

Synthesis of Concepts Concerning Multicultural Education

For generations, multicultural education has been a topic of concern and conflict. Because of racism in the US, multicultural issues are seemingly addressed only when a political or social need arises and is made public through the media. National, state, and local educational entities rarely engage in active measures to address the many problems that exist with multicultural education. Therefore, it has been the work of academics, researchers, and activists that have led to the discovery of multicultural problems within education, evidence of these problems, and models that offer hope for solutions in order to provide an equal education to all students in the US. Multicultural education is a complex and far reaching issue in which a myriad of components reticulates and make the need for educational reform of critical importance in order to propel generations of students forward, prepared to meet the needs of a global society in the 21st century and beyond.

I. Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals

In his article “Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice” Banks discusses the five dimensions of multicultural education. These areas are not only considered integral components for improving multicultural education by Banks, but also by other researchers before Banks that have examined education and the negative impact that exists by the lack of attention to multicultural education. Although different approaches, Gibson (1976), as well as Sleeter and Grant (1987), all identified five approaches to multicultural education. These approaches overlap in many regards and must be examined as a whole construct and framework in order to identify weaknesses and find solutions to propel multicultural education forward for the success of all students.

D. Quick

A positive climate will create positive outcomes and the inverse of this will yield the opposite result. However, ultimately it is up to the educational institutions to provide the school culture necessary for multicultural education. Comer's (1996) research provides models for what can be achieved when schools unite with students and parents from the community and all stakeholders generate ideas and approve decisions that affect student learning and behavior. This is increasingly important in our fast paced world of technology and innovation in a global society. In order to best prepare students for the future, educators must find a way to make multicultural education a priority and address teaching and learning with a focus on cultural integration.

II. Culture, Teaching and Learning

Cultural diversity is important in the classroom. Some educators value that notion and plan diligently to make this a positive in the classroom while other educators disregard cultural diversity wanting all students to assimilate accordingly. Just as these are two very different types of educators, the Cultural Deficit Model and the Cultural Differences Model yield very different student outcomes.

According to Rychly and Graves (2012), the Cultural Deficit Model contends that cultural differences exist. It also adopts the idea that because of cultural differences, students are different in their ability to achieve. Further, students from specific backgrounds will not be able to learn as well as others. Finally, these same students will not be high achievers. When educators have a fixed mindset in the area of cultural diversity within a school, the students have a relatively small chance to succeed or develop a positive academic self-image. Schools and educators who foster this attitude, need to be trained in the importance of cultural diversity as it pertains to student

D. Quick

achievement or perhaps they should get out of education, so that they do not continue to cause irreparable damage to students.

The Cultural Differences Model contends that cultural differences do exist. It also adopts the idea that just because of cultural differences, students are not different in their ability to achieve. Further, students from all cultural backgrounds will be able to learn. No one culture is academically high than another. Finally, all students will be high achievers. Educators who embrace this growth mindset enhance classroom learning. When educators have a growth mindset in the area of cultural diversity within a school, the students have a great chance to succeed and develop a positive academic self-image.

If educators set the bar high and expect a high standard of academic performance from all students, the students will live up to that challenge. Harboring a deficit model ensures students who will not achieve; however, embracing a differences model ensures students who will thrive.

III. Classrooms for Diversity: Rethinking Curriculum and Pedagogy and Understanding and Supporting Equity in Schools

In order to achieve a high standard for academic performance, rethinking curriculum and pedagogy needs to be a top priority. Positionality is one important theme to examine in order to better understand a multicultural perspective and implement multicultural teaching strategies to positively affect student learning throughout all academic disciplines. All too often, teachers impart knowledge to students or provide them with topics to consider without first examining

D. Quick

their own bias concerning the knowledge or ideas they present to students. A teacher's knowledge base or position is based on gender, race, class, and other variables (Code, 1991).

