

Critique

The thesis of “From the Ground Up . . .” may be characterized as optimistic, imaginative, and inspirational, viewing as it does the extended role of multiethnic literature in humanities curricula. Unless a humane community, or even a sense of community, as envisioned, is built, the viability of America as a pluralistic nation is very much at risk. Placing the beginning of building such a realization of a “sense of community” upon the individual’s responsible actions resulting from the reflection and decision well justifies the title Bedrosian selected.

Of course, Bedrosian’s closing comment is realistic in its assertion that, although changing the literature curriculum may not totally exorcise racism, it still will set in motion a dynamic of thought bringing to many a perception that suffering is not the lot of any one cultural group. The awareness that there are commonalities of experience might lead us to discover a sense of community.

The essay should provoke advocates of the teaching of multi-ethnic literature to examine areas and processes that will achieve the social aim hoped for. For this, researchers, scholars, and teachers will have to go well beyond the walls of collegiate classrooms. This critique can only briefly suggest the scope of what remains to be done.

The term “From the Ground Up” can be applied to another type of “building”: the extension of such instruction to the elementary school grades, in the various secondary school years, and then at the collegiate level.

What should be investigated is how the elementary school language arts curriculum planner may substitute as soon as possible multi-ethnic material in texts and anthologies for what has been too often material that was mostly Anglo-American or Euro-American in content. Children in the United States should be acquainted at all levels with the various literatures of the United States.

Inevitably, inextricably bound with these modifications must come extended attention to teacher preparation. Teachers must have in-depth knowledge of the range of multi-ethnic literature as well as first-hand acquaintance with the ways of best bringing this material to the children and, later, to young people in pre-collegiate classes.

Reading and reviewing the essay being examined, one has to conclude that the author’s concern is with the centrality of the teacher in having instruction in multi-ethnic literature succeed. The role of the instructor is crucial in helping to bring about the changes desired. One may infer from the author’s caveats that teachers must guard against being insensitive to students’ reactions to the material. The literature should be taught so that no students feel alienated or believe the discussion is irrelevant in their lives. Bedrosian also warns against teachers indulging in intangible abstractions that are unclear to their students. Teachers

must be careful not to foist their judgments and perceptions upon the students; rather, students must be led to self-discovery after their own reading and reflection.

Bringing students to existential encounters such as this is not a simple process. It almost goes without saying that teachers have to be more than just knowledgeable of the subject matter. At collegiate and higher levels, the instructors must be able to provide students with enlightening experiences for “interaction with the texts.” Certainly, the classroom atmosphere has to be such that students will feel at ease in “opening up,” developing and asking questions. Experiences must be humane and humanistic. Students will be enabled thereby to arrive at perceptions of what is universally shared by individuals of all cultures.

Finally, it should be noted that Bedrosian stresses the importance of students being aware of cultural substrata in their searches for answers to questions about themselves. In this connection instructors must be the purveyors of information on ethnic or folk traditions. In doing research, teachers would be wise to depend upon relevant research done by their colleagues in other interdisciplinary ethnic studies areas. The pooling of resources and research in the area would bring about a fine range of insights and approaches regarding the effective presentation of material leading to the guidance of students toward the goals enumerated in the essay.

This essay is a fine springboard toward necessary studies that will lead us to recognize our shared concerns. With our own enlightenment and in developing new perceptions in our students, we shall be closer to achieving the “sense of community” Bedrosian seeks.

—Cortland P. Auser