PLURALISM AND BILINGUAL/MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN HAWAII

Helen Nagtalon-Miller

"Pluralism" has occupied the minds of philosophers, statesmen and educators throughout history. In our country today, it continues to be a topic of serious — and sometimes heated — discussion among people who hold different values and beliefs about the relationships which various groups should have within the structure of a society. Many of these discussions have been non-productive because those involved failed to make a closer examination of the term and come to understand the ramifications of the type of pluralism which they espouse.

This kind of examination and understanding is important for education in Hawaii because of the growing interest in multicultural and bilingual education programs and the opposition to them, by influential educational leaders, on the stated grounds that such programs run counter to traditional American values.

The purpose of this article is to examine the concept "pluralism" and its relationship to multicultural and bilingual education in our state.

What Is Pluralism?

Social pluralism is defined as:

> *A state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization.*[1]

Thomas F. Green, in a published lecture, *Education and Pluralism: Ideal and Reality,*[2] demonstrates the inadequacy of the standard definition in the application of pluralism to real-life situations. In Green's view, pluralism involves three essential elements: (1) associations expressing different values and interests must be allowed to flourish in a society; (2) individuals must have freedom to associate with such groups in ways they find acceptable, and (3) diversity is beneficial for society because it provides opportunities for individuals and groups to be enriched by contact with other points of view. (With regard to the third element, Green makes the assumptions that there must be

actual contact between divergent groups, and the diversity itself must not be endangered by the contact.)

Further, Green accepts Charles Horton Cooley's distinction between primary and secondary associations or relations in social organization.[3] In this view, primary associations involve intimate, face-to-face, personal and informal relations. The family, children's play groups and tight social cliques are illustrations of primary associations. Secondary associations are often functional and usually not face-to-face. Professional organizations, civic committees and college faculties are examples of secondary associations. Green notes that the distinction between primary and secondary associations is not primarily a difference between kinds of institutions, but rather the difference between the kinds of relations those institutions engender.

With these distinctions in mind, Green has established three models or types of pluralism: (1) insular pluralism, (2) half-way pluralism, and (3) structural assimilation.[4]

Insular Pluralism

A society of insular pluralism would include "a plurality of groups in which both primary and secondary social relations are confined almost exclusively to each respective group."[5] In this kind of society and at the primary level, there would be no intermarriage and social cliques; clubs and children's play groups would be homogeneous. At the secondary level each group would provide its own services such as schools, hospitals, churches, newspapers, stores, housing, restaurants, and various cultural activities for its own members.

If there were no contact between the individual groups, they would constitute separate societies. For insular pluralism to exist, there must be some area of contact among the groups. The most likely area would be political. However, it should be noted that insular pluralism, while it expresses the value of freedom of association for groups, would limit the freedom of association of individuals who would have difficulty associating with other groups because of their differences.

In Green's view, insular pluralism may not be a form of pluralism at all, but rather a kind of social structure

constantly disappearing, either in the direction of a caste-society or toward the second of his three models.

Half-way Pluralism

In this second model,[5] there is structural integration among the groups at the secondary level of association, but not at the primary level. There would be no intermarriage between members of the different groups and children's play groups; and social cliques and clubs would remain homogeneous. At the secondary level, interaction among the groups would be allowed or, perhaps, encouraged.

But here, Green is forced to make a distinction between a pluralistic society and an open society. Where associations at the secondary level take place without regard to an individual's membership in a social group but are based, rather, on individual talent, that is a step toward an open society and away from a pluralistic society. Indeed, such associations, while they would serve the ideal of enriching society by providing contact between diverse groups, would tend to break down the differences between the groups as the contact continues. This would result from the necessity for individuals to suppress those characteristics inherent among members of their group which clash with standards demanded by other groups or the larger society. Thus, in half-way pluralism, groups must give up some of their distinctiveness in order to achieve the level of contact that is held to be desirable.