To gain a clear picture of history or any subject matter, teachers must consider their own biases, acknowledge them, and work diligently to keep their personal position from negatively influencing their teaching. Researchers find that it is impossible to completely separate themselves from information, especially when the research is qualitative in nature (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, if researchers find it difficult to separate themselves from their biases, teachers face an enormous challenge. However, by simply identifying one's position on issues, teacher's can then begin to actively pursue different perspectives, different points of view, and create a learning environment that provides options for students to consider, and meaningful discussions about why different people have specific views on issues. Recognizing and addressing positionality creates open dialogue and a richer more inclusive learning environment for students.

IV. Culturally Responsive Special Education in Inclusive schools and Assessment and Diversity

Another area in need of multicultural reform is Special Education and assessment of student achievement. There are many types of intelligence, and mainstream education has traditionally decided what is important for assessing intelligence and has continued to measure all students by that specific standard.

Most students in special education are from low socio-economic background and are more often than not, students of color (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, & Rausch, 2008). This provides a

D. Quick

backdrop for a meeting that often either involves apathy or contention. It is paramount that schools recognize and provide adequate information to parents and students. It is also of utmost importance that each student is treated with respect and thoughtful consideration is given to the student's IEP rather than the student and parents being pushed through the ARD meeting just to check off boxes in order to get to the next student.

Progress toward partnerships with educators is being made in some areas of the country such as the collaboration described by Watson and Gatti (2012) and the reflection of educators own ideologies proposed by Bevan-Brown (2009). Also important are parent to parent programs to provide knowledge and support for parents with similar backgrounds and who share students with similar issues. This is still an ongoing battle in the US education system, and one that does not seem to have clear answers and is choked by the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy that impedes special education students and parents in many ways.

In chapter 16, Taylor and Nolen discuss the lengths that publishers utilize to avoid bias and provide the inclusion of diverse perspectives and authors. This is also true for the companies that develop standardized tests, and larger test development companies are more thorough in their quest for potential bias in testing material than smaller test developers (Educational Testing Service, 2003). However, even with these practices in place bias was and still is discovered in many standardized educational assessments. Taylor (2008) noted that even with training, the panelists selected to review the standardized testing failed to notice subtle biases. Further, Taylor and Nolen noted problems with passage reading bias and culturally offensive wording as well as interpretation issues from reading that impacted the multiple-choice assessments.

D. Quick

Ultimately, US public school assessments favor white students over minorities. Taylor and Lee (2011) researched the disparity in assessment achievement and cultural bias and indicated that this was not unfounded when taking the reader response theory into account (Spiegel, 1998). This theory proposes that reading is dynamic and comprehension culminates from one's background, reflection, and prior knowledge.

V. Social Class and Education

Social Class is also an impediment for many students and their families when it comes to receiving an equitable education in the US. Jean Anyon's article "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work", provides a real albeit disturbing view of educational expectations in public schools based on the socio-economic disposition of the students attending the school and the community in which the school is situated.

According to Anyon's article, the schools utilized in this study could be put on a continuum in each of the aforementioned areas. The working-class schools would rank at the bottom of the continuum for school structure and culture, student autonomy, approaches to learning, and teachers' attitudes and dialogue. Conversely, the executive elite school would rank at the top of the continuum in the same areas. The middle-class school and the affluent professional school would fall in the middle of the continuum in their respective order. Ultimately, the schools in this study "tracked" their students based on their socio-economic strata and subsequently taught to the level of predicted achievement; thus, student learning mirrored the academic expectations of the district, school, and teachers.

D. Quick

Work by Meyer, Park, Bevan-Brown, and Savage discusses the importance of inclusivity for all students so they can achieve academic success. Similarly, work by Taylor and Nolen discusses the importance of providing assessments that demonstrate student achievement and student knowledge from their background and prior knowledge base, not rote memorization which only serves to promote a low level of critical thinking. This information serves as a stark reminder of the need for education reform to be inclusive of all learners from all backgrounds.

