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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process. As an idea, multicultural education seeks to create equal educational opportunities for all students, including those from different racial, ethnic, and social-class groups. Multicultural education tries to create equal educational opportunities for all students by changing the total school environment so that it will reflect the diverse cultures and groups within a society and within the nation's classrooms. This article deals with analyzing multicultural education as a process because its goals are ideals that teachers and administrators should constantly strive to achieve.

KEYWORDS: achievement, society, equity, multicultural education, positive attitudes

INTRODUCTION

The goals and objectives of multicultural education tend to vary among educational philosophers and liberal political theorists. Educational philosophers argue for preservation of the minority group culture, by fostering development of autonomy and introducing them to new and different ideas. This form of exposure assist learners in thinking more critically, as well as, encourage them to have a more open mindset. On the other hand, political theorists advocate a model of multicultural education that warrants social action. Hence, students are equipped with knowledge, values, and skills necessary to evoke and participate in societal changes, resulting in justice for otherwise victimized and excluded ethnic groups. Under such a model, teachers serve as agents of such change, promoting relevant democratic values and empowering students to act. Multicultural education has a host of other gains and goals:

- Promote civic good
- Rectify historical records

- Increase self-esteem of non-mainstream students
- Increase diversified student exposure
- Preserve minority group Culture
- Foster learners' autonomy
- Promote social justice and equity
- Enable students to succeed economically in an integrated, multicultural world.

The outcomes listed might require great investment or additional effort from the teacher to ensure that the goals being sought are met. Multicultural education, in its ideal form, must be in an active and intentional structure, rather than a passive, accidental approach.

There are infinite ways to assure that such an educational approach is purposeful and successful. Adaptation and modification to established curriculum serve as an example of an approach to preserving minority group culture. Brief sensitivity training, separate units on ethnic celebrations, and closer attention paid to instances of prejudice, are examples of minimal approaches, which are less likely to reap long term benefits for students. Multicultural education should span beyond autonomy, by exposing students to global uniqueness, fostering deepened understanding, and providing access to varied practices, ideas, and ways of life; it is a process of societal transformation and reconstruction. "Creating inclusive campus environments is challenging, but there is also great personal reward to be gained from helping create a campus 'laboratory for learning how to live and interrelate within a complex world' and to prepare students to make significant contributions to that world.

According to Reich, the goals of multicultural education is no longer on whether schools should recognize the diverse racial and ethnic identities of students, but on the extent to which this diversity should be recognized and affirmed in school curricula. His argument is not that schools no longer marginalize students based on race, ethnicity, or other factors, but that schools are no longer overtly oppressive. Reich insists that oppressive behavior in schools today would violate stated policies in most public and private schools. What has stayed the same in the debate about diversity is the concern about fostering an American identity, and how to promote citizenship in a diverse, democratic society.

Pai and Adler noted that advocates for pluralism believe that multicultural education is appropriate for a democratic society because: participatory democracy is fundamentally pluralistic ... it entails the acceptance of the intrinsic worth of all human beings and their unique individuality. Yet opponents of multicultural education often characterize it as another manifestation of the demand for group rights, and that an emphasis on groups may foster separatist attitudes and behaviors. In response, Darling-Hammond asserted: "Far from encouraging separatism, acknowledgment of diverse experiences creates new associations that helps us ultimately to build the common ground in which a more inclusive and powerful learning community can rest".[1]

Yet critics of multicultural education say this approach fosters group conflicts by being anti-white and anti-male, and that multicultural education also encourages negative attitudes toward the United States (Gorski). Some advocates have responded by insisting that teaching about diverse groups and diverse perspectives in American society attempts to provide students with a more inclusive and more accurate portrayal of an American society that has always been diverse. The purpose of teaching multiple perspectives is to develop an understanding of diverse perspectives that can lead to an understanding of what motivates the behavior of others. It should also encourage students to examine their own beliefs and attitudes. Multicultural educators insist that when schools only provide the perspective of a dominant group, they are not promoting patriotism but are engaging in propaganda

— "If mine is the only way of life I know, how can I judge that it is in fact a worthy and valuable way of life?" (Reich).

Main body

There are five dimensions of multicultural education. They are: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. Content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, generalizations, and issues within their subject areas or disciplines. The knowledge construction process describes how teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the biases, frames of reference, and perspectives within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it. Students also learn how to build knowledge themselves in this dimension.

