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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION FOR A CHANGING TOMORROW

JENNIFER FARKAS

Introduction

The astounding multiethnictiy of societies of the future has already arrived. Schools of tomorrow will need to address many issues not always articulated in education today. Multicultural education has made considerable progress over the past two decades. It is a mandatory requirement for teacher education in many states and is being implemented in school districts in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Though misconceptions and misunderstanding of the philosophy of multicultural education abound, many gains have been made. In spite of the ambiguity in the field over rationale and purpose for multicultural education, never has the need been greater. Education must rise to the challenge in order to address the needs of societies characterized by increasing diversity of every kind. The social and societal cost of failure to do so is beyond comprehension.

Personal Observations

My own educational history illustrates the colonial nature of the traditional hidden curriculum that persists in many of our contemporary schools. I was educated in public and private schools in America, New Zealand and Japan. Wherever I studied, strong biases prevailed and huge omissions were perpetuated. Throughout my years of study, I learned nothing of the Holocaust or slavery, only dates and battle lines about World War II, little about my own cultural roots, and even less about the lives of others different from my own. The only reference to Native Americans that I can recall was during seasonal studies of the first Thanksgiving which portrayed tentatively peaceful “Indians” who were often referred to as “savages.”

As a young child, I was keenly aware of my family’s roots in Germany, though heritage was never explicitly addressed. Like the hidden curriculum, I learned who I was through what was not said — through my experiences with family. Having ancestors in Germany was not something to boast about in the early post-war years. After all, Germany had been “the enemy.” Yet, I harbored the secret knowledge that “the enemy” could not possibly have been as terrible as the post-war propaganda on television portrayed. After all, Germans ate homemade sausage like my uncle made, and potato salad like my grandmother’s, and went to the same kind of church as we did. I simply could not believe that they were really evil. I felt an awkward embarrassment over my cultural identity.

I gradually became sensitized to the world of discrimination, stereotypes and the barriers
they create. In New Zealand I did not stand out in a crowd — my looks could deceive. When I opened my mouth to speak, however, I was met with amusement and sometimes ridicule. "Say something! Talk!" people would say. "We want to hear your accent!" Much to my relief, although I could not hear it myself, my accent soon disappeared.

In school I studied New Zealand history which painted a picture of the domination of all social and political powers by settlers from Great Britain as desirable and benevolent. I especially remember wondering how the Maoris felt when, as one textbook boldly proclaimed, the English colonists won rule over the country and "the natives were afforded all the privileges and benefits of British sovereignty." Much has changed in New Zealand society since the early 1960s, and the country has launched an impressively inclusive approach to multiculturalism that places great value on the culture and contributions of indigenous peoples. I recently visited many New Zealand schools and was touched by the sensitivity and respect with which other cultures are regarded — the results of an ambitious multicultural movement in New Zealand’s educational system.

I feel greatly advantaged by my overseas experience. Yet, it seems that wherever I attended school, the perspective taught that the majority was powerful, righteous and preferred. These experiences motivated me to constantly try to discover new, realistic ways to develop and foster multicultural education and a global perspective, with or without overseas travel experience.

It is my contention that multicultural education uniquely prepares young people to meet the challenges of a multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual society of tomorrow. Failure to provide such education will condemn us to conflicts of tragic and devastating dimension. In this paper, I will attempt to identify social changes that have made educational reform imperative. After reviewing several concepts of multicultural education, their strengths and weaknesses, I will outline one school district’s efforts towards implementation of multicultural education.

**Demographic Imperative in a Global Society**

As we move into the next century, major advances in industry, technology and communications will result in economic changes worldwide. Migration, immigration and increased cultural interdependence will hasten the blurring of political boundaries. If the United States is any microcosm of the global village, then many countries will find themselves similarly enriched and challenged by increasing linguistic and cultural diversity bringing about changes in every aspect of society. According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, three percent of the U.S. population in 1990 was “Asian,” and included Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, as well as other groups. In U.S. cities, such as Miami, Santa Ana, and Huntington Park, over 50% of the total population is currently foreign-born. Thirteen percent (13%) of the population, or 32 million people, speak languages other than English at home. Whites of European descent comprised 76% of the population in 1990. By the year 2050, the percentage of Asians is projected at 10%, and Whites will account for only 52% of the total population1 (See Figures 1 and 2). This is a significant change for a country settled

mainly by descendants of European ancestry who achieved domination over an indigenous native population. Still, the impact of recent immigration and resulting cultural shift is tremendous and influences all aspects of daily life. Robert Hughes challenges the very language the government uses to describe the elements of American culture as he points out: “Who talks of ‘Asia’ or ‘Asians’ now — even as we utter our vague generalizations about ‘European’ culture? There are only Chinese, Japanese, Indonesians, Cambodians, and within even these national categories lie complexities of identity and heritage that are lost on the distant for-

