2010

Multicultural Education: What is it and Does it Have Benefits?

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: WHAT IS IT AND DOES IT HAVE BENEFITS?

SUBMITTED TO

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FOR

SENIOR THESIS

FALL/2010
NOVEMBER 29, 2010

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On December 31st, 2010 House Bill 2281 comes into effect. The bill comes after Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne's, long struggle to terminate the ethnic studies program at Tucson Unified School District (Horne, 2007). Specifically, HB 2281 bans courses that "promote the overthrow of the United States government, promote resentment toward a race or class of people, are designed for pupils of a particular ethnic group, and advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals" (H.B. 2281, 2010). Tom Horne asserts that ethnic studies, particularly Mexican American Studies, does all of the latter (On the Record, 2010). Teachers who teach Mexican American Studies at TUSD argue that these assertions are wrong. They claim that their classrooms are diverse and are meant for all students of all backgrounds, that students who take their courses are more likely to graduate than students who don't, and that students in their classrooms are more likely to pass the reading, writing, and math sections on Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (SaveEthnicStudies.org, 2010). Clearly there are discrepancies between what people believe is being taught in multicultural education classes, like Mexican American Studies courses. This raises the question, what exactly is multicultural education and does this curriculum positively or negatively affect the students; I assert that multicultural education benefits students.

What is multicultural education?

Similar to Tom Horne, other opponents of multicultural education argue that multicultural education is only for people of color and members of other victimized groups, that it is opposed to Western tradition, and that it will divide the nation (Banks, 1993a). These comments have been disputed as misconceptions (Banks, 1993b). Multicultural education has been defined by James A. Banks, who is considered the

father of multicultural education, as "an inclusive concept used to describe a wide variety of school practices, programs, and material designed to help children from diverse groups to experience educational equality" (Banks, 1984, p. 182). Multicultural education has incorrectly been viewed as merely curriculum reform that involves the addition of content regarding diverse groups. It is, in fact, more comprehensive than this limited conception and is characterized by five dimensions: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2004).

First dimension: Content integration

Content integration refers to educators' use of content and examples from an array of cultures to illustrate key concepts, generalizations, principles, and theories in the subject that they are teaching (Banks, 1993a). This form of content integration developed after a series of events. In the 1800s African American students were being discriminated against in schools that were originally desegregated, consequently the African American community decided to open African American only schools (Banks, 2004). Teachers and administrators were African American; however, school boards, curricula, and textbooks were White controlled. Students were learning about European civilization instead of the history and culture pertaining to their own people. Carter G. Woodson, one of the earliest people of influence in promoting the study and teaching of African American history in the nation's schools and colleges, believed this was harmful to African American students. From the year 1920 to the year 1950 he wrote many of the histories that would be used in later movements, first the intergroup education movement and then the ethnic studies movement (Banks, 2004).

The intergroup education movement was the result of racial prejudice and discrimination (Banks, 2004). During World War II tensions had developed between African American, Mexican American and Whites, living in the North and West, who were looking for work. These tensions resulted in racial incidents and riots. Intergroup education was used to educate people on content related to religious, national, and racial groups in order to reduce prejudice and discrimination, and create interracial understanding among people from diverse groups. Educators within this movement "emphasized democratic living and interracial cooperation within mainstream American society" (Banks, 2004, p. 10). The main goal of this movement was to create racial harmony. The ethnic studies movement of the 1960s and 1970s, on the other hand, was meant to promote empowerment and the advancement of people of color (Banks, 2004). Students of color were demanding changes in the curriculum so that their histories could be added. This resulted in the formation of ethnic studies programs and the publication of new books. Multicultural education developed from the ethnic studies movement in four phases (Banks, 2004). In the first phase educators "who had interests in and [knowledge of] the history and culture of ethnic minority groups initiated [the incorporation of concepts from ethnic studies] into the school and teacher-education curricula" (Banks, 2004, p. 13). The second phase began when educators realized that merely incorporating ethnic studies into the curricula wasn't enough to reform schools, alleviating the educational inequality that students of color faced. Thus, multicultural education would have to be used to bring about structural and systematic changes. The third phase emerged when members of other victimized groups, not on the basis of race, demanded that their histories and voices be added to the curriculum. The current phase of

multicultural education is "developing theory, research, and practice that inter-relate variables connected to race, class and gender" (Banks, 2004, p. 13). Banks also points out that all of these phases continue today. As established earlier, multicultural education grew out of the ethnic studies movement which was a part of the civil rights movement. This association means that the claim that multicultural education is against Western tradition is false; multicultural education arose from the western democratic ideals of freedom, justice and equality (Banks, 1993b).

Second dimension: Knowledge construction process

The second dimension of multicultural education is the knowledge construction process. Multicultural theorists argue that knowledge is both objective and subjective, reflecting the "social, cultural, and power positions of people within society" (Banks, 2004, p. 14). Given the sometimes subjective nature of the knowledge presented in literature, it is of grave importance that students be taught to identify the writer's purposes and point of view, as well as how to think for themselves and "formulate their own interpretations of reality" (Banks, 2004, p. 14). Integrating multicultural content into the curriculum would present a different perspective from that of mainstream literature, and give students the opportunity to form their own interpretations.

