

TESTIMONY PROVIDED FOR HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
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TOPIC: ETHNIC STUDIES  
DATE: February 27, 2018

As a Head of School and as a teacher, I welcome what I would call the first steps in designing curriculums that teach for pluralism and democracy.

Diverse, inclusive educational programs promote the acquisition of language and perspective through which students become critical thinkers and problem solvers.

A study in 2002 conducted by the University of Michigan found that pre-college exposure to diversity produced strong intellectual outcomes: 1) the ability to see multiple perspectives, 2) strong cognitive development, and, 3) greater complexity of thinking. And, at this point in time, diversity is not just confined to race or ethnicity; it includes members of the LGBTQ community; it includes economic levels; it includes native-born and immigrant Americans; it includes people with varied abilities.

Diverse programs benefit not only marginalized populations, but also white dominant populations. Knowledge of only one side of history limits intellectual growth and inhibits the capacity to build strong interactive communities on the local, national, and global level.

In 2016 Yale students petitioned the English department to diversify their offerings saying, “A year spent around a seminar table where the literary contributions of women, people of color, and queer folk are absent actively harms all students, regardless of their identity.”

While I recognize the concern that content choice remain within the schools, it is apparent that schools have not diversified their programs and resist opportunities to discuss issues around race, ethnicity, cultural traditions, religion, ableism or gender to name just a few. In avoiding those opportunities we effectively silence those who live with us in America. To choose not to engage with diversity contributes to the status quo that has created the divisive politics that plague us today.

The recommendations of H.794 are not just about serving the marginalized populations in Vermont; they are about teaching all students for freedom and democracy.

It is important to note that the curricular offerings of today, the so-called canon, were established by white straight males. The rest of the population was there, writing stories and music, participating in the wars, and supporting the national economy. It is imperative that we teach our students to hear all the voices of their fellow citizens.

The educator Paulo Freire wrote that “There is no neutrality in education. Education either functions as an instrument . . . to bring about conformity, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

I urge you to support this bill on behalf of educating for freedom.

