

Multicultural Curriculum

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Brief History

The evolution of multicultural curriculum is embedded in the history of multicultural education that parallels the chronicle of the United States civil rights movement. The desegregation rulings of the 1950's were designed to provide equal education for all races. In the 1960's and 1970's this interpretation expanded to promote equity for all students with the emphasis on human rights (Banks, 2000). Out of this thrust for human rights came the multicultural approaches to teaching that recognized the need for awareness of a culturally diverse society. Multicultural curriculum came to be the descriptor of these new approaches teaching.

During these years the movement towards teaching to the diversity present in the classroom was also being established in Britain and Australia (Lynch, 1983). The philosophy adopted was that basis of multicultural curriculum must derive from the ethical and social imperatives of a multicultural society. There are also references to the fundamental ethic of the intrinsic value of each human being, which mirrored the human rights bent of the United States movement (Lynch, 1983).

In these countries the impetus was to have the concept of multicultural curriculum acknowledged and promoted by teacher education programs. Initially, research was conducted on and workshops offered to practicing teachers (Lynch, 1983). This led to the conclusion that although much was needed to bring current teachers to the level of multicultural teaching acceptable to the proponents of multicultural curriculum, an emphasis must be placed on institutions of higher learning to require the incorporation of inclusionary multicultural methods and practice in the teacher certification process.

Central Issues

One premise of multicultural curriculum is that transformative knowledge will always challenge

the existing knowledge (Piland, 1999). Therefore, any positive experience with minority cultures, or simply knowledge of "other's" cultures, would make prejudice, objectification, and dehumanization more difficult. Accordingly, multicultural curriculum recognizes diversity in experience and the relationships between experiences and the ways students construct new knowledge (Piland, Piland, & Hess, 1999). Curriculum is also multicultural when it examines two or more traditions and ways of viewing the world, which enables students to recognize their prior knowledge in what is being taught (Williams, 1992).

Recognizing prior knowledge is an important issue because, while multicultural curriculum can provide a sense of empowerment to those students of the minority culture, the ones that may benefit most are the students who arrive at school with a viewpoint that has been fostered by the dominant culture (Piland, 1999). As students learn about other cultures they gain insight into more important global issues that require cooperative problem solving among diverse people (Lenaghan, 2000). A goal of intercultural learning is to prepare students for responsible global citizenship. Students should be able to encounter people from other cultures as much as possible and compare the new information to prior knowledge of their own cultural identities and practices to produce new, altered knowledge.

Banks (1988) advanced a hierarchical list of approaches that can be taken by teachers attempting to go beyond the dominant culture curriculum to develop a multicultural curriculum. Levels 1 and 2 are the Contributions and Additive Approaches respectively. At these levels, teachers limit themselves to including ethnic/cultural holidays, foods, book studies with diverse cultural characters, and thematic units centered on a country and its people's cultures. The teachers are adding cultural content to the existing curriculum's basic structures and

purposes. The next two levels, Levels 3 and 4, are the Transformational and Social Action Approaches. For a teacher or school to reach Level 3 there must be a change in the curriculum's structure so that students can assume the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups. To achieve Level 4, students must examine important social issues of diverse ethnic and cultural groups and "take actions to help solve them" (Banks, 1988).

Leading Scholars

- James Banks has been writing on some facet of multicultural education since the early 1970's. Banks' earlier contributions concentrated on ethnicity. Later writings demonstrated a shift towards more inclusive multicultural education. Banks edited, along with Cherry Banks, a handbook for multicultural education (*Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*) in 1989 and have recently published a 4th edition. Banks addressed multicultural curriculum specifically in his article, Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform, in 1988. He is widely known for the promoting the four approaches to developing cultural curricula as outlined above. He is one of the editors of the Journal of Multicultural Education and the director of the Center of Multicultural Education at the University of Washington.
- Sonia Nieto is another key name in the field as she addresses issues of creating multicultural learning communities by looking at the needs of the culturally diverse student. Nieto also examines the contexts of multicultural education as they pertain to multicultural curriculum. She contributes often to publications aimed at the educator. Nieto espouses the concept of equity pedagogy, the belief that all children can learn equally well.
- Geneva Gay works with Banks as a faculty associate at the Center of Multicultural Education. Gay has written on the issue of culturally responsive teaching and has addressed curriculum needs for multicultural teacher education. Gay also examines theory to practice problems for educators in the arena of multicultural education.
- Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant publish

together and separately on similar platforms concerning the approaches of teaching multiculturally. Their concern is that there is not a commonly held definition of multicultural education. They addressed this issue in *Making choices for multicultural education* (1988) and have continued the discourse through the last 15 years. Sleeter published the product of a qualitative research project, *Keepers of the American dream: A study of staff development and multicultural education*, in 1992. In it, Sleeter offers educators an opportunity to have an insider's view of the culture, context and social dynamics of a staff development project aimed at multicultural education.

All of the above scholars address the goals of multicultural curriculum in their drive to help create schools that are sources of equity pedagogy staffed with teachers who promote anti-bias curriculum.

Resources

- ✓ The National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME) holds a national conference each year, 2003 will be in Seattle, Nov. 5-9. One of the six main goals of the goals of the association is to promote the development of culturally responsible and responsive curricula. One of the main objectives is to develop a national clearinghouse for consultant services to assist educational institutions with, among other things, curriculum development.
- ✓ The American Educational Research Association annual conference host sessions on curriculum development for the multicultural educator and in general multicultural education. Conference in 2004 will be in San Diego.
- ✓ Multicultural Perspectives is the quarterly journal published by NAME. It includes articles, reviews, program descriptions and curriculum reform designs for the multicultural educator and activists around the world.
- ✓ The Center for Multicultural Education at University of Washington, Seattle, focuses on research projects and activities designed to improve practice related to equity issues and intergroup relations.

✓ The McGraw-Hill Multicultural Supersite is an internet site that attempts to narrow the gap between theory and practice of multicultural education through a collection of information and original resources for in-service teachers, pre-service teachers and teacher educator.

✓ Internet Resource Guide includes over 100 websites created to assist teachers in locating resources to enhance the multicultural curriculum, from lesson plans to international pen-pals.

✓ *Cultural Diversity and Education*, James Banks (2000) is the 4th edition of the college textbook. Designed to help all levels of educators clarify the philosophical and definitional issues related to pluralistic education.

✓ *Multicultural Education, Issues and Perspectives*, 4th ed. James Banks and Cherry McGee Banks, Eds.(2002) Remains the definitive handbook on multicultural education, directed towards educators who are dedicated to promoting equity education for all students.

✓ *The Light in Their Eyes*, by Sonia Nieto (1999). Conveys the notion and understanding of what it takes to teach multicultural education, includes an understanding of the learning processes of teacher and students using multicultural curriculum.

✓ *Multicultural Teaching: A Handbook of Activities, Information and Resources*, Pamela Tiedt and Iris Tiedt (2002) is another book that offers a comprehensive guide towards creating and implementing a multicultural curriculum.

✓ *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Geneva Gay (2000) offers readers methods to bridge the gap between theory and practice for educators desiring to establish multicultural curriculum in their classrooms.

✓ Judy Leavell, Assistant professor at SWTSU, is the creator of a comprehensive list of multicultural literature. She is interested assisting teachers in utilizing inclusive literature in the classroom.

✓ Jennifer Battle, Assistant Professor at

SWTSU, is interested in the educational advancement of linguistically and culturally diverse children.

✓ Marguerite Gillis, Professor at SWTSU, is engaged in preparing teachers to teach multilingual and multicultural children.

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