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# Challenging Cultural Concepts

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EVERAL YEARS AGO, AN ARTICLE in this journal called multiculturalism “a spiritual imperative” for Adventist schools. In 1990, a theme issue on the subject won the JOURNAL a Distinguished Achievement award from the Educational Press Association. The topic continues to be a matter of concern because of the intercultural and interracial strife we hear about almost daily in many parts of the world. As our church carries the Gospel Commission to every “nation,” “kindred,” “tongue,” and “people,” it is inevitably becoming more diverse. As a result, misunderstandings occur. We must try harder to understand one another and find positive strategies for working together in Christ to reach our shared goals. The articles in the special section beginning on page 12 were assigned with this purpose in mind.

Multicultural instruction is part of the solution to prejudice and misconceptions about other people and cultures. However, diversity and multiculturalism make people uncomfortable because they challenge the status quo and assumptions about the “right” way to do things. Looking at the story of Creation, Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson finds that diversity is a divine gift, and offers ideas for building community amid our differences. Bob Egbert suggests ways to re-examine cherished stereotypes and misconceptions about people who are different from ourselves.

Multiculturalism also forces us to deal with revelations about the contributions and perspectives of minorities and oppressed peoples, as well as assumptions about power and privilege. Closer to home, it demands that we examine ways in which the interaction of race, class, and gender influences education. Caleb Rosado contends that multiculturalism is not just for minority students. He describes what a multicultural school looks like, and says that we will need to address five areas in order to empower all groups: Perspectives, Policies, Programs, Personnel, and Practices.

In a recent interview, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s daughter Bernice said that “ultimately racism is a spiritual issue.” She called for self-examination, listening, identification, forgiving, and embracing—all of which require hard psychological and spiritual work. To a large degree, the concerns she describes occur whenever different cultures interact.

Understanding and empathy are what multiculturalism is really all about. It must go far beyond a “museum approach” to education and life, in which schools simply observe a few special days or offer some fragmented facts about strange customs and exotic locales. Jeannette Bryson and Janet Mallery provide specific ideas to help your students understand and empathize with other peoples as you integrate multiculturalism throughout the entire curriculum.

A significant concern about multiculturalism is that, in the rush to break down prejudice, we may fail to examine cultural practices (including our own!) under the magnifying glass of the gospel. Finding a balance between celebrating diversity and upholding Christian principles is a legitimate concern, and several of the authors in this issue deal with it forthrightly.

The rewards of multiculturalism are many: helping students work and play cooperatively with others, enhancing academic achievement of minority children, preparing students to live and work with others in an increasingly multicultural society and world, easing culture shock for travelers and missionaries (see Charles Tidwell’s article), and instilling in students an appreciation for diversity and a love for all God’s children.—B.J.R.