VI. Language and Diversity

Language must be a key consideration within multicultural education reform. Given the current administration and its position on immigration, the primary linguistic issues facing schools today are more complex than ever. The primary issues facing English Language Learners include a lack of commitment from the school districts and schools to have effectively trained teachers and well-designed programs in place to assist these students with academic achievement, and a blatant disregard to acknowledge the importance of culture and linguistics other than American standards and Standard English.

Further, Varghese references the work of August and Hakuta (1997) which presents the program types that contribute to successful educational practices. The description is lengthy but inclusive and begins with a supportive school-climate, incorporates differentiation of instruction, provides for staff development and parent involvement. Further, Snow, Met, & Genesee (1989), provide detailed information concerning the benefits of Content-based instruction (CBI) for ELL students.

D. Quick

According to the research by Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez (2011), the fastest growing student population are children of immigrants, and half of these children do not speak English fluently. Current trends in most schools lump these English Language Learners (ELLs) together with one teacher to meet the varying ability levels which leads to a low level of academic success among the ELLs. This research study posits that what matters most in supporting ELLs and what contributes to them becoming academically successful is the quality of instruction. Therefore, Calderon and her colleagues provide models that have proven to be successful in closing the disparity gap between English proficient students and English Language Learners in the US, as well as eight domains in which school reform is essential in order for the needs of ELLs to be addressed to attain a positive academic outcome.

Specific case studies cited by Calderon and colleagues emphasize the achievement that can be made by ELLs with the proper structure and instruction in place. After just two years, schools in the study went from low performing to high achieving status (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2010). Research is available that proves what positive results can be attained with school reform. However, without comprehensive school reform, English Language Learners as a group will not improve significantly nor reach academic achievement in any real way that prepares them for college, trade, or career. Students who are not prepared for college or a trade school once they leave high school will have a significantly more difficult time achieving financial independence, and they will find it much more difficult to actively contribute positively to society. The current US immigration policy is negatively impacting immigrant children, students, and their education may be further negatively impacted.

D. Quick

VII. Communities, Families, and Educators Working Together for School Improvement

Therefore, in order to provide the opportunity for a positive impact for multicultural students, parental involvement is essential. Aikens (2002), points out that children perform better at school when there is strong parental support at home. Children learn at home before they ever enter an academic institution. Parents and caregivers are the first teachers in a child's young life. As McCallion, Janicki, & Kolomer's (2004), research reveals, in many cases it's not just parents that act as caregivers for students. It is important for schools to understand the many varied dynamics that students contend with in their homes. The student's cultural background and the family situation play a large role in the student's personal, emotional, and social growth.

Further, in order for students to develop a strong academic foundation, their prior learning needs to be taken into account by teachers, and it's the administrators and district personnel who must develop positive approaches to including parents and caregivers in decision making at the school level that impacts a student's academic development and achievement. Berger (2015), found that teachers and administrators who knew the students' parents and caregivers well showed greater respect for them and the school staff had better relationships with the students.

Understanding diversity is important for educators who are actively trying to involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process. And diversity can take many different forms. From cultural diversity to single parent households, diversity is a broad complex topic and educating educators to be knowledgeable and empathetic to a great variety of diversity is not an easy nor inexpensive task. However, opening the lines of communication by the district and the school can go a long way to begin to build a bridge of positivity and understanding. Decker &

D. Quick

Majerczyk (2000), found that two-way communication was an instrumental step in involving parents and caregivers. Through communication and developing resources to assist parents, progress toward meaningful parental involvement can begin to emerge.

The implementation of sound parental involvement at the whole school level is important for the academic growth and success of students. In the *Goals for 2000: Educate America Act*, the information indicated that a key component for reforming American schools and increasing student success in all cultural groups is dependent on parent involvement. It is not always easy for parents to become involved in their child's school. Both Comer and Sadowski noted that many low-income parents and especially immigrant parents, often face a language barrier and feel intimidated when dealing with the school system. Therefore, Comer made and implemented plans for changing many of the stigmas that parents face when trying to engage with a school.