Prejudice reduction describes lessons and activities used by teachers to help students to develop positive attitudes toward different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Research indicates that lessons, units, and teaching materials that include content about different racial and ethnic groups can help students to develop more positive intergroup attitudes if certain conditions exist in the teaching situation. These conditions include positive images of the ethnic groups in the materials and the use of multiethnic materials in a consistent and sequential way.

An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, and social-class groups. Research indicates that the academic achievement of African American and Mexican American students is increased when cooperative teaching activities and strategies, rather than competitive ones, are used in instruction (Aronson & Gonzalez). Cooperative learning activities also help all students, including middle-class White students, to develop more positive racial attitudes. However, to attain these positive outcomes, cooperative learning activities must have several important characteristics (Allport). The students from different racial and ethnic groups must feel that they have equal status in intergroup interactions, teachers and administrators must value and support cross-racial interactions, and students from different racial groups must work together in teams to pursue common goals.

An empowering school culture and social structure is created when the culture and organization of the school are transformed in ways that enable students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups to experience equality and equal status. The implementation of this dimension requires that the total environment of the school be reformed, including the attitudes, beliefs, and action of teachers and administrators, the curriculum and course of study, assessment and testing procedures, and the styles and strategies used by teachers.

To implement multicultural education effectively, teachers and administrators must attend to each of the five dimensions of multicultural education described above. They should use content from diverse groups when teaching concepts and skills, help students to understand how knowledge in the various disciplines is constructed, help students to develop positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors, and modify their teaching strategies so that students from different racial, cultural, and social-class groups will experience equal educational opportunities. The total environment and culture of the school must also be transformed so that students from diverse ethnic and cultural groups will experience equal status in the culture and life of the school.

Although the five dimensions of multicultural education are highly interrelated, each requires deliberate attention and focus. The remainder of this article focuses on two of the five dimensions described above: content integration and the knowledge construction process. Readers can see Banks (1995a) for more information about the other dimensions.

Multicultural education: curriculum, programs, teaching strategies implemented for teachers.

Robert K. Fullinwider describes one rather controversial method for multicultural teaching: teaching to "culturally distinct" learning styles. While studies have shown that "the longer these students of color remain in school, the more their achievement lags behind that of White mainstream students", it is still highly debated whether or not learning styles, are indeed culturally distinctive, and furthermore, whether implementing different teaching strategies with different racial or ethnic groups would help or further alienate minority groups.

All students have different learning styles so incorporating multicultural education techniques into the classroom, may allow all students to be more successful. "Multicultural education needs to enable students to succeed economically in a multicultural world by teaching them to be comfortable in a diverse workforce and skillful at integrating into a global economy". Teacher's should align the curriculum with the groups being taught, rather than about them. Every child can learn so it is the teacher's responsibility to not "track" them, but rather to personalize the curriculum to reach every student. Teachers need to assume that students are capable of learning complex material and performing at a high level of skill. Each student has a personal, unique learning style that teachers discover and build on when teaching.

Another important consideration in implementing multicultural education into the classroom is how deep to infuse multicultural ideas and perspectives into the curriculum. There are four different approaches or levels to curricular infusion. They are:

- The Contributions Approach - Dubbed the "Heroes and Holidays" approach; it is the easiest to implement and makes the least impact on the current curriculum. It does however have significant limitations in meeting the goals of multicultural education because "it does not give students the opportunity to see the critical role of ethnic groups in US society. Rather, the individuals and celebrations are seen as an addition or appendage that is virtually unimportant to the core subject areas".[2]
- The Additive Approach - Called the ethnic additive approach; it is slightly more involved than the contributions approach, but still requires no major restructuring of the curriculum. While this approach is often a first step towards a more multicultural curriculum, it is still very limited in that it still presents the topic from the dominant perspective. Individuals or groups of people from marginalized groups in society are included in the curriculum, yet racial and cultural inequalities or oppression are not necessarily addressed.
- The Transformative Approach - This approach requires pulling in *multiple* perspectives while discussing a topic. This approach is significantly more challenging to teach than the previous two: it requires a *complete* transformation of the curriculum and, in some cases, a conscious effort on the part of the teacher to deconstruct what they have been taught to think believe, and teach.
- The Decision Making and Social Action Approach - This approach includes all of the elements of the transformative approach but also challenges students to work to bring about social change. The goal of this approach is not only to make students aware of past and present injustice, but to equip them and empower them to be the agents of change.