**Figure 1. U.S. Population in 1990**

![Diagram of U.S. Population in 1990]


**Figure 2. Projected U.S. Population in 2050**

![Diagram of Projected U.S. Population in 2050]

Even the United States, whose contemporary society is comprised of many cultures, often operates with confusion and ambiguity over issues of identity.

The linguistic demands of a changing population are already impacting many school districts, as school staff struggle with the language needs of their students and the economic challenges of meeting those needs (See Figure 3). The changing language composition of entire communities requires flexibility in solving the dilemma of meeting students’ needs. Students currently attending New York City Public Schools speak 100 languages. As the number of linguistic minority groups increases in the U.S. and elsewhere, the school systems must reevaluate and realign their policies and procedures to ensure equity and opportunity for all.

**Japan Encounters Multiculturalism**

Recently, Japan has witnessed similar unprecedented change in demographics. Geography and cultural history render the country a unique set of immigration challenges. The foreign population has increased exponentially over the past three decades. Further diversifying the mix, the numbers of Japanese residing abroad and returning to Japan has jumped from a few thousand in the post World War II years to literally tens of thousands today. Space such radical changes in the population composition require complex accommodations at every level of society. This increasingly diverse linguistic and ethnic population prompts leaders to ask many questions that will impact greatly on the nation’s future. Demographers, economists and future specialists will address questions relating to predicting population shifts and the social impact of these changes. Educators must address questions

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relating to the role of education in an increasingly diverse society and must develop a rationale for reform that addresses the needs of all students, both present and future. Education will need to develop mechanisms to provide for broad-based participation by all stakeholders, including minorities. Education of the future must focus on educational theories that promise success for all through implementing organizational, curricular and instructional change. Reflecting on theories of multicultural education as it is emerging may provide a foundation for reflection in order to make choices regarding educational development for the future that encompasses both theory and practice.

Defining Multicultural Education

Multicultural education has multiple definitions whose origins, intents, interpretations and goals may differ depending on philosophical, political and pragmatic point of view. For example, in some American communities, multicultural education has come to mean an explicit effort towards inclusion, for the purpose of empowerment, of a given minority group or groups who previously experienced exclusion. Exclusion may occur through overt prejudice and discrimination, through lack of mention in instructional materials or instruction, or other ways such as lack of opportunity due to language or cultural barriers. Some compensatory programs designed to make up for omissions in the past are met with resentment or fear. Recent reaction to an all-Black alternative school in the Midwest had some opponents arguing reverse discrimination.

Not all multicultural education programs are compensatory in nature. In some districts, multicultural education may focus more on second language issues, from accommodation of non-native speakers through interpreters, to special instruction to promote bilingualism among mainstream students.

Yet another program approach is outlined by Scott Willis who states that the goals of multicultural education in the United States most often cited include, “impacting more accurate and complete information” regarding historical events or minority groups, “reducing prejudice and fostering tolerance, improving the academic achievement of minority students, building commitment to the American ideals of pluralism and democracy, and spurring action to make those ideals a reality.”

According to historian Alan Singer, multicultural education is an approach to looking at the world that has “its roots in rationalism and scientific exploration — it challenges the cultural limitations that distort our vision, and calls for inclusive, accurate, and reflective historical research, and teaching.” More importantly, he implies that it is a process rather than a product, a perspective in development rather than a fixed point of view.

James Banks helps to give direction to what multicultural education is by clarifying what it is not. He claims that a primary misconception about multicultural education is that it constitutes an “entitlement program,” a way to accommodate those who have remained invis-

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multicultural education is not an ethnic or gender-specific movement. It is a movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world.5

After providing a workshop to help teachers develop a more inclusive approach to celebrating major holidays. One teacher protested, asking why he had to consider including other cultures in his curriculum — after all, he pointed out, his school community was 99% White. I believe this demonstrates how pervasive this perception remains.

