

**Learning to Examine Life:  
Why Diversity Writ Large is Essential in K-12 Education**

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**Abstract**

We make the educational case for diversity independent of its larger societal debate.

Diversity in public schools encourages, as Plato observed, the ability to examine one's own life.

Such educationally-essential diversity ultimately seeks to inculcate the ability to examine and to understand unfamiliar or opposing viewpoints sincerely without necessarily forfeiting one's own beliefs. Not only is such ability—fundamental to civil discourse and to a quality education—critical in a pluralistic democracy as ours and in an increasingly interdependent global world, but also it is an essential prerequisite to a true meritocracy. We develop our thesis in three sections.

First, we define what is educationally-essential diversity writ large. Next, we explore the economic, political, and social educational goals diversity furthers. Finally, we present options for student assignment, faculty/staff assignment, school choice, special programming, and other factors to promote and assess this educationally-essential diversity.

Keywords: diversity, public education, meritocracy

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*“An unexamined life is not worth living.”*

—Plato, *The Apology*

*“People do not learn very well when surrounded by the likes of themselves. ... [The] Nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation.”*

—Justice Lewis Powell, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*,  
438 U.S. 265, 312-13 (1978)

*“The ... claims that ‘collective ability equals individual ability plus diversity’ and that ‘diversity trumps ability’ are mathematical truths, not feel-good mantras.”*

—Dr. Scott E. Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies.*

Much has been written about the value of diversity in American K-12 education (Charles Hamilton Houston Institute, 2009). Moreover, much has been written about the dearth of diversity in our K-12 schools (Orfield, 2009). Although both of us are unabashed supporters of diversity in all of its manifestations, this article’s intended audience is made up of those who remain unconvinced that diversity is anything other than a liberal agenda item and those, who like us, seek to engage anti-diversity proponents in discussion. Our approach then is neither liberal nor conservative but pragmatic.

In this article we attempt to convince the privileged parents, students, faculty, staff, and their advocates who benefit from the status quo in schools that increasing diversity, broadly and holistically speaking, is not only in their interest but also educationally essential. Educationally-essential diversity ultimately seeks to inculcate the ability, as Plato observed, to be critically self-reflective and to understand unfamiliar or opposing viewpoints sincerely without necessarily forfeiting one’s own beliefs. This ability to examine life—fundamental to a quality education and civil discourse—is not only critical in a pluralistic democracy as ours and in an increasingly

interdependent global world but also is an essential prerequisite to a true meritocracy. For those who remain unconvinced or who find the ideas of ancient philosophy and our founding democratic principles esoteric, we rely on interest convergence around practical issues such as global competitiveness (Bell, 1980; Garda Jr., 2011).

This article proceeds in five parts. First, we acknowledge the peril of using legal categories such as race, gender, and sexual orientation alone to encourage diversity and argue that the core concept of diversity in K-12 schools is a holistic, context-specific view of privilege and marginalization. Second, we define what is educationally-essential diversity writ large. Third, we explain how educationally-essential diversity can help achieve a modern and inclusive Jeffersonian meritocracy in the United States under the, albeit bold, assumption that a meritocracy is what we seek as a nation. Fourth, we explore the economic, political, and social education goals diversity furthers. Finally, we provide education policymakers and school leaders with a holistic diversity decision-making framework.

### **Categories and Privilege**

Most educational policies seeking to promote diversity in K-12 education concern specific categories such as race and gender (Biegel, 2009). Opponents of these categorical diversity policies often point out the irony of using the same oversimplified categories previously (or currently) used to marginalize and exclude people in an effort to increase diversity (Wilkinson III, 2006, 2010). Furthermore, such crude categories fail to recognize the unique experiences of people caught in between categories (*e.g.*, are African immigrants considered “Black” in the same way as native-born Black Americans?) (Williams, 1991) or in the intersection of these categories (*e.g.*, the experience of a Black lesbian is quite different than the experience of a Black

heterosexual man) (Weber, 2010). Opponents of categories ask us to treat parents, students, faculty, and staff as unique individuals as opposed to a group characteristic.

Is there a way to obtain the benefits of these categorical policies while maintaining individual treatment? Yes, we submit that the core concept behind these categorical approaches is that of privilege and marginalization. Policymakers care about race, gender, and similar categories not for their own sake but rather because those categories have been employed in the past (and continue to be used in the present) to privilege certain people and marginalize others. Directly examining ends (*i.e.*, privilege and marginalization) instead of just means (*i.e.*, categories) cuts to the chase. Moreover, this inquiry shifts from a purely demographic form of diversity to a more pedagogical form of diversity. A holistic, fact-specific inquiry into privilege and marginalization in the specific, idiosyncratic circumstances of a particular school, school district, or region (composed of adjoining school districts in the same geographic area) allows for individualized treatment and avoids the peril of categories.

### **The Peril of Categories**

Although categories like race are socially created constructs that lack inherent, independent meaning (Lopez, 1994), they matter because they have been used (or continue to be used) by American government and society to marginalize and exclude people who fall within such categories. These categories remain particularly poignant today because American law formerly used them to marginalize and exclude parents, students, faculty, and staff in schools (Kushner, 2005; St. John, 1994). So it is not surprising that the majority of educational diversity scholarship we have examined primarily concerns gender and race (Castania, 2003).

Considering that race has remained *the* “American dilemma” since the drafting of the Constitution (Myrdal, 1944), it is not surprising that most educational diversity policies seek to

promote racial diversity (Brosnan, 2001; Dickinson, 2008). After all, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund chose K-12 education to spearhead its full-fledged assault on American Jim Crow laws with *Brown v. Board of Education* (Kluger, 2004; U.S. Supreme Court, 1954) and in response many white students fled the public schools for independent schools (Brosnan, 2001).

