

Multicultural Education

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All levels of institutional learning throughout the United States, particularly in the urban environment, have experienced a steady increase in the diversity of their student bodies. This increase is not only in the area of race, but also in the areas of religion, language, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and national origin. This imposes increasing levels of complexity on educators in domains spanning the entire field of education. In order to address the increased diversity within education a set of loosely defined strategies was developed under guise of Multicultural Education. Multicultural Education seeks to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds with the intent of enabling a more democratic and free American social system.

The roots of multicultural education lie in the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Gorski 1999). Although there were many instances of thought and discussion on the subject from scholars such as W.E.B Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson in the early 20th Century, the 1960s Civil Rights movement provided the necessary momentum to change thought into action. The primary goals of early ethnic studies was focused on African-Americans and designed to challenge the negative stereotypes prevalent in main stream scholarship and to perpetuate a more positive and accurate depiction of African-Americans in all walks of life. Their efforts resulted in important works such as “The Story of the Negro Retold” for senior high schools and “The Negro History Bulletin”, a monthly magazine for teachers and students featuring articles about outstanding curriculum, historical narratives and biographical sketches (Banks 1996). These works and many others provided not only an example for future Multicultural Education publications, but more importantly they provided early insight in how to structure Multicultural Education programs for all levels of the teaching profession.

As a means to achieve equality amongst all groups and classes of Americans, the civil rights movement focused much of its attention on the integration of the education system which lead to the following important question: If students are to study together what changes should be made to incorporate a more diverse student body? Attempts were made on all fronts to address this issue to include increasing the number of minority faculty, designing course curriculum to include contributions from minority groups, and applying social science theories regarding intergroup relations to alleviate prejudicial practices throughout the education system.

Strategies developed throughout the 70s and 80s designed to address the need for Multicultural Education only touched the surface of the complexity of the need for education that speaks to a growing diverse population. Some of the first strategies solely focused on the inclusion of the perspectives and contributions of different groups of Americans into curriculum, which although provided a starting point, proved to be an insufficient and one-sided method of addressing such a complex issue. Dr. James A. Banks, a Multicultural Education theorist, devised a more rounded set of guidelines, which provides a more holistic approach to

Multicultural Education. Dr. Banks (1995) identified five dimensions of Multicultural Education to assist teachers and administrators in implementing Multicultural Education within their schools. The five dimensions of Multicultural Education are Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Prejudice Reduction, Equity Pedagogy, and an Empowering School Culture and Social Structure.

Content Integration involves the application of various methods to integrate examples and content from different cultures into curriculum. The most popular method involves inserting heroes and facts from other cultures into lesson plans. However, according to Dr. Banks, if not implemented correctly by adjusting lesson plans to incorporate various viewpoints, this method may only reinforce the perception that ethnic cultures are not truly apart of American society.

In Knowledge Construction and Integration students are taught not only to examine the knowledge presented, but also to inquire and understand the perspective of the person or group producing the knowledge. This helps students to identify the biases of the writers and results in a more complete understanding of the knowledge presented. This level of understanding gives the student the ability to dissect a thesis into its parts and give credit to the parts that are not subject to the authors bias while generating thought and discussion of the parts that are. Prejudice Reduction seeks to reduce a students prejudice towards other groups though the techniques of content integration and in class student interactions that are more cooperative then competitive.

An Equity Pedagogy focuses on the modification of teaching methods to accommodate the different learning styles of students from diverse backgrounds. In Equity Pedagogy a teacher may include cooperative exercises, which have been shown to increase the proficiency of Hispanic and African American students in the sciences (Fullilove 1990). Teachers may also modify their language during class to be more gender neutral. In the past, educators believed they were following a philosophy of cultural deprivation, which they believed would put students on an equal footing. However, this method tended to invoke feelings of alienation among students from diverse backgrounds. The last dimension is an Empowering School Culture and Social Structure. This dimension focuses on education as a complex system of various parts. According James Banks (1992), the systemic view of schools requires that in order to effectively reform schools, the entire system must be restructured, not just some of its parts. This dimension also focus' on genuine thoughtful reform as opposed to the type of reform that may marginalize students such as solely incorporating cultural months as the only method of addressing diversity without considering other areas of the educational system.