There is also considerable fear that multicultural education, with its emphasis on reflecting the multiethnic, multiracial makeup of society, will reinforce and solidify distance between groups and will create disunity in society. This contradicts the reality that many global societies today are, and have been, "sociologically... divided... along lines of race, gender and class."6

Many American public school districts were court ordered to desegregate in the 1970s and 1980s after the inequality in education for minorities was determined to be discriminatory in nature. Desegregation was most successful where schools and communities were afforded the support mechanisms needed to accommodate the schools' demographics. For example, one elementary school employed a part-time teacher to serve as cultural liaison to minorities to assist them in developing more effective communication with the school, and to serve as a cultural resource person, assisting teachers with culture related instruction. Another district sought to improve relations among various groups by implementing an ambitious teacher development program. Its purpose was to increase teacher understanding of a diverse student population, and to increase academic performance among all students. Effective multicultural education seeks to ensure the full integration of all individuals and groups within the educational system. Such integration need not diminish self-esteem or ethnic identity and cultural bonds, nor should it widen the gaps between cultures. Effective multicultural education helps to unify rather than divide, because it supports the democratic principle that all are equal, valued participants in society.

Understanding Diversity

Looking at common metaphors for understanding diversity can help us see what theo-
rists envision for multicultural education. Earlier in this century, the United States attempted to assimilate students from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds into the cultural “melting pot,” as society was described, quickly shedding traditional heritage in order to be accepted into the larger society. Banks points out that “a mythical Anglo-American culture required (outsiders and new immigrants) to experience a process of self-alienation.” The problem with this metaphor was that “even when students of color became culturally assimilated, they were often structurally excluded from mainstream institutions.” In spite of this irony, education throughout this century has been perceived as pivotal to the assimilation, acceptance or rejection of minorities in America, and was perceived as the cornerstone for integration into society as a whole.

Following the “melting pot” notion came the metaphor of the “vegetable stew” image of multiculturalism. In this myth, each group’s identity was maintained and respected, while differences were seen as contributing to the richness and diversity of a unique society. In this image, it was not seen as necessary to lose one’s cultural identity in order to become a full-fledged member of society. This was an improvement over earlier metaphors and helped to defuse teachers’ fears about multicultural education. Again, however, the myth denied the reality of gross inequality among groups, paternalism on the part of the politically strong, and the systematic abuse of power by those in control of policy and decision-making at the expense of minorities. Finally, the underlying remnant of an “us versus them” perspective insured continuance of the status quo and is, I believe, largely responsible for the growing chasm between the races in America today. Banks suggests that “the reformulation of what it means to be united must be a process that involves the participation of diverse groups within the nation”...and must involve “power sharing and participation by people from many different cultures who reach beyond their cultural and ethnic borders in order to create a common civic culture that reflects and contributes to the well-being of all.” Care must be taken not to allow this directive to be interpreted as a newer conceptualization of the “melting pot.”

If Japan is ready to tackle the challenge of multicultural education, it has the advantages of learning from the mistakes of others, mistakes that are pervasive in the field. For example, condescending portrayal of various groups in curriculum materials and in instructional practice only serves to strengthen stereotypes, increase resentments and widen the gaps between peoples. Inclusion of various groups in curriculum development and content materials and textbooks must avoid isolated infusion which, out of context, only promotes cultural tokenism and widens the divide. Then too, limiting the focus on various cultural groups to once-a-year celebration during a school’s culture day, or teaching about African-American heroes only during “Black History Month,” sends mixed messages. Such approaches foster the notion that “those people” are important enough to be mentioned in education, but still not quite important enough to be integrated into the fabric of the curriculum. Again, emphasizing inclusion of one group at the exclusion or expense of others is equally self-defeating to the cause. Nonetheless, as Maxine Greene states, “there is no question that what history has over-

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7 Ibid., p. 24.
8 Ibid., p. 24.
looked or distorted must be restored.” Further, she emphasizes the need “to remain aware of the distinctive members of the plurality, appearing before one another with their own perspectives on the common (vision), their own stories entering the culture’s story, altering it as it moves through time.” Multicultural education requires a letting go, a radical decentralizing of political power structures in order to afford a credible voice to all stakeholders.

A Rationale for Multicultural Education

Recently, James Banks and Carlos Cortes published a summary statement synthesizing developments in the field and explaining why multicultural education is needed. They emphasize four basic principles that multicultural education provides. They state that multicultural approaches “provide equal opportunities for all students to learn; develop cultural awareness among students and teachers; emphasize multiculturalism in instruction and curriculum; (and) create opportunities for community involvement.” At the heart of the multicultural education movement is the commitment to “affirming plurality and difference and, at once, working to create community.” That is to say, the movement seeks to recognize and bring into full participation the many faces and voices within our societies.