Nevertheless, federal and state laws are making it increasingly more difficult to use such categories in isolation. In the *Grutter v. Bollinger* (U.S. Supreme Court, 2003) and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007) opinions, the U.S. Supreme Court has made clear that any diversity which relies upon a mechanical application of a “protected category” like race probably violates the Constitution. Likewise, a number of states have adopted state laws patterned after California’s Proposition 209 outlawing “preferential treatment . . . on the basis of race” (Devon W. Carbado & Harris, 2008). Lobbying organizations like the American Civil Rights Institute and the Center for Equal Opportunity seek to have similar laws adopted in other states.

Eager to apply these federal and state laws increasingly hostile to such categories like race and gender are well-funded conservative public litigation organizations such as the Center for Individual Rights, the Institute of Justice, the Pacific Legal Foundation, and the Southeastern Legal Foundation that seek aggressively to challenge racial or gender diversity educational policies in the courts (Cokorinos, 2003; Cokorinos, Institute for Democracy Studies., & Reproductive Rights & Democracy Program., 2000). These conservative lobbying and litigation organizations embrace a colorblind ideology championing the dignity of the individual over group characteristics (Trucios-Haynes, 2007). Furthermore, language in U.S. Supreme Court education law opinions appears at least partially to agree with them. In the higher education *Grutter* opinion, the Supreme Court

expressed the need for a “highly individualized, holistic review” of students and stressed that “[t]he importance of this individualized consideration in the context of a race-conscious admissions program is paramount” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2003). Earlier, in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, Justice Powell explained that “[t]he diversity that furthers a compelling state interest encompasses a far broader array of qualifications and characteristics of which racial or ethnic origin is but a single though important element.” (U.S. Supreme Court, 1977). In *Plyler v. Doe*, where the Supreme Court recognized the right of undocumented school-age children to participate in the same free public education offered to American citizens and legally admitted aliens, the Court articulated an educational right of “advancement on the basis of individual merit.”

In addition to the pivotal role of education in sustaining our political and cultural heritage, denial of education to some isolated group of children poses an affront to one of the goals of the Equal Protection Clause: the abolition of governmental barriers presenting unreasonable obstacles to advancement on the basis of individual merit. Paradoxically, by depriving the children of any disfavored group of an education, we foreclose the means by which that group might raise the level of esteem in which it is held by the majority. But more directly, “education prepares individuals to be self-reliant and self-sufficient participants in society” (U.S. Supreme Court, 1981).

Many conservatives agree with Chief Justice Roberts’ often repeated declaration in *Parents Involved* that “the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007).

Despite their criticism of the use of categories like race, conservative leaders like Roger Clegg, President and General Counsel of the Center for Equal Opportunity and former Deputy

Assistant Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, have expressed support for a holistic concept of diversity focused on merit:

There is ... nothing wrong with diversity per se, meaning a variety of people, with different skin colors and national origins, outlooks, and experiences. The trouble is that, whenever one hears the term, it is almost certainly because the speaker has an agenda that favors racial and ethnic discrimination in order to achieve a particular and predetermined demographic mix, while opposing merit and assimilation to American culture (Clegg, 2005).

The challenge this kind of support presents is in the almost inevitable links among intelligence, merit, and race in U.S. society, which began with IQ testing (Baez, 2006). Diversity and academic quality are often considered mutually exclusive, which is to say that people of color are necessarily less meritorious (Guinier & Torres, 2002). And the use of the term “assimilation” as opposed to “acculturation” suggests that people of color need to erase core parts of their identities to become “American”. It would seem then, that conservative aversion to diversity, rooted as it is in culturally homogenous nationalism, may be intractable.

Regardless, is there a way to reconcile this desire to treat parents, students, teachers, and staff as individuals and to forego oversimplified categories while maintaining an understanding that these categories serve an important purpose in pursuing equality? Yes, because in the final analysis *privilege* is what matters.

### **Privilege is What Matters**

At the heart of opposition to diversity initiatives is the desire on the part of privileged parties to preserve the status quo thereby preserving their privilege (Armor & Duck O'Neill, 2010; Donnor, 2011; Zirkel, 2008). Although many scholars have used the terms “marginalized” and

“privileged” critically (Bender & Braverman, 1995; Rothenberg, 2001), we employ both terms herein for pedagogical purposes to represent empirical facts about power and demographics devoid of judgment.

Some people in U.S. society enjoy privileges that others do not. We can see this at work in the disproportionate distribution of societal benefits. If the system were not biased toward these people, we would have to assume that they have an inherent right to greater societal benefits, an idea which has largely been relegated to our social and scientific history. Vestiges of this belief can be found in the case of *Bakke* where Allan Bakke asserted he was not allowed to compete for every open spot in a medical school admission class. The problem is that Mr. Bakke was only interested in the seats set aside for students of color. “Neither Mr. Bakke nor his lawyers challenged the medical school’s other special admission programs, which reserved five admission slots in each incoming class for the children of wealthy financial donors or ‘important state politicians (Donnor, 2011 p. 743).’ Social class and political group privileges were seen as appropriate whereas privileges for racial/ethnic minorities were not.

There are other ways in which privilege is evident and indisputable. More and more services in the U.S. are available only online. This means that people with the resources to secure digital devices and subscriptions to internet providers have greater access—they are privileged. Able-bodied people generally have unfettered access to buildings, monuments, and historic sites—they are also privileged. Sexual orientation, attractiveness, and height are all categories where privilege is bestowed upon some and marginalization foisted upon others. This is our reality.

Privilege and marginalization are often at the heart of battles in schools. Regardless of whether the battles rise to the level of court cases, one group is typically trying to gain access or be recognized while another group is working to preserve their position of privilege. Racial

integration, accommodations for speakers of other languages, and recognition of sexual minorities are all issues where one group is pushing against marginalization and another group is holding tightly to privilege.