The Comer Model, which has been successfully implemented, utilizes teachers, administrators, and parents as stakeholders, and therefore, decision makers when it comes to educational experiences for students as well as the school climate. Another educator interested in reforming the role parents play in their student's education is Joyce Epstein. She created a framework that included family involvement in all aspects of school planning and included six important areas for reform: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Epstein's model has been implemented with success in increased parental involvement and students' level of academic success. Out of all of Epstein's key areas for improvement and development, the most important area is communication. Collaborating with the community provides knowledge for parents, students, and educators allowing all to

D. Quick

grow through knowledge and a shared commitment to helping students achieve academic success.

VIII. School Reform and Student Learning

Education policy has basically been the same for years. Educational goals and approaches are renamed and repackaged and used again and again. Sometimes current trends favor equity and what is best for students individually, and sometimes trends favor excellence and standardization.

As Cuban points out in his article, there are a number of inherent problems when trying to meet equity and excellence in education reform. These two goals are, for the most part, are opposite ideologies. If teachers differentiate for students and allow for students to process information differently and allow students to be assessed differently, then there is a great risk that when it comes time for the bureaucratic mandated testing for state standards, students will not show success according to the standardized data. This, of course, carries negative implications for the district, the school, the administrators, and the teachers. Negative outcomes of standardized testing can be far reaching and complex.

Cuban offers the blended school model in his article which allows students to practice basic skills for 100 minutes every day at their own pace, and then students spend the rest of the day in academic class settings learning through individualized instruction.

D. Quick

Fostering academic excellence is not an easy task. It takes planning and support from all stakeholders from the highest district level to the teacher assistants. According to Abramson (2010), the new hybrid schools, attempting to address the need for academic excellence, positive standardized data, and honoring the need for differentiation is a compromise. As much of the research concerning school reform indicates, multicultural school reform is not only a complicated issue, but in many areas of the US, a controversial issue as well.

Multicultural education reform begins with an understanding of the *sociopolitical* context (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Social and political policies dictate educational policies and are often in conflict with one another or as G.K. Chesterton stated, “It isn’t that they can’t find the solution. It’s that they can’t see the problem.” The conflict of educational reform within the framework of sociopolitical agendas has been an obstacle throughout the history of the US and continues to be problematic today.

Some of the most significant obstacles of multicultural school reform include: recognizing value in the students and families that make up the school, inequitable school financing, and specifically a paradigm shift to an anti-racist and anti-bias perspective (Nieto and Bode, 2008). According to the chapter by Nieto and Bode (2008), a school achieves an anti-racist perspective when there is open dialogue by students about their experiences with racism from which important lessons and knowledge may be ascertained by other students as well as teachers. Further, cultural deprivation must be admonished and an acceptance of all students having ability and academic prowess must be recognized. Ryan (1972) pointed out that it was the schools that

D. Quick

were culturally depriving students, and in fact it was not the students who needed to be “fixed” but the educational environment.

School reform must also include high expectations and rigorous standards. Jaime Escalante’s 1990 success with the students at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles in AP Calculus demonstrate what can be achieved when students and parents are held accountable and student expectation for success is held to a premium. Students will rise to the challenge.

Finally, multicultural school reform involves many complex layers but ultimately must include all stakeholders: teachers, families, students, and educators as part of the reform process.

Cummins (1996) illustrated the importance of programs that provide student autonomy and empowerment where students are encouraged to develop a positive cultural identity. As Nieto and Bode (2008) explain, there is no simplistic way to implement multicultural school reform in the US.

IX. Conclusion

Education reform is complex and is a result of sociopolitical agendas. All of the concepts above affect educators, students, parents, society and the future generations in the US. Therefore, including cultural diversity and a range of perspectives is of paramount importance for the success of the current generation of students and those that follow. In order for the US to stay competitive in an ever-changing global society, students from all backgrounds and cultural experiences must have preparatory education that allows them to succeed into the 21st century.