Carl Grant’s model for appreciating cultures provides a workable framework for conceptualizing multicultural education. It is important to note that the three stages articulated here are not the only means of translating multicultural theory into practice. The outline serves as a guide for approaching multicultural education in a way that makes concepts tangible, concrete and accessible to educational practitioners in the field. The stages are not necessarily consecutive, because members of any given school community — parents, administrators, teachers and students — will all be at various stages in their knowledge, their understanding and their awareness of others (See Figure 4). From this chart, educators can readily expand on ideas to address the needs of their unique school community.

Conducting surveys to assess teacher needs can be helpful in determining the initial direction for a school’s multicultural education efforts. The cultural composition of a given school can also help to determine the needs and focus of educational efforts aimed at breaking down cultural barriers among groups. Involving minority parents in various aspects of school life can assure that minority issues will be addressed, that curriculum will become more inclusive and that student needs will be articulated. This approach also provides access to authentic cultural resources that reach beyond the classroom.

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10 Greene, p.18.
12 *ASCD Program News*, p.2.
This chart describes the characteristics of the three stages of Multicultural Education based on Carl Grant's model. See Making Choices for Multicultural Education: Five Approaches to Race, Class and Gender (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988).

One Local School District's Multicultural Education Efforts

The experience of one local district illustrates some of the challenges that rapidly changing demographics have on a school system. Dublin City Schools, a public suburban school district of 8,994 students, located adjacent to Columbus, Ohio, has seen a dramatic increase in diversity over the past decade. From a predominantly White population in 1980, when U.S. Census Bureau statistics identified few minorities and no Asians, the district now accommodates nearly 600 children from more than 27 language and culture groups. The district serves well over 200 Japanese children who comprise the single largest linguistic minority group. The minority population includes 11 Native Americans, 188 African-Americans, 587 Asians, 52 Hispanics, and 31 multiracial students. English as a Second Language and Multicultural Education services rapidly developed in an attempt to keep pace with student needs. Fortunately, more and more districts are finding that multicultural education enriches all students, regardless of population composition (See Figure 5.). Some of Dublin's programs and activities will be described in this paper.
Dublin City Schools is somewhat unique in that its multicultural growth was extremely rapid and its largest minority population is Japanese. Certainly, the second language learning needs of non-English speaking students were especially acute in the early phase of program development, but they were not the only focus. Financing special programs was a challenge until the district qualified for a five-year federal grant for transitional bilingual education in 1986. That grant allowed the district to initiate and implement many programs that were later institutionalized. Since the end of the government funding, the district has supported its multicultural education efforts almost exclusively from local funds. Some of Dublin’s efforts toward implementing Multicultural Education include but are not limited to the following:

**Multicultural Education Policy.** This policy was developed with assistance from various program areas. It was approved and formally adopted by the Dublin City Schools Board of Education.

**Transitional Bilingual Education Project.** This program introduced bilingual education into the existing English as a Second Language Program. Interpreters were employed to assist Japanese students in the classrooms. The TBE program targeted students in grade 6 through 12 and provided funding for ESL instruction, curriculum development and teacher training.

**English as a Second Language Graded Course of Study.** The ESL GCOS was developed by district ESL resource teachers to assist ESL staff and regular classroom teachers in providing for English as a Second Language instruction focusing on proficiency in the skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Multicultural education is also an important component of this document.

**Bilingual/Multicultural Education Staff Development Programs.** These programs provide a variety for formats including 1) special lectures by visiting scholars and experts, 2) short-term (one to three day) seminars or workshops, 3) formal university course work, 4) participation...
in formal research studies, often through the Ohio State University, 5) multicultural education literature disseminated to teachers, and 6) community panel discussions. Topics include but have not been limited to: “Accommodating the Non-Native Speaker in the Classroom,” “Understanding Multicultural Education.”

Survey of ESL Parents. This survey is conducted periodically. It is an anonymous survey translated into several languages to help identify problems that international families and students may be experiencing. The survey includes items related to discrimination and racism. It also invites parents to make suggestions as to how the school can better serve their children.

Multicultural Coordinator. This administrative position was developed specifically to focus on identifying and addressing the needs of minority students and to increase teacher awareness, understanding and instructional expertise relating to Multicultural Education.