Our challenge in pursuit of equal opportunity is to limit the way that social institutions privilege any particular group. This will be exceedingly difficult if privileged persons and groups do not acknowledge their privilege without being defensive. Teaching White students about White identity development has been shown to prevent those students from seeing themselves diminished in the face of increasing acceptance of other racial/ethnic groups (Zirkel, 2008). Perhaps teaching economically advantaged students about the realities of social class might help those students to see the injustice of social class marginalization.

With those things in mind, this article is not limited to public schools, but also applies to private and parochial schools. Privileged elites need exposure to marginalized people and their concerns not only for character building but also to ensure that everyone can contribute to thoughtful to our democracy instead of holding to our respective and isolated positions. That said the kind of privilege we are discussing is tailored to the specifics of local situations. Privilege and marginalization may not apply in the same ways across jurisdictions and subgroups. Focusing on privilege is the antithesis of oversimplified categories. It allows us to take local intersectionality into account and rely on the data and facts of a given situation instead of applying blanket politically based “solutions.”

## **Educationally-Essential Diversity**

What is educationally-essential diversity? For that matter, what is diversity? After surveying past definitions of diversity in American education, we propose our own definition of diversity heavily influenced by Scott Page's groundbreaking work (Page, 2007, 2011).

### **Past Definitions of Diversity in Education**

What is diversity? This is more than a semantic question. As Robert Moore observed, “[l]anguage not only expresses ideas and concepts but actually shapes thought” (Moore & Council on Interracial Books for Children. Racism and Sexism Resource Centre for Educators., 1976). We agree with Devon Carbado and Mitu Gulati that “... the benefits of diversity [do not] go without saying. They must be theorized and demonstrated” (Devon W. Carbado & Gulati, 2003).

While the meaning and benefits of educational diversity remain disputed, its historical development is well-established. As the Supreme Court observed in *Parents Involved*, two recognized compelling governmental educational interests, “remedying the effects of past intentional discrimination” and “diversity in higher education” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007), have developed over time. The latter evolved out of the former. Although these two interests are often conflated, it is important to recognize that they are semantically separate and logically independent. While we believe that the remedial interest for race and other formerly exclusionary legal categories remains strong today, we do not address it here. Our focus is on the latter—as applied to K-12 schools—and not the former.

Before diversity in schools could be contemplated, the Jim Crow apartheid dual system of schooling first had to be dismantled by *Brown* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Separating students solely on the basis of a category like race is anathema to the idea of encouraging different

individual children to interact in the same school. The educational diversity rationale did not emerge nationally until Justice Powell articulated it in his famous *Bakke* concurrence (Harper & Reskin, 2005; Wood, 2003). Consequently, the U.S. Supreme Court has only explicitly recognized a diversity interest in post-secondary education (U.S. Supreme Court, 2003, 2007). Although there is a persuasive argument that a majority of the Court in *Parents Involved* found a compelling state interest in K-12 educational diversity (Love, 2009), it remains an open question.

After *Bakke*, there have been many definitions of diversity. From our own survey of current definitions of diversity, a common theme emerged. As Derek Avery recently observed, “diversity scholars have covered some facets of demographic diversity (i.e., sex, race/ethnicity, and age) significantly more than others (e.g., religion, sexual orientation, social class). As a result of these imbalances, there is more theory and evidence to draw upon concerning the more studied demographics” (Avery, 2011). Likewise, Ellen Berrey made similar observations about diversity definitions in higher education:

“Diversity” connotes racial minorities yet also is a vague, plastic referent. Diversity discourse on campus and many diversity programs use race as a modal category, but they rely on an expansive vision of difference that includes multiple categories of identity and difference. Moreover, diversity discourse and programs do not primarily define race in terms of the economic, institutional, or racial status of African Americans. They tend to define race primarily as a cultural identity of an individual or group, expressed through interpersonal interactions (Berrey, 2011).

The educational diversity definitions we have encountered are either categorical and amorphous as opposed to holistic and precise.

## A More Precise Definition of Diversity

We propose what we believe is a more holistic and precise definition of diversity based on Scott Page's pioneering books, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Page, 2007) and *Diversity and Complexity* (Page, 2011). As the American Bar Association Presidential Initiative Commission on Diversity concluded, Page has “unequivocally” disproven the “persistent myth that creating a diverse workforce is at odds with high quality outcomes” because “precise mathematical models [can] prove that in many instances diversity trumps ‘smarts’ and produces better results” (American Bar Association, 2010). Diversity “means differences in how people see, categorize, understand, and go about improving the world” (Page, 2007). We identify two types of diversity that apply individually and organizationally to both how we view ourselves and how we view other people. After Page we divide diversity into two types: (1) cognitive diversity and (2) identity diversity.

### Cognitive Diversity

Cognitive diversity is different ways of thinking about, evaluating, and solving various problems. It works best with conjunctive tasks, group tasks where the entire team must work together, as opposed to disjunctive tasks, individual tasks where only one person needs to succeed for the group to be successful. In addition, to leverage the maximum benefits of cognitive diversity, the conjunctive task should involve a difficult problem, the team members should possess diverse perspectives, and the team members should be selected from a large population and not be too small in number (Page, 2007).

Page also identified three benefits of cognitive diversity. First, “diverse perspectives, heuristics, interpretations, and mental models improve our collective ability to solve problems and make accurate predictions” (Page, 2007). Second, under certain circumstances, larger groups of

people can complete particular tasks and solve particular problems better than more capable individuals (Rheingold, 2003; Surowiecki, 2004). Third, with a more cognitively diverse team, there is “the increased probability of a savant” for that particular problem. “If we sample widely, we’re more likely to find the one person who can solve the problem or who can make the key breakthrough” (Page, 2007).