References

- Aikens, A.M. (2002). Parental involvement: The key to academic success. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(6), 2105. (UMI No.3056043).
- Anyon, Jean. (2006). Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work. Oakes, Jeannie, & Rogers, John, *Learning Power Organizing for Education and Justice*, 170-173. NY: Teachers College Press.
- August, D., & Hakuta, K. (Eds). (1997). *Improving schooling for language minority students: A research agenda*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Banks, James, A. (1993). Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice. *Review of Research in Education*, 19, 3-49.
- Banks, James, A., & Banks, Cherry A. McGee (2016). *Multicultural Education Issues and Perspectives*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Berger, E. H. (2015). *Parents as partners in education: Families and schools working together* (9th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Bevan-Brown, J. (2009). Culturally appropriate, effective provision for Maori learners with special needs: He waka tino whakarawea. Saar-brucken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing AG & Co.
- Calderon, M., Slavin, R., Sanchez, M. (2011). Effective instruction for English learners. *The Future of Children*, 21(1), 103-127.
- Code, L. (1991). *What can she know? Feminist theory and the construction of knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Comer, J. P. (1988). Educating poor minority children. *Scientific American*, 259, 42-48.
- Comer, James P. (2005). The Rewards of Parent Participation. *Educational Leadership*, 3, 38-42.
- Decker, J., & Majerczyk, D. (200). *Increasing parent involvement through effective home/school communication*. Chicago: Saint Xavier University. 9ERIC document Reproduction Service No. ED 439790).

- Gibson, M. A. (1976). Approaches to multicultural education in the United States: Some concepts and assumptions. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 7, 7-18.
- Maher, F., & Tetreault, M. K. (2001). *The feminist classroom* (2nd ed.). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McCallion, P., Janicki, M.P., & Kolmer, S. R. (2004). Controlled evaluations of support groups for grandparent caregivers of children with developmental disabilities and delays. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 109(5), 352-361.
- Meyer, L. H., Park, H.S., Grenot-Scheyer, M., Schwartz, I.S., & Harry, B. (Eds.). (1998). *Making friends: The influences of culture and development*. Baltimore, MD: Brooks.
- Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2012) *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Nieto, S., & Bode, P., Kang, E., & Raible, J. (2008). Identity, community and diversity: Rethorizing multicultural curriculum for the postmodern era. In F.M. Connelly, M. F. He, & J. Phillion (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of curriculum and instruction* (pp. 176-197). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rychly, Laura & Emily Graves (2012): Teacher Characteristics for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, *Multicultural Perspectives*, 14:1, 44-49.
- Savage, C., Hindle, R., Meyer, L. H., Hynds, A., Penetito, W., & Sleeter, C.E. (2011). Culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom: Indigenous student experiences across the curriculum. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(3), 183-198.
- Skiba, R.J., Simmons, A. B., Ritter, S., Gibb, A.C., Rausch, M.K. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Exceptional Children*, 74(3), 264-288.
- Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. (1991). Race, class, gender, and disability in current textbooks. In M. W. Apple & L. K. Christian-Smith (Eds.), *The politics of the textbook* (pp. 78-110). New

D. Quick

York: Routledge.

Spiegel, D.L. (1998). Reader response approaches and growth of readers. *Language Arts, 76*, 41-48.

Snow, M. A., Met, M., & Genesee, F. (1989). A conceptual framework for the integration of language and content in second/foreign language instruction. *TESOL Quarterly, 23*, 201-219.

Taylor, C. S. (2008, April). Bias and sensitivity issues for the Washington assessment of student learning. Seminar paper presented at a University of Washington College of Education, Seattle. WA.

real classrooms. Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice-Hall Pearson Education.

Taylor, C. S., & Lee, Y. (2011). Ethnic DIF in tests with mixed item formats. *Educational Assessment, 16*, 35-68.

Taylor, C. S., & Nolen, S. B. (2008). Classroom assessment: Supporting teaching and learning in

Varghese, M., & Stritikus, T. (2005). "Nadie me dijo [Nobody told me]": Language policy negotiation and implications for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 56*(1).

Watson, C., & Gatti, S. N. (2012). Professional development through reflective consultation in early intervention. *Infants and young children, 25*(2), 109-121.