English as a Second Language Parents’ Advisory Council. This parent support group is comprised of parents of ESL and former ESL students. Its function is to provide support, advice, assistance and expertise to the district in the implementation of all aspects of the ESL program. It also serves as a resource for many multicultural activities.

ESL/Multicultural Education Teacher Resource Library. This resource library provides instructional materials for principals and teachers to use. Materials include background information for teachers, books, workbooks, instructional games, testing materials, videos, and computer software relating to bilingual and multicultural education.

The Dublin Parents of Black Students Association. This district-wide association provides support for education and equity for Black students. Parent members also serve in many advisory committees for various programs and projects throughout the district. The group also networks with similar groups from other districts and provides an important mechanism for parent support.

Bilingual Aides Group. Bilingual Aides serve as interpreters and liaison for the Japanese and English school communities. They assist with instruction, counsel parents and provide bilingual assistance for crisis intervention. They provide an important link for Japanese parents. They also meet monthly to provide support across grade levels. When an interpreter is needed for some other language, services are exchanged with a neighboring district that employs interpreters of many languages.

Multicultural Club. This club provides a forum for the support of learning and extracurricular activities among minority students. It seeks to address issues affecting minority students, but is not exclusive to minorities.

Special Multicultural Education Events. A variety of special events are held to foster positive intercultural relations and to increase student and teacher awareness, understanding and acceptance of diversity. For example, some elementary schools hold annual Multicultural Fairs, featuring guest speakers and special cultural performers. Many presenters come from teacher and parent ranks. Intercurricular units and lessons often precede these special events.

Bilingual/Multicultural Special Education. A culturally sensitive approach to meeting the needs of linguistic or cultural minority students suspected of handicapping conditions assures
equity and appropriateness of evaluation and instructional placement. Tests may be adminis-
tered in languages other than English. At other times, a special bilingual aide will be em-
ployed to assist with a non-English speaking students assigned to special education.

Adult Basic and Literacy Education English as a Second Language Program. This program
provides intensive English as a Second Language instruction to non-English speakers from
more than 30 foreign countries. English instruction at five proficiency levels is provided
through an evening program held twice a week. The program is partially funded by a grant
from the Ohio Department of Education.

English as a Second Language Summer School. This program provides three weeks of instruc-
tion in English as a Second Language for students aged 4 through 18 and is designed to main-
tain language proficiency during the summer months. This program is private tuition based.

Foreign Exchange Opportunities. Each year, Dublin High School hosts foreign exchange stu-
dents from a number of different programs and countries. Foreign language teachers also ini-
tiate direct exchanges and take groups of students to Europe and Japan. Recently, Dublin ini-
tiated direct exchanges with Saitama-ken, Japan. Groups of teachers and students have been
hosted by Dublin, and a group of American teachers toured Japanese schools and were hosted
by Fuchu in Tokyo, Saitama and Suzuka.

Business Advisory Council. This group is comprised of Dublin administrators and representa-
tives of local businesses. The BAC has provided support to Dublin's multicultural education
efforts by providing financial assistance, practical or technical assistance, and guest speakers
for various events. Some businesses have elected to focus their contributions exclusively on
multicultural projects such as the Japan Study Tour for Teachers.

Minority Recruitment. The Dublin City Schools Personnel Department has actively recruited
minority candidates for teaching and related positions. Each year and number of minority
employees has increased. Minority recruitment includes interview visits to Black colleges and
other campuses. Dublin is also active in the Central Ohio Alliance for the Recruitment of
Diverse Educators.

Cooperative Learning Strategies. Many district teachers are trained in Cooperative Learning
techniques that foster positive interdependence and cooperation rather than competition.
Cooperative Learning practices promote harmony and place value on each child's unique con-
tributions to the group; they aid in implementing Multicultural Education.

Dublin's multicultural efforts are still emerging and developing, and will, undoubtedly,
remain fluid in response to the needs of a changing community. The various projects, pro-
grams and innovations attempt to provide a proactive rather than reactive response. These
efforts focus on integration and inclusion for all students, authenticity of instruction, the fos-
tering of positive self-esteem, promoting positive intercultural relations, preparing students
for an increasingly diverse society, and striving towards success for all students.

Multicultural Education, as it is evolving, holds promise for improving education for all
students. With far reaching implications for implementation throughout education, it need
not become the exclusive domain of the social sciences. The impact of effective multicultural
education may vastly improve the understanding of differences in peoples, cultures and
cultural values, and greatly enhance acceptance of the rich diversity that future societies will comprise.

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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