Structural Assimilation

In this third model,[7] integration occurs at both the primary and secondary levels of association: Not only are associations at the second level open to all persons but, in the primary level, there is a high degree of intermarriage, and social clubs, cliques and children's play groups are heterogeneous.

Green sees this as a kind of "make-believe" pluralism which is not really pluralism at all because cultural or ethnic diversity could not long continue in such a setting.

The standard belief, both for the United States as a whole and Hawaii in particular, is that we are a "melting pot." This is meant to be a description of a pluralistic society, but it leaves open the question of whether the blending of diverse elements in a common stew allows for the continuing diversity of its elements. It is essentially a description of structural assimilation rather than a form of pluralism. As Green points out:

This condition of structural assimilation is in

fact sometimes referred to as the fulfillment of a pluralistic society, i.e., a society which respects and values diversity. It is not, however, the model for a society which values diversity, but rather one in which differences between people are simply irrelevant as long as they do not inconvenience the conduct of affairs either in the polity, in the economy, or in the family.[8]

We see and hear this ambivalent attitude often in the statements of political leaders, newspaper editors and, indeed, of the man-on-the-street. Clear evidence of it can be found in the Hawaii State Plan proposal which is under discussion at this time. A presentation of the State Plan has been published in newspapers throughout the state. In it we find the following statement:

CULTURAL HERITAGE: Hawaii's most valuable asset is its people and the various cultural and ethnic groups in the islands. Historical sites, artifacts, customs, traditions, and language are part of Hawaii's multi-cultural heritage. Hawaii's cultures are also viewed as dynamic entities that transmit values, beliefs, identity, and knowledge through the generations, act as a mutual benefit association, and promote socialization.[9]

After noting indications "that the process of assimilation and adjustment to modern living is undermining cultural and ethnic group influences," the presentation adds:

It is important to realize that without a strong desire by Hawaii's people to maintain their cultural and ethnic ties, on an individual and family level, there is little that government can do to support the influences of cultural and ethnic groups.[10]

Thus, the State Plan would seem to support the desirability of ethnic and cultural diversity as a benefit to society, although in a somewhat half-hearted manner. However, elsewhere in the Plan can be found just the opposite point of view:

SOCIO-CULTURAL ADVANCEMENT: Society places a high value on self-reliance for each individual. Satisfying employment

and adequate income should provide each
individual with the opportunities to fulfill
his or her needs and aspirations. Basic needs
include adequate food, clothing, shelter,
health care, and a purposeful life. Education,
social services, culture and leisure provide
the basis for personal well-being. Society,
through its government, assumes
responsibility for the protection of civil
rights, community values and public safety.[■]

Clearly, this is a statement of the Anglo-American-Puritan ethic prevailing in the community which does not include within it other cultural values sharing the Hawaiian scene, such as the *'ohana* system of the Hawaiians and the similar extended family systems of those with Asian backgrounds.

To understand clearly the contradiction with which we are faced when we say that we believe in pluralism, it may be helpful for us to summarize Green's typology by way of the following schema:

TYPE OF PLURALISM	PRIMARY ASSOCIATIONS	SECONDARY ASSOCIATIONS
Insular	Homogeneous	Homogeneous
Half-way	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous
Structural Assimilation	Heterogeneous	Heterogeneous

The following points can be made: (1) structural assimilation is a contradiction in terms; that is, if there is assimilation, then a state of pluralism does not exist; (2) if assimilation is an ideal as well as a reality (although not fully realized) in our country, then how can we also express a desire for pluralism? It seems that this expression merely serves a ceremonious or ritualistic function.

The Role of Multicultural and Bilingual Education

If we really believe in the value to society of cultural diversity, there are things we can do to preserve and enhance this diversity even in a system of structural assimilation. However, it will require more than simply a desire on an individual and family level as indicated in the State Plan presentation.

One of the things we can do is explore the possibilities of multicultural and bilingual education in our schools.