Multicultural Education is a contentious issue for many and rightfully so. On the extreme peripheries some may believe Multicultural Education represents the abandonment of American ideals that bond us together regardless of race, religion, politics, or gender. On the other hand, some believe that injustices within education necessitate the dismantling of the entire educational system in favor of a system which places primary focus on the needs of millions of minority students who will soon represent the majority of Americans. Unfortunately, the latter, if not executed properly, can diminish the American culture the world has come to admire in times of prosperity and adversity by watering down our shared heritage.

Arguments for Multicultural Education tend to center around the necessity of having a more holistic understanding of the world around us in order to function successfully. According to Geneva Gay (1994), "A feature of American society that underscores the importance of multicultural education is its growing involvement in global affairs, increased global interdependence, and the shifting international balance of power." We saw this situation in the 80s with the rise of Japanese dominance in the Auto industry and the subsequent requirement for

American business people to become immersed in Japanese culture and its effect on their business practice. This kind of understanding could only be achieved through the genuine consideration of Japanese culture as equal and relevant.

Opponents of Multicultural Education would argue why should we consider other Non-Western cultures as our equals, when the bulk of modern advances were obtained by Western people. Furthermore, many Non-Western cultures continue to carry on very Non-Democratic practices such as slavery, the denial of rights to women, and honor killings which are all contrary to Western beliefs and practices. These cultures should be studied for understanding, however to give these beliefs the same moral validity as many of our democratic principles would be disingenuous. In theory, Multicultural Education if not executed with stringent guidelines could unintentionally allow for the sanctioning of such negative practices (Dewitt).

As with many things in life there is a middle ground. It would be wrong to say that not educating students on the histories and cultures present within the classroom or connected to American culture internationally would somehow be a profitable endeavor. However it would be just as wrong to focus solely on the difference between cultures to the extent that our commonalities and uniqueness as American people is not celebrated. In general most Americans support multicultural education with the greatest tones of dissent arising in how it should be executed (Seltzer, 1995).

References

Fullilove, R. E., & Treisman, P. U. (1990). Mathematics Achievement Among African American Undergraduates at the University of California Berkeley: An Evaluation of the Mathematics Workshop Program. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 59, No.3, p. 463-478.

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Seltzer, Richard (1995). Multiculturalism, Race, and Education. *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 64, No.2, p.124-40

Annotated Readings:

1. Gibson, M. A. (1984). Approaches to Multicultural Education in the United States: Some Concepts and Assumptions. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol.15, No. 1, p.94-120
This article reviews five approaches to Multicultural Education: Benevolent Multicultural Education (1), Education about Cultural Difference and Cultural Education (2), Education for

Cultural Pluralism (3), Bicultural Education (4), and Multicultural Education as the Normal Human Experience (5). This article provides an excellent discussion of each approach by breaking each approach into its assumptions and then discussing the goals and shortcomings of each. Interestingly, the article ultimately supports the fifth approach which applies an application of the anthropological definition of education to Multicultural Education. In this definition the person develops competencies in multiple cultures transcending the common misconceptions relating culture to ethnicity. This idea can have profound implications in our implementation of Multicultural Education.

Banks, J. A. (1993). Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions and Practices. *Review of Research in Education*, Vol. 19, p. 3-49

This article provides the best source of information in regards to Multicultural Education in its current form. It gives a detailed history and explanations for various developments within this field. Although Multicultural Education has many definitions, Banks strives to narrow the field by presenting his Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education: Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Prejudice Reduction, Equity Pedagogy, and Empowering School Culture.

Johnson, W. R. (1982). Education: Keystone of Apartheid, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 214-237.

This selection is included because it provides a thorough discussion of the role of education in the racial stratification of apartheid-South Africa. It provides an excellent analysis of how the Apartheid educational system can represent all the negative aspects of Multicultural Education. This article examines the ways in which an educational system is constructed based on cultural distinctions and provides both, motivation for the necessity of Multicultural Education, while at the same time illuminating its obvious limits.

