This important collection of essays offers a sustained philosophical examination of fundamental questions raised by multicultural education in primary and secondary schools. The essays focus on both theory and policy. They discuss the relation between culture and identity, the role of reason in bridging cultural divisions, and the civic implications of multiculturalism in the teaching of history and literature. Several of the essays examine aspects of multicultural policies in California and New York, as well as the curriculum guidelines promulgated by the National Council for the Social Studies.

Although there exists an extensive literature on multiculturalism in the primary and secondary schools, it remains largely unknown outside professional circles. Moreover, it offers no philosophically sophisticated treatments of multicultural education’s pivotal concepts and commitments. This volume, which carefully addresses the philosophical issues surrounding multicultural education, will be welcomed by philosophers and historians of education, sociologists, professional educators and policymakers, other academics, journalists, and the reading public.
Public education in a multicultural society
Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy

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Public education in a multicultural society

Policy, theory, critique

Edited by

ROBERT K. FULLINWIDER

University of Maryland, College Park
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Preface

The chapters in this book evolved from a Working Group on Multicultural Education that met twice in Washington, D.C., during 1991–92. Several members wrote papers discussed at the two meetings, then revised and rewrote them. Other members of the Working Group who did not write papers were nevertheless valuable interlocutors and commentators and helped improve all the papers. Those members (and their affiliations in 1991–92) were Peggy Altoff, Maryland Department of Education; Samuel Banks, Thomas DeLaine, and Jesse Gladden, Baltimore City School System; Richard Wilson, Montgomery County (Maryland) School System; John Fonte, U.S. Department of Education; John Bremer, The World & I magazine; Louis Harlan, Department of History, University of Maryland; Jorge Kló de Alva, Anthropology, Princeton University; and William Galston, Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, University of Maryland.

The Working Group discussed multicultural education in the context of the public school, not the college or university. Although there is considerable overlap in the debates about curriculum on our campuses and curriculum in our public schools, the issues are not always the same. The public schools educate children, rather than adults; they possess a distinctive civic mission; and they must be responsive to community and parental interests. The movement for multicultural education in the schools has an earlier origin than the multicultural reforms on the campuses, with a distinct history and supporting literature. Although the chapters in this book are quite pertinent to contemporary controversies in colleges and universities, their starting points are multicultural policies and challenges in the elementary and secondary school.

“Diversity” is the watchword in multicultural education, and the Working Group exhibited a number of diversities of its own. It contained members whose nations of origin are Ghana, Burma, Mexico,
Preface

and New Zealand; members from different regions of the United States; members younger and older; members more and less sympathetic to multicultural education; members with practical involvement in multicultural policies; and members with only theoretical interest.

In other ways, the Group reflected uniformities: all of the chapter writers but one are academics, and although the academic disciplines represented include history, literature, and education, philosophy heavily predominates. Moreover, partly as a result of accidents and drop-outs from the Group, the contributions don’t span as wide a range of political views as they might in another volume. It was never the aim in composing the Group, however, to represent every opinion. The leading goal was to convene a group of individuals who would not retreat behind their already well-fortified barricades to lob grenades at one another but who would engage in a lively give-and-take from which all would learn something. The Working Group discussions succeeded in this regard, and all the chapters are better for that success.

All the chapters are markedly better, as well, as a result of the painstaking editorial work of Arthur Evenchik, Editor at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy and contributor of a chapter of his own. Thanks are also owed to Carroll Linkins and Teresa Chandler of the Institute for helping to organize the Working Group meetings and for providing research assistance.

The Working Group and this consequent volume are projects of the Institute’s Program in Civic and Moral Education. The object of the Program is to deepen understanding of moral character and civic virtue, and to explore the best institutional means for their generation. The Program gratefully acknowledges the support it has had from the University of Maryland, the Spencer Foundation, and the Bradley Foundation.


RKF