

A National Multicultural Education Program

AMERICANS ALL

An Evaluation of

Results of an Evaluation of Program Effects
in Washington, D.C.

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The changing demography of American classrooms is prompting a nationwide movement to restructure school syllabi to reflect society's growing ethnic diversity. The likely dimensions of this change are already discernible in the ethnic profiles of the five states with the largest populations under 18 years of age—California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas. Together they account for 35 percent of the nation's child population. Presently, 43 percent of the children of these states do not have European ethnic origins. Rather, they are: Hispanic (24%), African (14%), and Asian (5%). By the year 2000, children of these diverse ethnic origins will become the majority of students in these five states. This pattern could well become characteristic of the entire nation toward the middle of the twenty-first century if current demographic trends continue.

To prepare students to function in a multicultural society, educators have begun to diversify school syllabi to acquaint students with the history of minority and diverse ethnic and racial groups whose experiences have hitherto been neglected or omitted from classroom curricula. Although many people welcome the diversification of curricula as enriching students' cultural identities, self-concepts, and multicultural awareness, others warn that the assumptions and goals of the current reforms risk undermining some essential foundations of American solidarity. Certain commentators caution that by schools' celebrating and strengthening children's sense of ethnic origins and identities, society runs the danger of encouraging social divisiveness at the expense of national unity (Ravitch 1990, Schelsinger 1991).

Progress toward settling such issues has been hampered by a lack of empirical studies of programs of multicultural education. Although many of the arguments in favor of a more diversified curriculum have been around for several decades, some of its key claims, such as improved

Americans All reflects each of the above approaches in varying degrees, but its primary emphasis is on fostering cultural pluralism by teaching the history of both voluntary immigration to the United States and the involuntary incorporation of various ethnic and racial groups through colonization, enslavement, or territorial annexation. The program is intended to augment the standard social studies curricula for kindergarten through the twelfth grade. It utilizes materials

Steeter and Grant (1987) identified five distinct approaches to multicultural education which emerge from the literature: (1) "to assimilate minority students into the cultural mainstream and existing social structures by offering transitional bridges within the existing school program"; (2) "to help students of different backgrounds get along better and appreciate each other"; (3) "to foster cultural pluralism by teaching courses about the experiences, contributions, and concerns of distinct ethnic, gender, and social class groups"; (4) "to promote cultural pluralism and social equality by reforming the school program for all students to make it reflect diversity"; and (5) "to prepare students to challenge social structural inequality and to promote cultural diversity."

Background

To advance our understanding of these issues, it is important to conduct careful evaluations of programs of multicultural education and assess their effects on students and consequences for their education. This article reports findings from a study of the implementation of one such multicultural education program, Americans All, which was field-tested in the Washington D.C. public school system in 1991.

Similarly, the concern that multicultural education undermines national identification and promotes separatism remains only speculative at best.

ing student self-esteem and strengthening scholastic interest, still must await research verification.

from the Images of Ellis Island curriculum which commemorates the American immigrant experience and the historic importance of Ellis and Angel Islands. It supplements these materials

with essays on the particular experiences of African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Puerto Ricans. Teachers are trained in

a two-day workshop in the use of these products and in methods of appreciative learning to promote four general goals: (1) enriching children's cultural identities, (2) enlarging their multicultural awareness, (3) enhancing self-esteem, and (4) fostering critical thinking skills.

A core value of Americans All and other multicultural programs is cultural pluralism. The following two statements are indicative of this orientation. The first comes from the Introduction to the Americans All's teachers guide and second from the National Coalition for Cultural Pluralism:

The world in general and American society in particular are made up of many different groups of people with a variety of familial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Working cooperatively and effectively within communities is easier when people appreciate and value these multiple cultures and human experiences. Developing multicultural awareness increases one's sense of security or belonging, provides opportunities for expression and communication, and enhances one's sense of personal empowerment and freedom (Christopher and Sreb 1989, p.1-1).

Cultural pluralism is a state of equal co-existence in a mutually supportive relationship within the boundaries or framework of one nation of people of diverse cultures, with significantly different patterns of belief, behavior, color, and in many cases with different languages. To achieve cultural pluralism, there must be unity within diversity. Each person must be aware of and secure in his own identity, and be willing to extend to others the same respect and rights that he expects to enjoy himself (quoted in Suzuki 1979, p. 45).