In light of these sensible benefits, there is little dispute over the desirability of cognitive diversity. In fact, the rationale behind interdisciplinary research is cognitive diversity. There is dispute, however over how and from where to obtain cognitive diversity. Furthermore, there is greater disagreement over the other form of diversity, identity diversity.

### **Identity Diversity**

Identity diversity is the many different ways people self-identify themselves with characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. While people who are identity diverse are not always cognitively diverse, the two types of diversity do overlap. Although identity diversity can be a source of conflict among teams (Page, 2007), identity diversity is unavoidable. The demographic reality is that the United States and the broader world is becoming increasingly more diverse in individual identity. “If companies are to flourish in today’s ever-diversifying markets, they will have to attract, develop, coordinate, and retain a much broader base of human resources than in previous years,” making “diversity management” a modern business imperative (Avery, 2011).

Although identity diversity encompasses more than race, racial demographic data is the most readily available. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau has projected that whites will become a minority in the United States by 2050 (Dougherty, 2009). The 2010 Census “underscores the transformative nature of growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The number of Hispanics and

Asians is soaring, the number of blacks is growing slowly and whites are almost at a standstill. ...

The decade also witnessed a large increase in the number of people who identified themselves as “multiracial” (Morello, 2011).

Justice O’Connor recognized the necessity for both cognitive and identity diversity in higher education, writing in *Grutter* that “diversity promotes learning outcomes and better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce, for society, and for the legal profession” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2003). If cognitive diversity is essential for innovation and identity diversity is a demographic reality, then understanding and encouraging diversity is a valuable goal that should be pursued earnestly and seriously. Accordingly, core diversity is what is needed.

### **From Surface to Core Diversity**

If diversity is worth furthering, nurturing, and harnessing, then such efforts should be sincere and attain authentic, deep, lasting core diversity instead of token, surface diversity (R. K. Lee, 2009). Such core diversity encourages leaders “to reconceptualize the purpose and value of having a diverse membership to better enable all members to shape the organization’s work” (R. Lee, 2012). Such core diversity management commonly requires large-scale organizational change and employee activism for success. In addition, there is a marked difference between endorsement of the concept of diversity and activism to ensure that diversity is actually promoted in an organization. Current organizational research demonstrates that the effect of diversity on an organization is largely contingent upon the level of support for such diversity within the organization (Avery, 2011). As Justice Powell observed in *Bakke*, “‘the nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure’ to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples” (U.S. Supreme Court, 1977). Justice O’Connor later echoed Justice Powell’s sentiments in *Grutter*, writing that “the path to leadership must be visibly open to talented

and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2003). For American democracy to continue to benefit from cognitive and identity diversity, our leaders at all levels of the public and private sectors need not only to possess cultural competency and inclusive excellence but also to reflect the cognitive and identity diversity of our heterogeneous nation to demonstrate that the United States possesses a true meritocracy where anyone has a fair chance to achieve success.

### **The Goal of Meritocracy in the United States**

Fundamental to our central argument is the assumption that meritocracy is a desirable goal for the United States. We know this is a bold assumption to make, but it is based on the reality of U.S. society. Inequality is built into our society and will remain so as long as we remain a capitalist society that believes in our being exceptional in the world. Both capitalism and our claim to be exceptional lead to inequality and point to hierarchy. This is the reality of our cultural bias (Baez, 2006). We can choose to fight valiantly for a total end to inequality or acknowledge its permanence and seek to diminish its magnitude. We choose the latter.

For the purposes of this essay, meritocracy is defined as Thomas Jefferson proposed it—without the reference to any human being as rubbish. Although he did not use the word meritocracy and would definitely not agree with our modernizing it to include *all* people. Jefferson’s meritocracy is a system wherein individuals are rewarded based on their having the capacity and skills necessary to compete in a given institution or sector. Our attempt to redefine and repurpose meritocracy here is our “attempt to gain control over the power to do [so] (Baez, 2006, p. 1012; Bourdieu, 1979/1990).” We acknowledge that our position as academics means we can assert power over the definition of terms. We understand that there are clear problems with the

idea of meritocracy as it is used in some arenas, but we disagree with those who assert that it is impossible to erase the negative association between merit and race (Baez, 2006).

With the existence of various kinds of biases in society both interpersonal and institutional, the U.S. is not yet a meritocracy. The elimination of biases is a critical prerequisite to achieving a meritocratic society. The roles of schools in such a system is to maximize the capacity and skills of the population. U.S. public schools as institutions of the U.S. embody the biases of our society. Given this reality, they do not presently serve the goal of meritocracy. Instead, they reinforce the many isms that serve as restraints on the potential of individuals and the nation. The individuals who govern our public schools and make up our leadership and teaching forces are products of the very system they perpetuate. An intervention must necessarily begin in public schools where an overwhelming majority of U.S. citizens ages 5 to 18 are socialized. Until the individuals governing, leading, and teaching in public schools gain an understanding of how isms inhibit their success and the success of their students, it is unlikely the system will change.

Therefore, we are putting forth an argument that core diversity is essential to K-12 education because it promises the elimination of the isms that stand between us and meritocracy. Core diversity would allow public schools to fulfill the generally agreed upon goals of public schools in the U.S.

### **The Goals of Schooling in the U.S.**

Diversity writ large is essential to education because it promotes the generally agreed upon goals of schooling: political, economic, and social. Although the specifics vary over time, the goals of U.S. education have been the same since before publicly funded schools became available. In the days following the American Revolution, the primary goal was to preserve the republic by

inculcating voting eligible white males with the values of democratic republicanism (Kaestle, 1983; Rudolph, 1965). This goal was accompanied by a focus on values associated with self-sufficiency and productivity grounded in protestant ethics. Our present day discourse still addresses the civic role (Knight Abowitz, 2002), but with far less emphasis than the economic necessity of creating an innovative and productive workforce (NCEE, 2007). The social goals that were once central have also been marginalized by the economic goals and tend to receive attention largely when practices conflict with vocal interest groups. Regardless of how much focus a subset of goals receives, the trio of politics, economics, and society remain the defining features of the goals of public schooling.

