilingual programs.

In <sup>20</sup> 1974 the Supreme Court implied in Lau v. Nichols that in certain limited circumstances separate classes for bilingual education may be appropriate.

Still many districts have effectively integrated their bilingual classes while maintaining the educational components essential to a high-quality program.

There is no apparent conflict between the outcomes of bilingual education and desegregation. However, bilingual education programs may suffer at the remedial state of the black and white desegregation cases when <sup>21</sup> the constituent of the program are not before the court to make their interest known. Parents must become active in the process of litigation in order to win or pressure these cases in courts.

## *Conclusion*

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Culture is a normal yet important aspect of life within a community. Attitudes, values, and beliefs are shaped and influenced by many external forces. Throughout many generations these ideas are fine tuned to fit the esthetic philosophy of a community.

Numerous parades, festivals, and other social events are planned and held annually within a community. People young and old come to know these events and look forward to their occurrence each year (like seasons).

If all these statements are true, then why is it so difficult to effectively involve culture in the planning of a school curriculum?

Educators must consider the ethnic background of the students who attend the school in which they teach. Educators should consider these factors in planning activities (social or otherwise) for students, for school assemblies, and other school functions.

If the community is composed of a mosaic of cultures, then a multicultural approach to education should be adopted.

Teachers must also be sensitive to the needs of the community.

When issues involving elements of culture occur within a community, teachers must be at the forefront of these activities to provide leadership and compassion for their students.

Finally, parents are an important aspect of the school community. They represent a link to the past for our students. Parents (or elders) have traditionally been the keepers and passers of culture within a society. Often, parents can be used as a valuable resource to aid in the instructional process. Many times parents can provide educators with much needed information and insight into the various customs and rituals that a particular ethnic groups observes.

Educators can no longer afford to neglect this valuable resource.

It is extremely important that educators stay abreast of the numerous court decisions that occur almost daily that effect education. Within the last ten years there has been a variety of rulings regarding the rights of students, teachers, and parents, along with new legislation that effects the students involved in bilingual and special education programs.

Successful teaching in the nineties must take into account many different issues. Educators who are knowledgeable in their field and are sensitive to the needs of their students and community will continue to achieve a great amount of success in the ever changing world of education.



## Notes

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1. Sedlacek, W. *Racism in American Education: A Model For Change* . p.5.
2. Ibid., p.3.
3. Ibid., p.6.
4. Ibid., p.7.
5. Ibid., p.11.
6. Yarmolinsky, A. *Race And Schooling In The City* . p.107.
7. Ibid., p.115.
8. Ibid., p.116.
9. Ibid., p.117.
10. Ibid., p.118.
11. Ibid., p.120.
12. Ibid., p.122.
13. Ibid., p.257.
14. Ibid., p.265.
15. Ibid., p.218.
16. Ibid., p.220.
17. Ibid., p.222.
18. Ibid., p.223.
19. Ibid., p.223.
20. Ibid., p.224.
21. Ibid., p.225-226.

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## ***Student Activity I.***

*Cultural Share Day/week*

***Procedure About two weeks before the start of this activity students will be given instructions on what is to occur.***

The students are to either bring in to class or design an example of an artifact that is germane to their culture. This artifact could be an example of song, dance, art, clothing, literature, or any other aspect of life in their culture.

The students should prepare an oral presentation to accompany their example. Students who choose not to participate in the share part of the project are still required to complete a written report or a visual presentation.

The subject matter can be adjusted to fit the ethnic heritage of students in your class. Class presentation guidelines should also be discussed prior to this activity.

If there are more students than time will allow for in one period, then the activity could carryover into the next day(s). This will be determined before the start of the presentations.

***Evaluation The oral presentations along with any written material will be used in determining the grade. For those students who only present written material their grade will be based on that aspect only.***

## ***Student Activity II***

*Role Playing: Values/ Race*

*Background/Procedure*

***Values This activity has the potential to be the most challenging for students. During this activity students will be asked to role play a situation that is much different from their own background.***

Students will be divided into groups and will be able to:

choose their own topic,

write their own script, and

produce original skits for presentation.

Prior discussion should have taken place concerning rules and guidelines along with suggested topics to be explored. These suggestions should be written down by students in their notebooks or journals.

Some suggested topics could be:

moral issues including human sexuality, drug/alcohol abuse, AIDS, teenage pregnancy or others,

social issues such as education, rights of students/parent/teachers or others or,

any other previously discussed and approved topic.

All students in the group should be assigned a part in the role play.

The role plays will be presented and graded according to content and presentation.

After their presentation a discussion could follow to debrief what had just transpired.

***Race For this activity the students will be asked to role play a situation involving the issue of race.***

For example students of one ethnic background could assume the role of a member of another ethnic (minority) group member to understand the depth of the problems that some students face in their daily lives.

Some possible suggestion could be:

have non-hispanic students role play situations in which language could present a barrier in communication.

This situation could represent a problem from home, from the community, or from the school.

Another possible situation could be to have non-black students role play a problem concerning racial attitudes or race discrimination. This situation could be an example of a situation encountered in daily life or a problem created just for instructional purposes.

Another variation could be to have a non-Asian student assume the role of an Asian student in American public schools. By assuming this role students may better understand the difficulty that this minority group encounters in our society.

It is anticipated that the situations presented are resolved by the performers (if possible).

***Goal The goal of this activity would be to make students sensitive to the issues surrounding race in the hopes that they are better able to understand the over all concepts involved.***

### ***Evaluation***

As mentioned previously grades will be determined by the quality of the presentation. It may be helpful once again to debrief this situation for instructional purposes.

As a variation to this situation role plays could also be created involving attitudes or values involving gender. However, this activity should only be attempted with mature and capable classes.

### ***Student Activity III***

#### *Parent Information Day*

#### *Background*

The goal of this activity will be to get parents into their child's classroom.

***Procedure One of the ways to get parents involved in their child's education is to have a parent information day.***

Parents will be invited into the classroom to view some of the activities and projects that the students have been working on in this unit. These activities include:

role playing  
oral presentations  
written presentations  
visual presentations and  
any other student activity

Prior to this activity notices would be sent home to invite parents into class on a specific day and time. Parents would be able to see some of the activities that have taken place in the social development class. The activities presented for parents should all center around the topic of culture.

As a suggestion this activity could be presented after the previous activities as a showcase of some of the better projects that have been presented during this unit.

For variety the school auditorium or other suitable room could be used for presentations.

***Evaluation Since the goal of this activity is to get parents into the classroom, a good measuring device would be the number of parents that are able to attend. As a follow up to this activity a parent newsletter could be sent to those parents that were unable to attend this presentation with the hope that the next time this activity occurs they may be able to attend (schedule permitting).***

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