Implicit in the above statements are a set of propositions that provide the rationale for Americans All and similar multicultural programs: (1) increasing students' awareness and appreciation of their own *cultural identity* and origins, (2) fashioning a basis for increasing their *multi-*

Acknowledging the potential limitations or unintended consequences of multicultural education programs does not argue for their abandonment. What is required in light of the current controversies, rather, is careful research into the anticipated goals of multicultural programs and a rigorous accounting of their actual effects on children. Findings from such research should not

culture, even those that are exploitive or oppressive (Suzuki 1979, Bloom 1987). promotion of a cultural relativism that can lead to an uncritical acceptance of all aspects of every student self-esteem. Likewise, there is no guarantee that multicultural education will automatically foster critical thinking skills. In fact, many are worried about the opposite occurring: the This research calls into question both the need for and capacity of multicultural programs to raise slightly better than the self-esteem of majority white children (Bachman and O'Malley 1984). 1989). But recent research shows that the self-esteem of minority children is no worse or even esteem by neutralizing the impact of negative stereotypes (Ransney 1982, Crocker and Major some social psychological theories imply that multicultural education can improve student self- and religious divisiveness as promote pluralistic appreciation (Schlesinger 1991). Similarly, ening children's cultural identities and origins schools could just as likely reinforce ethnic, racial, ethnocentric attitudes (Project REACH 1990). Still, it is feared that by celebrating and strength- that multicultural programs can simultaneously improve ethnic self-awareness and decrease ing degrees, much skepticism about their validity still remains. For example, some studies show While there is scattered research around to support each of the above propositions to vary-

communication and development of *critical thinking* skills.
promote mutual regard and positive *self-esteem*, and, (4) expand the opportunities for
cultural awareness and respect for different cultural identities and origins, which (3) help to

The subjects of this study are students attending grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 in Washington, D.C. public schools. In 1991, the principals of 23 school volunteered their institution's participation in the research. A total of 39 program classrooms and 39 control classroom out of an original 102 were deemed eligible for random assignment to the program or to a waiting list for participation in the next academic year. Classrooms on the waiting list constituted the control group.

Subjects

Method

In the next section, I shall discuss the methods used in this study to evaluate the implementation of the Americans All program in the Washington, D.C. school system. The original design called for the random assignment of classrooms within schools to the Americans All programs or to a one-year waiting list (control group). Two-rounds of identical instruments were administered to students in the program and control groups. All students were asked to complete a brief, self-report measure designed to assess self esteem in children and adolescents. In addition, students in grades eight and eleven were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to measure scholastic interest, educational aspirations, perception of school climate, attitudes toward cultural pluralism, and their estimation of the contributions of different ethnic groups to American history. The primary hypothesis of this study is that children in the Americans All program will exhibit significant differences relative to a control group in self-esteem measures, ratings of minority ethnic groups' contributions to American history, and acceptance of cultural pluralism.

A total of 10 program classrooms (206 students) and 10 control classrooms (180 students)

ultimately elected to participate in the research by completing pretest instruments. Unfortu-

nately, attrition from the study was high. Posttest instruments were completed by 7 program

classrooms but only 3 control classrooms. Refusals by some students to provide identifying

information limited the matching of pretest and posttest instruments, which further reduced the

final sample size to 81 students in the program group and 69 students in the control group.

Although the study was originally designed to achieve equivalence between the program

and control groups through random assignment of classrooms, the heavy attrition of participants

makes it untenable to assume that the groups remain statistically equivalent. Therefore, my anal-

ysis assumes a nonequivalent control group design (Cook and Campbell 1979) and employs mul-

tiple regression (analysis of covariance) to adjust for pre-existing differences. While this

fall-back option complicates the conclusions one feels confident in drawing about the

effectiveness of the Americans All program, the fact that pretest and posttest observations are

available for both program and control groups does permit some reasonable interpretations of

results to be made.

Variables and Instruments

Self-Esteem (Grades 3 and 5): The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers 1984)

was used to assess children's self esteem. The Piers-Harris scale is an 80-statement self-report

inventory designed for use with students in grades 4-12. Children respond "yes" or "no" to indi-

cate whether each statement is self-descriptive. Total scores range from 0 to 80 with higher

scores indicating greater self-esteem. In addition to the total score, the instrument yields six

factor analytically derived subscales: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appear-

ance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. The instrument is gener-

ally regarded as psychometrically sound for assessing children's self-esteem (Chiu 1988). In some quarters, however, it is considered better suited for children than adolescents (Blascovich and Tomaka 1991). Testing forms were purchased from Western Psychological Services.

