

## CHAPTER 2

### EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

This chapter describes the various educational approaches to diversity that educators have employed over the years. Despite the considerable number of such approaches, certain broad tendencies are apparent. Most of these can be classified as conservative, liberal/pluralist or critical. In what follows, I describe each of these approaches to diversity in education, the associated explanations of student failure, and recommended strategies for success. In each case I trace how, if at all, the perspective enhances inclusion. As will become evident in the pages that follow, some approaches are more consistent with inclusive education than others. The conservative view promotes inclusive practice the least, while critical approaches support it the most. The liberal/pluralist position falls somewhere in between. All three approaches, however, display shortcomings, which I illustrate below. I also document the contemporary challenges to inclusive education. In doing so, I use some of the ideas of more recent approaches to diversity by critical multiculturalists, antiracists and postmodernists. These challenges revolve around globalization, issues of identity and recent conservative opposition to efforts to recognize diversity. Before I move on to these descriptions, I provide a brief and selective history of perceptions of human diversity.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMAN DIVERSITY

Views of human diversity that have a bearing on contemporary education and inclusion have a history. They reach back to well beyond 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. It was at this time that what came to be seen as significant differences between and among people began to take on new meanings. From this point on, such differences would occupy the thoughts and words of humanity in new ways. Of the many reasons for this, two stand out. The first is humankind's increased mobility. Advancement in travel technology, and in the shipping industry in particular, made it possible at the time for people to travel longer distances in shorter and more manageable times. The result was that the differences between and among people who lived in different areas of the world became more apparent. This differed from previous eras when people stayed relatively close to their respective birthplaces. And even those who traveled great distances did not appear to give much notice to group characteristics. Shreeve (1994) maintains that neither Marco Polo nor the 14<sup>th</sup> century Arabian explorer Ibn Battutah seldom thought in these terms. Rarely covering more than twenty-fives miles a day, it never occurred to

them to categorize people in “racial” ways, or at least not in the manner in which the contemporary world does.

These differences also took on greater significance as traditional hierarchies began to break down (Taylor, 1991). Up until 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century a European’s station in life and the privileges that accompanied this position were determined at birth. So the son of a nobleman inherited advantages that a son or daughter of a serf could never in their lifetime expect. At this time, however, these long-established traditions were seriously threatened by the new and evolving economic system – a person need not necessarily be of noble birth to profit in the market. Faced with the erosion of these privileges, those of upper class standing clambered to protect this traditional hierarchy by working to ensure that they enjoyed particular advantages in the newly evolving market economy. The establishment of the nation state was one such strategy, although of course there were also other reasons for the rise of the nation state. Such a move provided an ideal legitimizing mechanism for establishing laws that favored the already privileged. So laws regarding land ownership and other resources favored those who already had the means to acquire them over those who did not.

Another strategy in safeguarding these privileges involved highlighting differences of those who were thought to be unworthy others and characterizing the differences associated with them in negative ways. Doing so, the privileged claimed, would provide a justification for treating such individuals in unfair, exploitive, and demeaning ways. These characterizations applied both to those who lived in their midst as well as those more distant others. In this respect, these characterizations had both a “class” and a “race” dimension.<sup>1</sup> The ruling class in feudal Europe and the later so-called bourgeoisie class in industrial Europe sought to protect their privileged positions, in part by promulgating a view of serfs and working class people as simpler and more primitive than themselves. The idea here was that these people did not deserve the same privileges as the upper class because they were somehow lesser human beings than the latter. Mathew Arnold’s characterization of working class people as having no culture, as being “raw and uncivilized,” and as savages, typifies this view (Young, 1995). These same kinds of characterizations also provided the owners of capital a rationale (and supposedly a clear conscience) for enslaving people from different parts of the world, and profiting from their labour. The privileged reasoned that not only was it their right, but also their duty to do as they pleased with people they believed to be “heathens”, “savages” and “poor infidels captivated by the devil” (Rushames, 1962, p. 2).

The idea of “race” and associated value attributions solidified as scientists become involved. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, employing what they believed to be scientific and thereby objective methods, scientists established two (supposed) facts about humanity. The first was that humanity was divided into distinct groups they called “races.” The second fact was that each of these races had a different worth. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach was perhaps the most influential of these scientists (Gould, 1994). His theory emphasized the belief that *homo sapiens* had been created in one

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, they also applied to gender, but the differential status of men and women at this time was so taken for granted that there was probably little need to justify the treatment of women.

location and then had spread out over the globe. He believed that diversity occurred as groups of people moved out from this place of origin and adapted to different climates and topographies. Nevertheless, Blumenbach did single out one group as being closest to the created ideal, and characterized all others by relative degrees of departure from this archetypal standard. His criterion for identifying this original and ideal group was physical beauty. Not surprisingly, he affirmed his fellow Europeans as the most beautiful, and those from the area of Mount Causasus the most comely of all, hence the designation “Caucasian” (Gould, 1994). At this point, however, Blumenbach faced a problem. His mentor, Carolus Linneaus, had only identified four races, and he needed an additional race to complete the transition from the most attractive races to the least. One side of the equation presented no problem; the line of departure went from the most comely Caucasians, through the intermediary North Americans to the least worthy Asians. The other side of the pyramid, however, needed an additional race to be the intermediary between his ideal Caucasians and the least attractive Africans. He solved this problem by creating a new race – the Malaysians, all in the name of science!

### CONSERVATIVE APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY

The so-called scientific research that was based on these erroneous ideas would influence approaches to the education of various groups of students and explanations for their successes and failures. Particularly influential in this respect was the connection that researchers of the time drew between what they believed to be distinct groups and their social aptitudes and cognitive abilities. Researchers were convinced that cognitive abilities were inherent, that is, they were biologically determined. To prove such claims, a number of scientists engaged in a program of research that sought to draw a relationship between brain size and intelligence. Such research, however, has long since been discredited (Gould, 1981; Shreeve, 1994). In fact subsequent analyses revealed that one of the most prominent of these scientists, Ceril Burt, actually fabricated his data (Gould, 1981). This is not the end of this story, however. Despite convincing evidence to the contrary, contemporary social scientists continue to pursue this erroneous connection between “race” and intelligence. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) are just the latest of these misguided social scientists who cling to the idea that there is a fixed connection between biology and social behaviour.

The implications of this conservative ideology for education, however, are not as clear-cut as they may seem. On the one hand, those people who had the prerogative of defining certain groups and individuals as different sought to protect their privileges, in part, by using educational institutions to eliminate what they saw in these different others as threatening. A key strategy in their drive to contain these threatening differences rested with assimilationist educational policies. The idea here was to educate different others in ways that would prompt them to accept certain values, values that they would share with the already privileged. So, for example, the school promoters in 19<sup>th</sup> century Upper Canada wanted the children of immigrants and the poor to attend school (Prentice, 1977). They believed that education would provide the means through which these young people could be



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