

Multicultural Teacher Education for the 21st Century

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Abstract

Multicultural education, also viewed as a way of teaching, promotes principles such as inclusion, diversity, democracy, skill acquisition, inquiry, critical thought, value of perspectives, and self-reflection. It encourages students to bring aspects of their cultures into the classroom and thus, allows teachers to support the child's intellectual and social/emotional growth. They argue that this explicit professional preparation is needed because of the increasing racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Two other factors underscore the need for more multicultural teacher education: the fear of diversity and the resistance to dealing with race and racism frequently expressed by students enrolled in teacher education programs. To overcome these problems and better prepare preservice teachers to work effectively with ethnically diverse students the authors suggest a two-part program of professional development. Multicultural education, also viewed as a way of teaching, promotes principles such as inclusion, diversity, democracy, skill acquisition, inquiry, critical thought, value of perspectives, and self-reflection.^[2] It encourages students to bring aspects of their cultures into the classroom and thus, allows teachers to support the child's intellectual and social/emotional growth.

Introduction

Education and technology together can offer a number of challenges and possibilities for teacher education. Teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity are powerful determinants of learning opportunities and outcomes for diverse students and classrooms in schools. Therefore, teacher education programs have a responsibility to prepare preservice teachers for working with historically marginalized populations and implementing an effective multicultural curriculum. As a way of expanding preservice teachers' understandings of these multicultural issues, researchers have illustrated ways that instructional technologies can be used to support the goals of multicultural education. In addition, teachers are central to the equitable and effective uses of technology in our increasingly multicultural classrooms, it is important that preservice teachers are trained to be technologically competent teachers who can skillfully integrate technology in culturally diverse classrooms.

What is Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is more than celebrating Cinco de Mayo with tacos and piñatas or reading the latest biography of Martin Luther King Jr. It is an educational movement built on basic American values such as freedom, justice, opportunity, and equality. It is a set of strategies aimed to address the diverse challenges experienced by rapidly changing U.S.

demographics. And it is a beginning step to shifting the balance of power and privilege within the education system.

The goals of multicultural education include:

- Creating a safe, accepting and successful learning environment for all
- Increasing awareness of global issues
- Strengthening cultural consciousness
- Strengthening intercultural awareness
- Teaching students that there are multiple historical perspectives
- Encouraging critical thinking
- Preventing prejudice and discrimination

Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of multicultural education tend to vary among educational philosophers and liberal political theorists. Educational philosophers might argue for preservation of the minority group culture, by fostering children's development of autonomy and introducing them to new and different ideas. This form of exposure would assist children in thinking more critically, as well as, encourage them to have a more open mindset. resulting in justice for otherwise victimized and excluded ethnic groups. Under such a model, teachers would serve as agents of such change, promoting relevant democratic values and empowering students to act.^[4] Multicultural education has a host of other gains and goals to be met:

- Promote civic good
- Right the historical record
- Increase self-esteem of non-mainstream students
- Increase diversified student exposure
- Preserve minority group culture
- Foster children's autonomy
- Promote social justice and equity
- Enable students to succeed economically in an integrated, multicultural world ^[13]

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

Advantages of Multicultural Education

- According to the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), multicultural education:
 - Helps students develop positive self-image.
 - Offers students an equitable educational opportunity.
 - Allows multiple perspectives and ways of thinking.
 - Combats stereotypes and prejudicial behavior.
 - Teaches students to critique society in the interest of social justice.

Multicultural teaching strategies and practices

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”.¹ 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”.^[20]

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:

1. 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”.

3. 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”.
4. 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 Multicultural education programs implemented for teachers
5. 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 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.

Conclusion:

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 student. 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.

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