Self-Esteem (Grades 8 and 11): Under licensing agreement with Western Psychological Services, the Piers-Harris scale was also included in a special questionnaire I developed for Americans All's use with eighth and eleventh graders. Because of the uncertainty over Piers-Harris's suitability for adolescents, the questionnaire also included a variant of the widely used Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale. The Rosenberg scale was originally a 10-item inventory designed to measure adolescents' global feelings of self-worth. The particular version reproduced in the Americans All questionnaire is a modified version of the original scale which the U.S Department of Education used in its 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study

(NELS:88) of eighth graders. The NELS:88 version was chosen over the original scale to facilitate drawing comparisons between the Washington D.C. sample and a 1988 national sample of eighth graders. Although the Rosenberg scale is typically scored using a Likert-like response format (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree), the dichotomized format of the Piers-Harris scale was used in the Americans All questionnaire. This change was made partly for convenience sake, but also was motivated by research that pointed to the possibility of systematic biases in black student responses to Likert-type questionnaire items, who tend to favor the extreme response categories independent of item content. Bachman and O'Malley (1984) reported that black students scored significantly higher than whites in self-esteem scores when a full four- or five-point response range was used, but that the racial difference disappeared when a truncated scoring method was used. I obtained similar test results for the NELS:88 sample using a dichotomized scoring method to control for racial differences in the use of extreme response categories. A dichotomized scoring method will also be used in this study.

Cultural Identity (Grades 8 and 11): The Americans All questionnaire for grades 8 and 11

asked students to report their *ethnicity* by circling the one category that best describes their ethnic or cultural group. The choices were: (1) Black or African American, (2) White or European American, (3) Mexican American, Mexican or Chicano, (4) Cuban American or Cuban, (5) Puerto Rican American or Puerto Rican, (6) Asian American, Asian or Pacific Islander, (7) American Indian or Native American, or (8) Alaskan Native. Students were also asked to characterize their *own ethnic group's achievements* by choosing between two things about their ethnic or cultural group that made them feel most proud. The choices were: (1) scientific

contributions or athletic achievements, (2) acting and musical accomplishments or contributions to American history, (3) political leadership or religious leadership, and (4) money-making abilities or academic achievements. The responses were recoded into popular achievements (athletic, acting and musical, political, money-making) and other achievements (scientific, historical,

religious, academic) and summed together to form a total score. The total score ranges from 0 to 7 with higher scores indicating higher pride in non-popular achievements. Lastly, students were asked to assess the contributions of various ethnic groups to the country's history using a four-item response format (very much, some, a little, very little). The response for the group corresponding to their self-reported ethnicity was used to measure students' assessments of their *own ethnic group's historical contributions* to the country. The scores range from 0 to 3 with higher scores indicating greater contributions.

Multicultural Awareness (Grades 8 and 11): Unlike self-esteem measures, it is difficult to find instruments that assess people's orientation toward the value of cultural pluralism. Adorno et al.'s (1950) Ethnocentrism (E) Scale and Bogardus's (1950) Social Distance Scale measure closely related constructs, but neither was considered suitable for today's junior and senior high school population. Therefore, I helped Americans All to design a set of items (see Figure 1) to

Figure 1. Feelings About Peoples Differences

How much do you agree with each of the following statements about people's differences?
 (Circle One On Each Line)

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. People of different color (whether they are black, white, brown or some other color) are basically the same.	1	2	3	4
2. People who live here but don't speak English aren't true Americans.	1	2	3	4
3. It would be better for everyone if people dated only people of their own race.	1	2	3	4
4*. People's differences in language, religion and customs are the real strengths of this country.	1	2	3	4
5. People who weren't born in the United States haven't contributed much to this country's history.	1	2	3	4
6. It would be better all around if people spoke the same language, practiced the same religion, and shared the same customs.	1	2	3	4

* Scoring reversed to indicate pluralistic appreciation.

measure students' feelings about people's differences. For the analysis, I constructed two additive scales from the items: degree of *pluralistic appreciation* (items 1, 4 and 6) and degree of *pluralistic acceptance* (items 2 and 5). The scores range from 0 to 15 and from 0 to 7, respectively, with higher scores indicating greater appreciation or acceptance. Item 3 on interracial dating was analyzed separately. As an additional indicator of multicultural awareness, I computed a measure of students' assessments of *other ethnic group's historical contributions* by adding together their responses on the contributions of different ethnic groups to the country's history. The scores range from 0 to 19 with higher scores indicating greater contributions.