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ABSTRACT

Representatives from 26 educational, community, and governmental groups attended a national symposium in January 1990 sponsored by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). The position paper presented here was developed at this symposium. It examines the growing population of students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds and holds that teacher preparation programs need to be restructured in order that all teachers, whether majority or minority, may be adequately prepared to provide quality education to all students. In order to nurture a culturally informed teaching force, preservice teachers must be prepared more effectively to teach students from diverse backgrounds. The "Next Level" initiative requires policy and programmatic changes to incorporate diversity throughout teacher education programs. The paper discusses why the initiative is necessary; who should be involved; and how it should be implemented. (LL)

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A POLICY STATEMENT



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## AN AACTE NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON DIVERSITY: A POSITION STATEMENT

The growing diversity of our student population, combined with a limited pool of teachers adequately prepared to teach students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, poses an immediate threat to America's economic well-being and historic commitment to equality for all. This threat comes from our inability to provide quality education to the minority youths who will constitute the majority of the work force within this decade.

Minority teachers are essential to providing quality education. They contribute cross-cultural understanding to the educational process and serve as role models for students. Given the current inadequate supply of minority teacher candidates, however, it is

unlikely that racial and ethnic parity in the teaching force will be achieved within the next decade. Thus minority teacher recruitment and retention programs are a necessary first step in maintaining a multicultural teaching force. At the same time but on a different level—the NEXT LEVEL—a culturally informed teaching force must be nurtured.

The need to restructure teacher preparation programs so that all teachers—majority and minority—are adequately prepared to provide quality education to all students has never been so urgent. The NEXT LEVEL initiative requires policy and programmatic changes to incorporate diversity throughout teacher education programs.

**Representatives from 26 educational, community, and governmental groups attended a national symposium in January 1990 sponsored by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) to examine this NEXT LEVEL of commitment. The following position paper was developed from that symposium and was presented to the AACTE Board of Directors at its February 1990 meeting.**

**A national voluntary organization of more than 700 colleges and universities, AACTE is committed to equity and excellence in preparing the nation's teachers. The Association strongly believes that the current structure and content of teacher education programs do not reflect the growing diversity of the nation's population.**

## **PREAMBLE**

**Realizing that “the survival of this nation depends on the successful education of our diverse population,” we believe**

- **that the increasing diversity of the American population provides a richness in culture that our society can explore to achieve democratic, political, and economic leadership in the world;**
- **that the nation’s student population will become increasingly different rather than increasingly similar;**
- **that all children can learn if provided appropriate instruction;**
- **that teachers can be prepared more effectively to teach students from diverse backgrounds;**
- **that teacher preparation is a university-wide responsibility; and**
- **that teacher preparation programs and staff under the leadership of schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) must change to reflect current demographic reality.**

## WHY IS THE NEXT LEVEL INITIATIVE NECESSARY?

The United States is currently experiencing the greatest level of racial and ethnic diversity since its inception. According to data estimates from *American Demographics* (1990), the total U.S. population grew from 226.5 million people in 1980 to 249.9 million in 1990. Of the 1980 figure, the racial composition was comprised of 86 percent White, 12 percent Black, 8 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian and other (includes Native American, Pacific Islander, Eskimo, and Aleut). Ten years later, the percentage increases were 65 percent for Asian and other, 44 percent for Hispanics, 16 percent for Blacks, and 8 percent for Whites. In that period, 500,000 legal and approximately 200,000 illegal immigrants per year contributed to the population increases. By 2010, minorities will

constitute one-third of the nation (American Council on Education 1988).

With respect to this ethnic surge, of striking significance to education is the growing diversity of students in our nation's classrooms. The minority school-age population is expected to increase to more than 30 percent within this decade. Although everyone knows that minorities have different racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, our educational system has paid little attention to understanding these differences and their impact on the quality of education that youngsters receive. As Cole warned,

understanding and respecting differences among us is one of the central issues of the 21st century...In our colleges and

universities, in our society, and in our world, either we learn to deal with diversity or we will be "unified" in our destruction. (1990, p. 5)

To deal with diversity, we must abandon the quest for cultural homogeneity and define cultural values that we share as a nation, while simultaneously recognizing and embracing our important differences as a diverse people. Also, we must recognize that diversity is a natural phenomenon with enormous strengths and wealth, and that diversity has given impetus to our nation's aspirations and progress over time. To capitalize on this wealth, it is imperative that all teachers be adequately prepared to educate all students regardless of their racial or ethnic origin.

The demographic reality of our population is that by the turn of the century, the nation will depend on minorities and immigrants, along with White women, for 90 percent of its work force (Quality Education for Minorities Project 1990). In addition, a majority of the baby-boom generation that makes up the bulk of today's work force is expected to retire by 2010. These statistics suggest that our educational system faces unprecedented challenges in teaching a myriad of critical skills needed for the nation to remain competitive and for society to maintain and improve its general well-being.

In a recent study by the Brookings Institution on school performance and educational quality in public and private schools between 1975 and

1985, researchers found that earnings for high school graduates have declined for the first time since records were kept. The decline suggests that the skills students acquire in high school are no longer adequate. A related study by the Hudson Institute indicates that by 2000, a majority of new jobs will require postsecondary education. The findings from these studies are startling, especially considering the current changes in international competition that have increased the relative demand for highly skilled workers.