### **Political goals**

The United States of America is a democratic republic. Our form of government is dependent upon individual citizens practicing their rights and responsibilities to engage in civic life, choose wisely in elections, and hold elected representatives accountable for their service. The ability to do this well depended in the early years on both a general belief in the idea of democratic republicanism, which was a paradigm shift for colonials, and the capacity to engage. Education, therefore, was to focus on reading and basic mathematics. Thomas Jefferson asserted that the combination of a free press and a literate public would assist in maintaining a robust political debate and an informed and active citizenry:

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society, but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education (Jefferson, 1820)

Inculcating citizens with the ideals of democratic republicanism was the political focus of one era; patriotism served as the focus for another. The role of schools in promoting loyalty to the nation is essential to some and ominous to others. The tension between blind patriotism and active democratic participation is evident in the public controversies surrounding issues like the Pledge of Allegiance and the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. The socialist who authored the Pledge sought to create a sense of unity in a diverse society. The legislators who added “under God” sought to create a hierarchy of religion and define the boundaries of political acceptability within patriotism (Spring, 2010). An important goal of the JROTC, created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was to instill a sense of patriotism in our youth. Our standing volunteer military forces comes with the need to recruit. JROTC is a way to promote patriotism and recruit adolescents for service. But where are JROTC programs located? And what kinds of students are encouraged to join?

More recently democratic and civic education have received greater attention among scholars and educators, but far less attention from politicians. Democratic education is a pedagogical approach that uses the principles of democracy in teaching. Civic education seeks to teach children about the obligations of citizenship.

Social studies education is regularly the place of political battles. The history of the U.S. is fraught with landmines for those who seek to promote blind loyalty to the nation through the nurturing of a national identity. At any point in the nation’s history it is possible to highlight the negative impact of wealthy white male privilege—racism, sexism, classism, and economic and military imperialism. A recent exposition of this idea is “that, compared to any other nation, America’s past is a bright and shining light. America was, and is, the city on the hill, the fountain of hope, the beacon of liberty (Schweikart & Allen, 2007, pg. xxi).” Taking this into consideration, the existence of the undeniable parts of U.S. history rooted in manifest destiny makes it difficult to

promote the kind of patriotism some would prefer. Regardless, as the author of the original pledge desired, it is possible to create unity among diverse groups.

### **Economic goals**

With the industrialization of the U.S. came the interest of industrialists in schools. Business leaders see schools as the places where future laborers are trained. The buildings and practices of schools have mirrored factory life in many ways: lining up to move from place to place; staying to one side of hallways or stairwells; responding to bells; and respecting strict hierarchies—even those imposed in classrooms like the teacher’s aide who may or may not be an adult but still has authority. The twenty-first century equivalent is the promotion of “soft skills”: punctuality, proper professional dress, good communication, being a team player, among others (Rosenbaum, 2001).

From the National Defense Education Act of 1958 to President Obama’s Race to the Top Initiative, the strategic and economic interests of the nation were pursued through schools. During the Cold War, schools were also expected to create the next scientists and engineers who could build weapons delivery systems—rockets and missiles. And lest anyone mistake the development of weapons delivery systems as a purely defense—or political—goal, he should remember the admonition of President Eisenhower when he introduced the phrase “military industrial complex” to the nation. Twenty-first century political leaders call for schools to create globally competitive workers. These workers will primarily occupy the highest-level jobs in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Even the method of promoting these goals is imbued with the spirit of competition that underlies our capitalist economic system. What is missing from the current press for STEM graduates to compete globally is an equivalent press for linguists and political strategists who have intimate knowledge of other cultures. Our politics and economics are inextricably intertwined.

## Social goals

The social goals of education are likely the most controversial. During the common school era, public schools were meant to tame the unwashed immigrant masses and make them American. To that end, children were put in schools to learn hygiene and morality. This moral education was a combination of Protestantism and patriotism. One of the earliest and most lasting rejections of that effort to properly socialize children was the creation of Catholic schools. Catholics rejected the use of Protestant doctrine and did not believe Protestantism and Catholicism could find common ground in the teaching of morals, particularly for the Catholic immigrants filling public school classrooms. This schism did not have any lasting impact on the moral education in public education.

The social goals of public education can be categorized into multiple overlapping categories: social roles (e.g, gender), morality, sexuality, hygiene, diet and nutrition, discipline. Historically, it has been the role of schools to teach boys and girls their places in society as breadwinners and consumer-homemakers; control the sexual behavior of girls; manage the eating and fitness habits of the young; and ensure that young people know how to follow rules. Although the focus has shifted over time from taming the unwashed immigrant masses to reducing urban crime to promoting cultural uniformity of roles, the idea that schools have the charge and capacity to shape the future adults of society by imposing social controls remains.

In fact, the argument we are making in this essay is that schools *are* in a position to affect the way people interact across race/ethnicity and social class. Schools *are* still where children are socialized; and giving them the opportunity to socialize with racially, ethnically, economically, and otherwise diverse peers means giving them opportunities to develop relationships that could alter uninformed ideas about different kinds of people.

A significant challenge to the social goals of schooling is promoting general goals while respecting particular values, which is impossible. Total acceptance and tolerance is impossible because there will be groups whose ideologies require intolerance. Their intolerance is essentially intolerable in an environment that promotes diversity. Tolerance and mutual respect, therefore, have their limits (Anderson, 2002). So how should a given society determine what its goals are and which particular values can be marginalized? This question remains unanswered in the U.S., but it is still worth putting forth reasonable arguments for what can be considered worthwhile social goals and being prepared to acknowledge the contradiction in embracing diversity and being intolerant of the ideologues of intolerance.