Haynes, J. H. (2008), Unmasking, Exposing, and Confronting: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and Multicultural Education, *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, Vol. 10, No 2, p. 1-15.

The focus of this article is on the effects and remedies of colonization in relation to the education of Indigenous people throughout the world. In this selection the author attempts to dispel the myths regarding Multicultural Education, which as she notes, in many places merely comprises "food, fun, festivals, and foolishness". She also links CRT and TribalCrit to Multicultural Education as a means to compensate for the shortcomings of Multicultural Education.

Bruna, K. R. (2007), Manufacturing Dissent: The New Economy of Power Relations in Multicultural Teacher Education, *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 1-17.

This article challenges the myths associated with the training of White pre-service teachers in the field of Multicultural Education. Katherine Bruna analyzes the works of various authors and draws conclusions from her own observations and interviews of a teacher and her students in a Multicultural Education class for pre-service teachers in Northern California. In the article she addresses the resistance of many White pre-service teachers to the conduct of this type of training, which often wrongfully assumes Whites are inherently racist. She notes that White pre-service teachers and educators are often viewed as challenges to the education system, opposed

to individuals requiring training. She provides her theory of “Loving Subversion” as a means to address racial issues in Multicultural Education classes in a more equitable fashion.

Hoffman, D. M. (1996), Culture and Self in Multicultural Education: Reflections on Discourse, Text, and Practice, *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 545-569.

In this article Diane Hoffman uses the anthropological perspective of multiculturalism to analyze shortcomings in Multicultural Education. She demonstrates how many assumptions made by Multicultural Education practitioners may not be applicable universally. Finally she makes suggestions in the areas of, teaching and learning about culture, Pedagogy, and critical perspectives that will allow for needed transformation in Multicultural Education.

Olneck, Michael (2000), Can Multicultural Education Change What Counts as Cultural Capital?, *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 37, No.2, p 317-348. p. 317-348.

This article analyzes the effect of Multicultural Education on Cultural Capital, with Cultural Capital being one of the primary means for dominate groups to remain dominate. In short, Michael Olneck describes cultural capital as the accumulation of knowledge and experience gained by being a member of a particular social group. He describes in detail the effects of Cultural Capital on the education system. He also argues that in many cases, the application of Multicultural Education, if not implemented properly, may undercut cultural capital by “eroding the value of the stocks of cultural capital of the dominant classes, without enhancing the value of cultural capital among non-dominant classes”.

Jones-Kavalier, B. R. & Goetzinger, Paul (2008), Application of Treisman Model in Developing Collaborative Math and Science Learning Communities, *ijournal*, No. 19

In this article the authors apply the Treisman Model to improving college mathematics scores for minority students at a two year community college. The Equity Pedagogical methods used, involved a combination of collaborative and team-based learning methods which resulted in 93% of students passing, 74% with a grade of C or better. The article also notes that students participating in the project were more likely to use other campus resources for assistance in other classes.

Sowell, Thomas, “Multicultural Education”, <http://www.tsowell.com/spmultic.html>

Thomas Sowell takes Multicultural Education to task in this speech published on his website. He analyzes four arguments for multicultural education which center around Content Integration, the first of Bank’s Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education. While humorous at times, he weaves threads of commonsense throughout the speech that support his argument, which essentially boils down to the reality that we are all Americans so why shouldn’t we be versed in its American history and culture, which like it or not came from Europe.

Civil, Marta, Bratton, Jill, and Quintos, Beatriz (2005), Parents and Mathematics Education in a Latino Community: Redefining Parental Participation, *Multicultural Education*, Vol. 13, No. 2, p 60-64.

This is an important article in that the majority of the literature regarding Multicultural Education fails to mention parental responsibility or methods to involve the parents of students from

minority or diverse backgrounds. This article focuses on a low socio-economic Latino community in Southwest Arizona. The authors discuss the involvement of Latino Parents in MAPPS (Math and Parent Partnerships in the Southwest). While they do not provide any statistical evidence of the positive results of the program, they do note, through conversations with the parents, a growing confidence in helping their children with mathematics and growing competence in making decisions in regards to their child's mathematics curriculum.