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Affirming Diversity Within an Integrated Curriculum

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The increased pluralism in the nation's schools today provides exciting educational opportunities, but it also brings the conflict of competing demands and the threat of fragmentation and chaos in student learning. Some of the most controversial issues relate to curriculum. How can teachers maintain educational coherence within a culturally diverse curriculum?

In our increasingly interdependent world, it is essential to see that while education today must be informed by many voices and many perspectives, the common bonds uniting the human community should be the point of departure for all explorations of human diversity.

At the Carnegie Foundation, we are preparing a report on a restructured elementary school called the Basic School. We have organized the curriculum thematically around a new integrated core called the "Human Commonalities," by which we mean those experiences shared by all people everywhere. We define eight commonalities and suggest how traditional school subjects, as well as cross-cultural studies, might fit within this framework. This integrated curriculum can spiral up to form the core of secondary and higher learning as well.

The "human commonalities" curriculum, with regard to diversity, can provide unifying themes for the study of many cultures and viewpoints, helping students understand and respect their own more personal heritage, learn about the traditions and experiences of others, and gain a deep sense of the bonds

that unite all people. We describe the eight commonalities briefly here, focusing on their relevance to multicultural learning.

The first commonality is *the life cycle*. At the most basic level, all people share life itself--its beginning, its development, its ending. Through studies around this theme, students can discover how the experiences of birth, growth, and death differ from one culture to another.

Second, *the use of symbols* is a common human activity. All people use symbol systems to express feelings and ideas, and students should not only master language and math but gain a broader perspective on the universal use of symbols, including their use by the earliest humans.

The third commonality we define is the *response to the aesthetic*. In their study of art, art history, and aesthetics, students should learn about and come to appreciate the visual and performing arts of many cultures.

The fourth human commonality is the *sense of time*. All people have the capacity to recall the past and anticipate the future. Students should explore a sense of time through a study of the history of various cultures and learn also that time has been perceived and measured in different ways by different peoples.

Fifth, all people hold *membership in groups and institutions*. Groups and institutions make up the very fabric of human existence. They are shaped by people and they shape people's lives. Studies around this theme provide rich opportunities for multicultural and historical investigations.

The sixth commonality is *producing and consuming*. All people engage in making and using things. Cross-cultural investigations within the study of economics and vocation can extend students' awareness beyond themselves.

The seventh human commonality is our *connectedness to nature*. All forms of life are inextricably connected. Students should learn the role the

natural environment has played in the development of different cultures and about the dramatic changes taking place in the world today in natural resources and cultural development.

Finally, all humans are engaged in a *search for meaning*. We all seek purpose in our lives. This theme helps students understand that all people live by values and beliefs. They become familiar with the vital roles that spirituality and religion have played, and continue to play, in the human experience.

One of the greatest challenges our schools face today is the need to affirm and celebrate diversity while building a true community of learning which unites people from many cultures with a sense of common bonds. While celebrating diversity with our students is essential, even more critical in the world today is helping young people grow up knowing that we are all members of the same human family and that a study of *any* human culture is a study of ourselves.