### **Promoting Cognitive and Identity Diversity in K-12 Schools**

Given that diversity writ large does indeed further the political, economic, and social goals of schooling. How do we implement such diversity on a local level? Although the primary focus of this article is public schools, there is no reason why private and parochial schools cannot engage in the same pedagogical practices and holistic diversity analysis.

#### **Cognitive and identity diversity and the goals of schooling**

One pedagogical practice has the potential to promote cognitive and identity diversity and meet our contemporary goals for schooling inasmuch as we can agree upon them. The challenge? It is not new; it simply has yet to be properly implemented and brought to scale in any jurisdiction. It is also fraught with controversy because of the impulse of privileged persons to protect the status quo. Multicultural education can benefit all students, not just students of color and speakers of other languages (Zirkel, 2008).

### **Multicultural education**

According to an extensive review of the literature, “[m]ulticultural education practice...improves the learning, achievement, and engagement of all students—higher and lower achieving students, students of color and white students, lower and higher SES students....[G]ood multicultural education practice is, at its core, simply good educational practice (Zirkel, 2008, p.1167).” But what is “good multicultural education practice”?

Multicultural education practice is far more complex than integrating multicultural texts into a curriculum—or tacking them on for special occasions. It requires five specific components: (1) content integration; (2) knowledge construction; (3) prejudice reduction; (4) equity pedagogy; and (5) an empowering school culture(Banks, 2004) . Most educators are familiar with content integration because this is what is taught in professional preparation programs—often in one course among many requirements. But without the other four components, what is happening in classrooms across the U.S. is not multicultural education. It is curricular tokenism.

***Content integration.*** Content integration, which might also be described as exposing “students to a wide variety of materials, information, and ways of being (Zirkel, 2008, p.1167),” is the most straightforward components. It is most widely known because it is likely the easiest to adopt without threatening the status quo.

***Knowledge construction.*** Knowledge construction, or helping “students learn to question and consider how knowledge is constructed and who is doing the constructing as they explore curricular content (Zirkel, 2008, p.1167),” is far more complex. It necessarily begins in teacher preparation programs where pre-service teachers may or may not learn to acknowledge their own epistemologies and recognize that others may construct knowledge differently. Teachers cannot

lead students in investigating knowledge construction, if they are not equipped to do it for themselves.

Language learning and bilingual education leads to a better understanding of how people construct knowledge. Language is more than just words. Our language reflects a culture and how they see the world. When one learns another language, one gains a second mind—a new way of going through the world. In bilingual education, one gains this new mind while also engaging with native speakers. As Allport (1954) pointed out, it is insufficient to put different kinds of people in proximity to one another. Sustained and meaningful interaction is how we begin to break down prejudices. Bilingual classrooms are perfect examples of both cognitive and identity diversity because speakers of different languages are necessarily cognitively different from each other. The native languages present in an environment, the more cognitive diversity there is.

***Prejudice reduction.*** Prejudice reduction, or learning “about other groups and explor[ing] similarities and differences between people in an open, reflective way (Zirkel, 2008, p.1167),” is a direct threat to the status quo and the maintenance of privilege. Like knowledge construction, prejudice reduction is likely to be more successful in environments with sustained interaction with other people—or identity diversity (Allport, 1954)—but even in homogenous environments it is possible to help students identify their prejudices, and the prejudices that injure them, and learn to empathize. This is where multicultural education can play an important role in poor, rural, and homogenous communities as well as poor, urban, and homogenous communities. Both are well aware of the prejudices others have about them—rednecks, hillbillies, ghetto, gangbangers—and are therefore well positioned to recognize the damage that can be done by holding onto prejudices.

***Equity pedagogy.*** Equity pedagogy, or teaching “students in a way that empowers them as constructors and explorers of knowledge, and teach[ing] them in such a way that diverse learning

styles are accommodated (Zirkel, 2008, p.1167)," is another component that like content integration seems to have taken hold in teacher preparation and practice. Perhaps this is because the inclusion of special education students in mainstream classrooms requires this approach. The challenge is making sure that teachers are aware of the many different ways that students can be empowered or disempowered. All of the preceding components of multicultural education practice help in reducing the degree of disempowerment. This is another area where both cognitive and identity diversity come into play. At the root of diverse learning styles is variation in ways of knowing, knowledge construction, and approaches to problem solving. Having students with varying learning styles solve problems together creates opportunities for students to learn to appreciate diversity of thought. The degree to which identity diversity contributes to cognitive diversity—beyond linguistic diversity—is not entirely clear (Page, 2007), but it is reasonable to suggest that individuals developing in distinct cultural contexts might approach problem solving in distinct ways.

***Empowering school culture.*** It is ultimately essential to create an empowering school culture or more specifically one where "students feel empowered to achieve their best, in which all students are exposed to the highest level of curricular content, and in which the most effective education practices and policies are enacted in just and equitable ways that attend closely to the need of individual students (Zirkel, 2008, p.1167)." While all of the elements of multicultural education practice have implications for both school leader and teacher preparation programs, this is the component that needs to be better integrated into school leadership preparation. Instruction on multicultural education practice—largely focused on content integration and equity pedagogies—appears regularly in teacher education programs, but there is a less of a sense of how or whether it is integrated into leadership preparation.

### A Holistic Tailored Inquiry

The school desegregation analytical framework—well-established through decades of school integration in thousands of American school districts—can be refitted to guide an analysis of diversity writ large at the school, school district, or regional level. This framework is characterized by using numerical balance measures as a starting point and applying different factors to analyze all aspects of school operations. Although the school desegregation analytical framework has been deservedly discredited (Fischbach, Rhee, & Cacace, 2008), we believe it nevertheless can be repurposed to guide a holistic diversity analysis entirely different from its original desegregation rationale.