In looking into practical strategies for implementing multicultural education into the classroom, Andrew Miller offers several suggestions that might provide helpful:

- Get to know your students. Build relationships and learn about their backgrounds and cultures.
- Use art as a starting point in discussions of cultural and racial issues.
- Have students create collective classroom slang dictionaries.

Find places in your current curriculum to embed multicultural lessons, ideas, and materials. (Please note that for this to be most effective, it must be a continuous process, not merely the celebration of Black History Month or a small aside in a textbook.)

- Allow controversy. Open your classroom up to respectful discussions about race, culture, and other differences.
- Find allies in your administration who will support your work.

Another essential part of multicultural teaching is examining your current lesson materials for bias that might alienate the students you are trying to teach. The Safe School Coalition warns against using a curricular material, if it omits the history, contributions and lives of a group, if it demeans a group by using patronizing or clinically distancing language, or if it portrays a group in stereotyped roles with less than a full range of interests, traits and capabilities.

Multicultural education plays a huge role in the way students perceive themselves and others, but there is still more work to be done. In some college syllabi, there is cultural sensitivity and multicultural competence. However, a lot of them lack the design to prepare teachers with consistent ways of the defining principles of multicultural education and preparation of teaching multicultural education authentically [3].

Multicultural education is a complex subject with many concepts. It is important for teachers to be fully knowledgeable of its depth and open to learn more about it as time goes on so they can create a safe space for their students. It is also important to see that although multicultural education is becoming more known and taught, there is still so much to learn and discover within this topic, and there always will be more to learn as we evolve. Even teachers need to be taught and become exposed to different dimensions of multicultural education in order to teach and revolutionize student attitudes about this topic.

New teachers can be blind to the diversity of their students, which can lead to generalizations and stereotypes about different cultures. New teachers being able to take a multicultural education class leads to increased knowledge of diversity, altering of attitudes towards multiculturalism, and preparedness of them teaching multicultural education to students of a variety of backgrounds (Wasonga, 2005). Preparing those teachers include being able to effectively confront fears and openness of talking about sensitive subjects, such as diversity issues and transforming attitudes that students may also possess towards different cultures. Multicultural education courses conclude eye-opening measures for the teachers, including becoming more open to such issues and positively affected preparedness to teach about multicultural education to their students.

A similar result happened in another study, in which the multicultural education course led to "increased awareness, understanding, and appreciation of other cultures." This includes having a better vision of a multicultural setting in a classroom, become more flexible when it comes to multicultural issues, and becoming more open to different perspectives of different students [4] Some pre-service teachers can still feel hesitant because of the lack of knowledge they still hold about multiculturalism, which can encourage further courses intended to educate teachers on the variety of cultures their students may possess.

While individual teachers may work to teach in ways that support multicultural ideas, in order to truly experience a multicultural education, there must be a commitment at Universities. In developing plan for multicultural education, Dr. Steven L. Paine, gives these suggestions:

- Involve stakeholders in the decision-making process.
- Examine education climate and culture and the roles played by both students and staff.
- Gather information on what is currently being done to promote multicultural education already.
- Establish education activities throughout the year that support multicultural themes.
- Focus on student and teacher outcomes that involve a knowledge of diversity, respect, cooperation, and communication. involve the community in this plan.

CONCLUSION

Teachers need to develop an awareness of their own cultural perspectives beliefs and behaviors and to be aware that their own cultural perspective is not the universal perspective and the only right one. Pre-service teachers need to acquire multicultural competence, the ability to be functional in cross-cultural settings. The teaching strategies seen by the teachers as could be effective in dealing with the students came about because of some of the difficulties experienced during their teaching practicum, religious and cultural groups. This study aims to examine teachers understanding of and attitudes towards multiculturalism, and in so doing, find out what are the language teaching strategies used in promoting and enhancing successful multicultural interactions. Teachers should be able to seize this opportunity to foster tolerance and understanding in classrooms of diverse cultural backgrounds.

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