It is not the intention of this writer to undertake a detailed discussion of multicultural and bilingual education programs; however, some explanation is necessary in order to show the relationship between the concept of "pluralism" and these types of educational programs.

Bilingual education has become an alternative method in this country for teaching students whose native languages are other than English. Joshua A. Fishman defines it in the following way:

In very general terms, bilingual education
implies some use of two or more languages
of instruction in connection with teaching
courses other than language per se.[□]

Some educators consider bilingual education to be compensatory; that is, the students for whom it is designed are looked upon as being linguistically and culturally deprived. Implicit in this view is the idea that the student's native language is neither intrinsically worthwhile nor on equal footing with English. There are also educators who consider bilingual education to be merely transitional; that is, the objective is to wean the students from their native language as soon as possible and to have them shift to English as soon as they "appear" to be functioning well in the classroom.

The point that needs to be made here is that the attitude of many teachers, educational administrators, professors of education, political leaders, and the public at large — that teaching students in languages other than English has no place in the curriculum of the American school — weakens, if not contradicts, the statement that pluralism as an ideal and reality is desirable.

Fishman's view, then, that bilingual education is good for the majority group, the minority group, for education, and for language teachers and language teaching, is considered to be a radical view. However, if we say that we believe in pluralism because different cultures have something valuable to contribute in the realms of philosophy (ethics, religion), esthetics (art, literature, music), the culinary arts, et cetera, then the type of pluralism (that is, structural assimilation) which we seem to advocate and promote only encourages the eradication of those cultural differences which we claim would enrich the fabric of American life.

The question, "Why must we help students maintain their native languages in order to help bring about a

pluralism that respects diversity and encourages culture sharing?" is often asked. A response to it would include the following: (1) language is a reflection of culture; those who continue to communicate in their native languages while learning English cannot help but be in touch with their culture's view of the universe; they then will have something to contribute to the other members of society; (2) when languages other than English are heard spoken in the schools, the students are given the opportunity to appreciate other languages and develop a respect for speakers of other languages; (3) speakers of languages other than English are given the opportunity to develop a positive attitude towards their own language and culture, thus increasing self-confidence; (4) languages are learned faster and more effectively by younger children; it is more difficult for older children and adults to learn to speak another language with near-native proficiency; consequently, it is important that native speakers of languages other than English be given the opportunity to maintain their language.

But what about American students who are monolingual or monocultural? Fishman holds the view that bilingual education is beneficial for all; however, as has been pointed out, a great majority of Americans consider it a radical idea. It may take many years before people's way of thinking on the subject can be changed. In view of this, it is safe to assume that most Americans will continue to support monolingualism.

In recent years, however, educators who recognize the need for Americans to understand other cultures, as well as that of their parents and grandparents, have developed multicultural education programs. And, although in such programs students are not taught in languages other than English they do have an important role to play in preparing future generations of Americans to make their behaviors and attitudes conform more closely to the ideal of a society in which diverse cultural elements can blend together without losing their uniqueness. Only then can there be a pluralistic society where people of diverse backgrounds are able to make important contributions.

Footnotes

[1] *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1975.
[2] Thomas F. Green. *Education and Pluralism: Ideal and Reality*, School of Education. Syracuse University, 1966, pp. 10-11.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-28.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 18-22.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 23.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[9] *Hawaii State Plan*, Supplement to the Sunday Star-Bulletin and Advertiser, Honolulu, October 2, 1977, p. B-6.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[12] Joshua A. Fishman. *Bilingual Education: An International Sociological Perspective*, Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1976, p. 24.

Helen Nagtalon-Miller is Project Coordinator, Disadvantaged Minority Recruitment Program, School of Social Work, University of Hawaii at Manoa. Formerly Administrator, Hawaii Bilingual/Bicultural Education Project, Department of Education, State of Hawaii, Ms. Nagtalon-Miller has been a Teacher with the Department of Education and the University's College of Education, Department of European Languages and Literature, and Curriculum Research and Development Group.