At the onset, we cannot overemphasize the importance of a sincere, holistic, data-driven inquiry custom-tailored to the local idiosyncrasies of a particular school, school district, or region. Not only to survive possible legal challenges but also to ensure the effective promotion of diversity writ large, education policymakers need to conduct a careful analysis of privilege and marginalization in their local schools, gather necessary data, and document evidence-based findings on how their specific local policies intend to further holistic diversity. This inquiry is not intended to serve as a proxy for any oversimplified category, such as race (which of course was the basis of original school desegregation legal doctrine), nor is it intended to encourage racial balancing.

### Numerical Balance Measures to Start

Perhaps one of the most controversial elements of school desegregation legal doctrine was the use of racial balance as an analytical starting point (U.S. Supreme Court, 1992). Racial balancing is the “process of trying to remedy racial imbalance by manipulating the ratio of students by race at each school such that the proportion of white and minority students at each school

closely parallels the proportion of white and minority students in the school system as a whole” (Fischbach, et al., 2008). As Justice Thomas observed in *Parents Involved*, “Although presently observed racial imbalance might result from past de jure [government-sponsored] segregation, racial imbalance can also result from any number of innocent private decisions, including voluntary housing choices” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007).

Although not advocating racial balancing or any other numerical balancing by category, we nevertheless believe that numerical balance measures reporting the number of students who fall into various identity categories provide a good descriptive snapshot of a school or school district. Such a snapshot provides an objective (albeit limited) performance measure and helps promote accountability. In his influential *Parents Involved* concurrence, Justice Kennedy approved “tracking enrollments, performance, and other statistics by race” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007).

The key difference, however, between categorical data and holistic data is that categorical data is primarily motivated by demography whereas holistic data is motivated by pedagogy. For example, race and socioeconomic status are common categories used to gather categorical data. In contrast, a particular school district might scrutinize No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) data and interview teachers and school leadership to conclude that the two lowest performing neighborhood middle schools are racially and socioeconomically isolated with poor Latino students who are factually marginalized (*e.g.*, demographically a minority ethnic group in the district and socioeconomically less affluent than the district average) and redraw the middle school attendance zones to ensure that the factually marginalized poor Latino students and factually more privileged white students (*e.g.*, demographically the majority ethnic group in the district and socioeconomically more affluent than the district average) are assigned to the same middle schools so that both privileged and marginalized students can benefit from holistic diversity and the poorer

Latino students might improve academically. The primary difference between the former and latter data is that the former sought categorical data for its own sake whereas the latter sought holistic data for a specific pedagogical purpose.

While data already collected pursuant to federal statutes and regulations (like NCLB, the U.S. Census, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and analogous state statutes and regulations can help provide such numerical balance snapshots, school leadership must scrutinize such preexisting data closely to ensure that it accurately reports the precise information needed to assess the relevant, particular, context-specific diversity characteristics. For example, the UCLA Civil Rights Project has criticized August 7, 2006, changes to U.S. Department of Education student racial data reporting protocols as making it “extremely difficult, and sometimes impossible, to conduct meaningful research or monitor civil rights compliance and educational accountability for students by race and ethnicity” (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2006). Taking holistic diversity seriously, however, also means interpreting data in a more sophisticated way than via categorical approaches.

Because such holistic diversity—by definition—is local and limited in nature, schools, school districts, or regions may want to collect their own data custom tailored to the particular diversity characteristics they seek to examine. We also believe that another vestige from the school desegregation era—the factors first articulated in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (U.S. Supreme Court, 1968)—provide a useful framework to help educational policymakers brainstorm possible policy tools and data sources.

### **The *Green* Factors Applied Broadly**

The so-called *Green* factors were first articulated by Justice Brennan in 1968 as concerning the “composition of student bodies . . . , faculty, staff, transportation, extracurricular activities and

facilities” and encompassing “every facet of school operations” (U.S. Supreme Court, 1968). To those six required *Green* factors was added an optional seventh, quality of education. These factors “need not be a rigid framework.” They “may be related or interdependent[,] … intertwined or synergistic in their relation” (U.S. Supreme Court, 1992). We have categorized them by (1) assignment (of students, faculty, and staff); (2) transportation; (3) extracurricular activities; (4) facilities; and (5) quality of education.

**Assignment.** Assignment concerns the way a school district or school permanently assigns students, faculty, and staff to a particular school. Because most interpersonal interaction at a school occurs between the students enrolled in a particular school and the faculty and staff who work there, these factors are the most important to consider when evaluating diversity.

**Student.** Student assignment can be measured on a variety of levels, from individual classrooms, student grade levels (by school or districtwide), individual schools, individual school districts, and geographic region. Justice Kennedy in *Parents Involved* approved of “drawing attendance zones with general recognition of the demographics of neighborhoods” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007). Given the educational mission of schools, this is the most important—and most controversial—factor.

Although not necessarily motivated by the same holistic diversity considerations outlined in this article, school districts such as the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) in California (Dickinson, 2008), the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) in California—whose plan survived legal challenge in California state court (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2009)—and the Jefferson County School District (JCSD) in Kentucky (Kiel, 2009)—who remained undaunted by the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Parents Involved* that its prior plan was unconstitutional—have employed holistic student assignment policies that employ a variety of race and race-neutral

factors. SFUSD uses “a variety of race-neutral factors including socioeconomic status, geographic proximity, and academic achievement, among many others” (Dickinson, 2008). BUSD’s plan considers factors such as family income, race, geography, and parental education level:

Rather than looking at the racial composition of large neighborhoods in the city, [BUSD] has divided the city into more than 440 micro-neighborhoods. In this system, all the families submit their school choices. If the choices put the school within the range defined as desegregated in the city and the number of choices is equal to or less than the school’s capacity, all choices are granted. If the school is out of balance, then the system will give preference to students from the micro-neighborhoods most likely to foster diversity. Since no one looks at the race or ethnicity of the individual student—in each micro-neighborhood, students from each race are treated identically—and no individual is chosen or rejected for a school on the basis of his or her race or ethnicity, the system squares with the conditions established by the [U.S. Supreme] Court (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2009).

