

Goal: Inclusive Society

NATIONAL CONVERSATION

It is important to get our subject set properly (elaborate)

- not a subject that belongs first to civil rights
- not a subject that belongs first to religion (openness to others)
- BUT A SUBJECT THAT BELONGS FIRST TO EDUCATION.....

MULTI-CULTURAL LITERACY -- written in response to recent proposals that have gotten particularly wide appraisal and discussion.....

The first one: E. D. HIRSCH, JR.

In 1983, wrote an essay called "Culture and Literacy," first appeared in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.....

real enemy in Hirsch's appraisal: JOHN DEWEY....

Why Dewey? -- because Dewey proposed an education that was value neutral....

Dewey was more interested in process than in content of what was being learned...

point: if you could develop the learner's learning skills, the learner will learn things which need not be specified by the instructor...

HIRSCH IS OPPOSED TO DEWEY --

Hirsch's point: education involves ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ acquiring the shared information that enables one to participate in the community.....

Education = a means of access to community-understanding...
= a means of access to how the community understands itself, how it conducts its affairs, how it goes about its life...

SO, THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION IS OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE....
and not simply the Process.....

Hirsch's objective: to identify what the appropriate content should be....

Now, to get a sense of the challenge, think of how you would proceed if you were completely outcomes oriented.....

that is, if you were motivated by what you wanted students to become at the end of the educational process...

-- not just what profession they might be prepared for

-- not just how they would make decisions about what they wanted to become, what they wanted to do, and the like...

-- but WHAT THEY SHOULD KNOW...THE KNOWLEDGE THEY SHOULD HAVE IN THEIR POSSESSION....

THEN, THINK ABOUT HOW YOU WOULD GET TO THIS PLACE...WITH THIS SET OF OBJECTIVES....

Well, Hirsch continued working after the article was published, and in 1987 published his book, CULTURAL LITERACY, which has passed through many ~~editions~~ editions...

WHERE HE SAID:

"To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world.

"Literacy is far more than a skill; it requires large amounts of specific information."

PEOPLE CANNOT FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE SOCIETY UNLESS THEY POSSESS THE BASIC INFORMATION.....

So, Hirsch's goal became NATIONAL LITERACY....

to bring the entire nation up to certain standards of cultural literacy...so that no one would be left out, so that everyone could participate....

AND HE MADE A NETWORK OF PROPOSALS THAT SAID: THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE A FULL PARTICIPANT IN THE SOCIETY.....

Of course, there is a lot of CRITICISM in Hirsch's proposals...

He is upset by the fact that ~~people~~ too many people do not know how to read and write...

He is upset by the fact that people watch television for hours, but very few actually read a book

He is concerned that AMERICANS don't know things we really ought to know....

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And when people really don't know things, then they can't really or fully participate in the decision-making processes of the society.....

SO, HE SET A KIND OF ROUGH STANDARD: the goal is to bring everyone in the society up to the level of being able to comprehend the stories on the front page of THE NEW YORK TIMES....

(pause)

Note that he is talking about CULTURAL LITERACY...and not only about INDIVIDUAL LITERACY...

His objective is to raise the standards of literacy of the entire nation...and not simply of this or that individual (to get a high S.A.T. or G.R.E. score)

BECAUSE HE IS INTERESTED IN COMMUNICATION....IN THE DEPTH OF COMMUNICATION THAT OCCURS WITHIN THE SOCIETY...

And he adds: that no one can really participate in the workings of the society unless he or she possesses sufficient knowledge to participate.....

SO, THE GOAL IS TO TEACH CONTENT....

Now, as we review this proposal, we are conscious of the fact that it has been criticized severely by the people who believe in MULTI-CULTURAL LITERACY....

So, let's ask: what does Hirsch say about the multi-cultural phenomenon in our society?

How would he approach this?

ANSWER: First, he believes that English should be the language of the nation.... ENGLISH IS THE LANGUAGE OF PARTICIPATION... IF YOU DON'T KNOW ENGLISH, IT IS DIFFICULT TO PARTICIPATE...

(2) Second. when children are educated, they should enter "neither a narrow tribal culture nor a transcendent world culture... but a national literate culture."

Note: there is a program on our campus to INCREASE RACIAL AWARENESS...

Hirsch would go the other way: DECREASE RACIAL AWARENESS...

nationalize the people.... find ways that all can participate in a NATIONAL LITERATE CULTURE

Jose Garcia

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multi-cultural reality
- NY TIMES

In sum, Hirsch believes in a STANDARD LANGUAGE....
and a national culture....

Well, what about the multi-cultural reality? one might ask him.

His response: He knows why educators sometimes stress the virtues of multicultural education. "Such study is indeed valuable in itself; it inculcates tolerance and provides a perspective on our own traditions and values. But however laudable it is, it should not be the primary focus of national education. It should not get in the way of our school's responsibility to insure our students' mastery of American literate culture."

FURTHERMORE,

"National literate culture is democratic culture...the most democratic culture in our land. It excludes nobody. It cuts across generations and social groups and classes."
"IT IS USUALLY NOT ONE'S FIRST CULTURE, BUT IT SHOULD BE EVERYONE'S SECOND CULTURE --- BEYOND THE NARROW SPHERES OF FAMILY, NEIGHBORHOOD, AND REGION."

