

# Diversity education is an essential education

By the Comparative Cultures students at SAMI

If in 1776, “The Great Seal of the United States proclaim [ed] the achievement of the American Revolutionary generation: ‘E Pluribus Unum – out of many, one,’” we must ask who were the many and who was the one at that time in history? In any reputable history class discussing 1776, the instructor would probe context (enter indigenous genocide, slavery/genocide and colonization), look at the speakers of this recycled proclamation (one was a slaveholder) and analyze intent (increased support for nationalism).

Then, the instructor would ask students to analyze American demographics since 1776 and make future projections, all under the auspice of who is the “many” then, now, and in the future. But what does it mean to be the one?

As we enter a new social landscape, we are faced with this dilemma: in our schools and communities, who is the one? Who benefits from the help and mandates put in place in 1776, and should a goal of our new generation be to update those ideas?

Now, we as students, support the intended goal of the Washington legislature to accurize school curriculums so that history in the classroom reflects the history of our diverse and constantly evolving community. Our wishes are strongly tied to the fact that we will be affected by the outcome of this decision directly.

House Bill 1314, supported by bipartisan academics, would provide students with a chance to learn about the culture of their peers, and provide a worldly view for students. The bill requires that the superintendent develop new state learning standards that “identify the knowledge and skills that all public school students need to be global citizens in a global society”. The bill also would have the superintendent create an ethnic studies model to be used across the state.

Mr. Jankanish cites that "alternative stories" would replace “common American stories” within the curriculum proposed by the bill. With a country as diverse as ours, it's only common sense that these "common American stories" are just as diverse and complicated. In sharing these stories of diversity and educating each other on cultures beyond our own, we are in turn understanding each other and coming to a sense of unity, not division.

Diversity and cultural education may not be mandated as a graduation requirement, yet it should be just as much as math and science. Learning about different cultures is the crux of the human experience, and the failure to expose

students to other cultures results in blind ignorance such as that of Mr. Jankanish.

Mr. Jankanish believes that the goal of the American public school should be simply to assimilate rather than to educate. His blindness to the injustices pressed upon students as recently as the 1968 Chicano Walkouts is astounding. America is often referred to as the melting pot, where every immigrant's culture is mixed together and eventually becomes one. Mr. Jankanish would rather serve immigrants a bowl of plain, American homogeneous broth and have them celebrate their culture behind closed doors.

Mr. Jankanish asserts that "to become "American" did not necessarily mean immigrants have to forgo the language and ceremonial life of their country of origin." However, while an immigrant may still hold onto their language and culture, the pressure to assimilate causes many immigrants to not pass on their mother tongue and cultural traditions to their children. In addition, many second generation students suffer from the ill effects of their parents' assimilation and feel less of a connection to their culture of origin. The culture still ends up being given up, just in a less explicit way.

American assimilation has been a reality for immigrants since time immemorial, so the idea that the teaching of culture would be a political strategy as Mr.

Jankanish implies is ridiculous. The teaching of culture is simply the attempt to put students' lives first. The goal is to help every student feel represented in their learning, as opposed to using curriculum that only reflects the white students' backgrounds. Culture has and always will be a part of the American experience. Culture is not political. Culture is human.

The truth is this: the proponents of HB 1314 and other measures like it no longer support the marginalization and racism behind the idea of one type of "American". They don't want to force immigrants to assimilate and forgo their own culture by pushing a racist and exclusionary model of "a true American" on their children and future. America is racist and discriminatory, but our future is defined by the actions we take now to foster understanding among Americans.

We can do no better than to end with words from Barack Obama: "We do not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it." HB 1314's purpose is to shape the future and create a more accepting environment for all peoples, no matter culture or ethnicity. The end goal is the global citizen, the human that understands our lives are layered and we are indeed all different. Those differences are what make us stronger. They are what make us human. They are what make us united.