To solve these problems, a number of school reforms have been put in place in recent years, but these have had limited success. One promising approach, not yet fully explored, is the new linkage of school reform with teacher education reform—that is,

strengthening and replicating successful teacher preparation policies and practices while exploring and implementing innovative strategies.

Specifically, the NEXT LEVEL initiative on diversity is required to

- ensure the future well-being of our society by embracing the reality of its changing demographics;
- provide equitable opportunities to the nation's diverse populace;
- produce a work force that sustains an economically viable society;
- remain competitive in a global economy; and
- capitalize on the strengths and wealth of this diversity.

## WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE NEXT LEVEL INITIATIVE?

Preparation of the nation's teaching force to effectively educate a diverse student population requires the absolute commitment of all segments of society, with the primary leadership responsibility resting with the schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) in our colleges and universities. It is imperative for SCDEs to define the scope and content of the challenge faced in teacher education programs and to articulate realistic approaches to achieve desired outcomes. It is equally imperative that the effort be collaborative, including all the constituencies required to fully implement the NEXT LEVEL initiative. These constituencies include the administrators of higher education institutions; the administrators and faculties of schools, colleges, and departments of arts and sciences;

federal and state policymakers; leaders from educational organizations and accreditation agencies; business and industry leaders; parents and community leaders at large.

Active leadership from SCDEs in setting the agenda for program restructuring involves an institution-wide imperative to educate faculty, staff, and students. For example, establishing an institutional faculty development center will provide an opportunity for other colleges within the institution to engage in building relevant curricula that draw from the nation's diversity. Active leadership from SCDEs can influence legislation, mandates, and policies regarding the nation's educational system within the context of diversity. Active leadership from SCDEs can help to coalesce the

collaborative efforts of the various partners to provide the necessary resources and knowledge needed for preparing the next generation of teachers.

The potential benefits of the NEXT LEVEL initiative are far-reaching. Students will benefit from the variety of pedagogical styles, instructional materials, and interactive experiences that better reflect their diverse backgrounds. The quality of education will improve for teachers, leading to greater satisfaction with student achievement. Society, in general, will benefit from sustained political and economic well-being, which will result from a more literate and skilled population.

Involvement in the NEXT LEVEL initiative on diversity will be

- by schools, colleges, and departments of education setting the curricular agenda in collaboration with other colleges and departments within the institution and working to transform undergraduate teacher education programs to reflect diversity in content and character;
- by state and federal policymakers providing leadership in legislative and administrative actions and resources needed to improve the quality and excellence of our educational system;

- by the leaders of educational organizations keeping alive the issues and debates on the need for diversity in teacher education;
- by the leaders of accreditation agencies establishing and enforcing standards to reflect diversity in teacher education and monitoring compliance by institutions;
- by business and industry leaders actively collaborating with leaders in higher education, teacher education, federal and state governments, and parent and community organizations and providing resources (financial and otherwise) and opportunities for educating the nation's children;
- by parents collaborating with their schools to provide conducive teaching and learning environments that ensure quality education for all children; and
- by community leaders monitoring equity, access, and quality as these relate to diversified teaching and learning processes.

## HOW SHOULD THE NEXT LEVEL INITIATIVE BE IMPLEMENTED?

The NEXT LEVEL initiative requires that before 2000, under the aegis of SCDEs, each constituency continually evaluates how well its policies, practices, and programs embrace the salient elements of the initiative. For example, staff development and change at the cognitive and behavioral-feelings levels for individuals, groups, and organizations are vital components of this initiative. Delineating national, regional, and state goals for SCDEs and their respective universities and colleges for recruitment, retention, preparation, and graduation of more African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American teachers is another prominent component of the initiative. The induction and employment of these groups as teachers is also important to the initiative.

Institutions of higher education and SCDEs should be committed to ensuring that the education of all prospective teachers is culturally relevant to the needs of all youngsters and is more focused toward their needs, aspirations, and culturally influenced learning styles. Fulfilling this commitment requires designing and implementing teacher education programs that reach beyond the academy to capture the essence of community and social reality. Of significance is the commitment to adopt the concept of responsive *pedagogy*, an instructional philosophy that uses students' cultural backgrounds to enhance positive cognitive development as well as overall individual and professional development.

Another essential component of the NEXT LEVEL initiative is a commitment to develop reliable assessment models that are fair in evaluating the next generation of teachers. Objective criteria for measuring desired competencies required to educate a diverse student population need to be clearly defined. A related commitment to continuous research and evaluation is paramount to providing a current, comprehensive information base for formulating new policy

options and practices for teacher education.

Finally, for all concerned, there should be a genuine commitment to the optimum use of existing resources. This commitment should be coupled with fully allocating new resources to ensure effective implementation of agreed upon policies and practices of the NEXT LEVEL initiative.

## SUMMARY

The ambitious, realistic, and pragmatic goal of educating a diverse work force can be achieved if all segments of our society work together toward that purpose. AACTE and other educational organizations join in calling upon the nation to actively support the NEXT LEVEL initiative.

If the educational reform momentum is sustained, then our nation's educational system and the quality of its human capital will have a much better chance of returning America to the forefront of economic leadership in the world. However, to achieve this end, we need to act together, now.

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