Hirsch notes that people tend to use the hyphen to describe who they are: he calls it "the hyphenated American"
Italian-American, Polish-American, Afro-American, Mexican-American, Asian-American, Euro-American, and the like...

Hirsch's observation: "The worlds of the private, the familial, and the group are where most of us live... And this life is protected by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights... These special and local and regional differentiations must be protected. BUT THE WORD AFTER THE HYPHEN IS THE SAME IN ALL OF THESE INSTANCES, and IT IS UP TO US TO DECIDE WHAT IT MEANS FOR ALL OF US.... Then, it follows, that education is the primary means to instill and insure this COHERENCE.....

What Hirsch wishes to teach: "the vocabulary of our national discourse.....

In sum, should the schools teach diversity?

No, the schools should honor diversity, but teach the contents of coherence....

Hirsch does not see this as being racist: rather he understands it to be thoroughly democratic...

everyone is on the same footing...

He recognizes that some groups "have farther to climb," but he believes that the chief determinant of educational success is the amount of time the student spends studying...

ANOTHER BOOK, similar in tone & feeling to Hirsch's...

book by Allan Bloom, THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND, published
in 1987...

question too: what does it mean to be educated?

what should take place during the four/five years
a student is in college?

"What image does a first-rank college or university present today to a teen-ager leaving home for the first time, off to the adventure of a liberal education? He has four years of freedom to discover himself -- a space between the intellectual wasteland he has left behind and the inevitable dreary professional training that awaits him after the baccalaureate. In this short time he must learn that there is a great world beyond the little one he knows, experience the exhilaration of it and digest enough of it to sustain himself in the intellectual deserts he is destined to traverse. He must do this, that is, if he is to have any hope of a higher life. ... The importance of these years for an American cannot be overestimated. They are civilization's only chance to get to him."

Bloom's answer: humane learning -- immersion in the GREAT BOOKS...
along the way, many assertions:

- (1) not everything to be learned is of equal value
 - some things are less important
 - no real "democracy of the disciplines" -- such democracy is really CHAOS..
 - smorgasbord education is not very worthwhile..a little of this, and a little of that.. INSTEAD of smorgasbord, Bloom wants SUBSTANCE...and FUNDAMENTALS.....
 - Black Studies, Womens Studies, Gender Studies, Peace Studies, as well as "LEARN-ANOTHER-CULTURE" studies are just "fancy packaging..." but it is really a CHEAPENING OF EDUCATION....

He says that in the 60s people were talking about OPENNESS.

In the 80s (and 90s) people are championing not Openness, but BREADTH..

Consequently, students know a bit about this and that, but not very much of it in depth...and not very much of it as a field of specialization.... no experts any longer....but dabblers...

The solution: here's Bloom:

Bloom continued

"Of course, the only serious solution is the one that is almost universally rejected: the good old Great Books approach, in which a liberal education means reading certain generally recognized classic texts, just reading them, letting them dictate what the questions are and the method of approaching them -- not forcing them into categories we make up, not treating them as historical products, but trying to read them as their authors wished them to be read."

Further:

"Liberal education flourished when it prepared the way for the discussion of a unified view of nature and man's place in it."which

WHAT WE HAVE TODAY INSTEAD: piecemeal education....

this and that from here and there... no coherence...

no overarching plan....

MULTI-CULTURAL LITERACY's response to both Hirsch and Bloom:

- (1) agree that education is in trouble, and that something needs to be done.
- (2) disagree with Hirsch's and Bloom's proposals...or the direction in which they point...
- (3) main problem: Hirsch and Bloom describe culture in very narrow and even parochial terms.

sort of starts in Greece, moves over to Rome, comes to full expression in Europe, then is transferred across the Atlantic Ocean to America...

The irony: Hirsch and Bloom want to give this intellectual tradition more attention.... Simonson & Walker say that this very cultural tradition has lost its energy.... it isn't large or expansive enough to do the appropriate cultural work today....

WHAT HIRSCH & BLOOM OVERLOOK, according to Simonson & Walker:

- (1) that there are repressed cultures, and not simply other cultures
(explain -- not just a matter of mathematics.. but there is a powerful relationship operating between dominant culture and repressed culture)
- (2) that we are now aware of the fact that history has been rewritten and molded to the vision of the majority population...
Hirsch & Bloom account forgets or discounts that the majority population has an AGENDA...otherwise it wouldn't be majority.
- (3) Hirsch outlines what people in today's world need to know...but we actually need to know much more...
(note, in the back of the book there is a list of essentials)
- (4) the Hirsch model doesn't describe the way it is....
that there can be a single national literate culture...

RATHER, WHAT IS HAPPENING IS THAT MINORITY POPULATIONS ARE FINDING WAYS TO SUCCEED WITHIN THE MAINSTREAM CULTURE WHILE PRESERVING THEIR OWN LANGUAGES AND CULTURE...

All this talk about a national literate culture...
is out of step with reality...

THE REAL NEED is to know about other cultures....

because currently one in four Americans represents
a cultural heritage that is not majority...

and cannot be equated with national literate culture...

Furthermore, in the world today, cultures are encountering
each other.... no longer distant from each other...

so, it is necessary to know the cultures of the world...

CHARGE: The people of the United States are profoundly
ignorant of world literatures, histories, mythologies,
and politics

Baldwin —

TALK TO
TEA OFFERS

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