Finally, JCSD uses “student diversity, median household income, and adult educational attainment” to assign students to schools (Kiel, 2009). Although most school districts continue to employ categorical student assignment plans, education policymakers can borrow ideas—especially race-neutral ones—from these categorical plans to apply to their own tailored, holistic plans.

Because urban and suburban school districts often lack certain kinds of diversity within their boundaries, voluntary interdistrict transfers (*i.e.*, where a student who resides in one school district volunteers to transfer to another school district) are a particularly important way to further diversity. Lest cynics assume that affluent, predominantly white suburbanites will resist such

interdistrict efforts, a Charles Hamilton Houston Institute study of eight such programs found that after initial resistance affluent whites ultimately recognized the value of such programs. In the affluent suburban Clayton School District in Missouri, for example, when informed that the voluntary inter-district transfer program with St. Louis was at risk, students at Clayton High School organized a walkout to, according to a local news story, “show support for diversity in this top-ranked school district and for their friends. Organizers asked students to sign petitions to maintain the school’s diverse student population” (Wells, et al., 2009). While the issues implicated by interdistrict transfers are quite complicated, the eight programs in the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute Study demonstrate the promise and potential of voluntary interdistrict transfers.

*Faculty and Staff.* Faculty assignment examines the way that teachers and non-instructional staff (*e.g.*, janitors, secretaries, cafeteria workers, bus drivers) are assigned to schools. Because teachers and staff are school district employees, a school district has much more flexibility in where to assign them. While most learning to examine life occurs between students, significant learning can also occur between students and teachers (Parker, 2008). The most obvious way a school district can increase faculty diversity is through recruiting. In *Parents Involved*, Justice Kennedy approved “recruiting students and faculty in a targeted fashion” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007).

**Transportation.** Because our cities and suburbs remain extremely segregated by residential housing patterns (Dickinson, 2008), an unavoidable reality is that some forms of diversity writ large are only accessible across longer distances that require the use of student transportation—be it bussing or parents driving their children. While the days of forced bussing are long gone, the length of time and accompanying cost of transporting students is an important factor to consider.

While maximizing voluntary transportation measures, where parents can volunteer to drive their students farther for better programs or enhanced opportunities, can help minimize controversy, this factor will remain a flashpoint. Many parents prefer nearby neighborhood schools to any other student assignment approach and will often use transportation burden to justify neighborhood schools. For example, in 2011, the Wake County, North Carolina school board proposed to dismantle its income-based student assignment system in favor of neighborhood schools to reduce bussing (McCrummen, 2011).

***Extracurricular Activities.*** Although diverse student interactions ideally will take place during regular instructional time, extracurricular activities provide a novel way for students across school or school district lines to interact through sports events, joint art activities (*e.g.*, plays), or student-interest clubs.

***Facilities.*** Because students enroll in a physical school, the location and availability of school facilities, combined with local residential housing patterns and student assignment plans, can have a marked impact on school diversity. In *Parents Involved*, Justice Kennedy recommended “strategic site selection of new schools” as a permissible way to increase school diversity (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007). In addition, school designers have also created innovative school buildings that are better suited to cultivating the increased student interaction essential to learning to examine life (Krings, 2011).

***Quality of Education.*** As exemplified by the past success of the magnet schools program (Dickinson, 2008), parents are willing to drive their students to desirable schools with a high quality of education. We divide this factor into special programs and technology.

***Special Programs.*** Schools can create special programs that either focus on a particular part of the curriculum (*e.g.*, the arts, the sciences, or language immersion) or are academically

rigorous with selective enrollment (*e.g.*, a gifted and talented or honors program) and provide students who possess holistic diversity preferential admission. Justice Kennedy in *Parents Involved* encouraged “allocating resources for special programs” (U.S. Supreme Court, 2007).

**Technology.** There are many ways schools can leverage technology to foster diversity. For example, geographic information system (GIS) software can take student assignment data and generate custom maps of a particular school, school district, or region. In addition, distance-learning technology can also help overcome travel distances and allow for increased cognitive and identity diversity in the classroom.

### **Learning to Examine Life**

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how—even in the face of ongoing attempts to stop or diminish the value of the increasing diversity in the U.S.—it is still possible to promote diversity using the standards set by opponents of it. This idea may seem simplistic or naïve, but as Page (2007) has demonstrated “‘collective ability equals individual ability plus diversity’ and ... ‘diversity trumps ability’ are mathematical truths, not feel-good mantras.” The challenge in a society built upon privileging certain groups and marginalizing others is educating the privileged on how their work to maintain the status quo may be holding back the collective. Of course this would require a more collectivist approach to civil society, but that is not entirely outside the realm of possibility. We do have a capitalist economy, but we also have regulations and social programs that fly in the face of the purity of “laissez faire” capitalism.

At the heart of our argument is the assertion that if we are self-reflective and acknowledge the positions and privileges we enjoy, and the attendant cost to others, we are in a better position to appreciate the perspectives of others. And if we seriously consider the goals we have as a nation—

with the knowledge that there will never be unanimous agreement—and plot a course for the accomplishment of those goals, considering every citizen and aspiring citizen of the nation, we will necessarily have to put our biases aside. We will have to if we are to capitalize on the capacities and skills of everyone and maximize our own. Page's (2007) work suggests that the limits of our individual talents can be expanded by joining diverse groups. We are all better served by diversity.

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