J.A Banks has conceptualized four approaches to integrating multicultural content. The contributions approach is the first level of integration (Banks, 1988). In this approach the focus is on inserting ethnic heroes, holidays and other discrete cultural artifacts into the curriculum (Banks, 1988). An example of this approach would be studying famous African Americans during African history month or studying the food of different cultures (Appelbaum, 2002). This approach is the easiest and most frequently

used by schools; however, it can lead to superficial understanding of other cultures

(Appelbaum, 2002). The second approach is the additive approach. In this approach

ethnic content, concepts, perspectives and themes are added to the curriculum (Banks,

1988). Although ethnic content is added to the curriculum, the basic structure and

principles of the curriculum remain unchanged. For example, a book by Toni Morrison

may be read in a classroom, but the students are merely reading it and not being helped to

fully understand the book and its background (Appelbaum, 2002). Thus, ethnic content

may be available, but it is critiqued from a Eurocentric point of view (Banks, 1988). The

next approach is the transformation approach. This approach differs from the previous

two in that the goals, perspectives, and structure of the curriculum are changed (Banks,

1988). In changing the structure of the curriculum students are able to view concepts,

events and issues from the perspective of diverse groups of people. For example, when

learning about the American Revolution students would learn about it from the

perspectives of Anglo loyalists, African Americans, the British and Native Americans

(Appelbaum, 2002). The goal of this approach is to extend students' "understandings of

the nature, development, and complexity of US society" through the "infusion of various

perspectives, frames of references, and content from various groups" (Banks, 1988, p.

142). The transformation approach allows students to see that the Anglo-Saxon

Protestant culture does not make up the whole U.S. culture, but is a part of the whole

along with ethnic events, literature, music and art (Banks, 1988). The social action

approach adds to the transformation approach in that students are also taught to view

society through a critical lens and take action when necessary. In the social action

approach students become active members of society and learn not to accept existing

ideologies without questioning them first (Banks, 1988).

Third dimension: Prejudice reduction

The third dimension of multicultural education is prejudice reduction. Research

has shown that children, as early as three years old, are aware of racial differences, and

that children have a White bias, meaning they prefer people and objects that are White

(Banks, 2004). Studies aimed to modify children's racial attitudes have found that an

intercultural curriculum positively affects students' racial attitudes, that reinforcing

children for choosing black objects reduces White bias, that teaching students to

differentiate the faces of out-group members reduces prejudice, and that positive contact

with members of other racial groups reduces prejudice (Banks, 2004). Thus, the

prejudice reduction dimension is ultimately aimed to "help students develop democratic

attitudes, values, and behaviors" (Banks, 2004, p. 16).

Fourth dimension: Equity pedagogy

The fourth dimension of multicultural education, equity pedagogy, abandons

traditional teaching strategies and classroom environments. Equity pedagogy involves

strategies and environments that "help students from diverse racial, ethnic and cultural

groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within,

and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society" (Banks & Banks,

1995, p. 152). Teachers can do this by eliminating the power relationship that exists

between them and their students. In this new environment students are producers of

knowledge and not merely passive recipients of the knowledge their teachers give them.

In classrooms where equity pedagogy exists, students are not just memorizing facts, but

are constructing knowledge and developing their own understanding of the world. These

refined skills allow students to make informed judgments and become active members of

society fighting for societal change (Banks & Banks, 1995).

Fifth dimension: Empowering school culture and social structure

The last dimension, an empowering school culture and social structure, occurs

when the structure of the school is transformed allowing students from diverse racial,

ethnic, gender, and social-class groups to experience equality and a sense of

empowerment (Banks, 1993b). In order for the students to feel equal and empowered, the

school must be reformed through change in the curriculum and testing procedures, as

well as change in the actions and attitudes of teachers and administrators (Banks, 1993b).

<center>**Concluding clarifications: Multicultural education**</center>

People who oppose multicultural education claim that it is only for members of

marginalized groups and that it will lead to division within the nation (Banks, 1993b).

These people fail to see that the United States is still a nation divided by race and social

class. Complete equality has not been met when only 46% of Mexican Americans

graduate from high school, in comparison, to the 84% of Caucasians that graduate from

high school (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Something must be done, and multicultural

education may be the answer. As discussed in this section, multicultural education is

more than merely adding people of color to the curriculum; it is a reform movement

meant to produce equality, a sense of empowerment, and critical thinking skills for

members of all groups.

Multicultural education's benefits

In a study done by Falbo and De Baessa (2006) the influence of Mayan education on the academic achievement of Indian and Ladino students was examined. Similarly to Mexicans in the United States who are encouraged to learn English and assimilate, Indians in Guatemala were "encouraged to drop their indigenous identities and languages to become 'Ladino'" (Falbo & De Baessa, 2006, p. 602). In this study the sample was Ladino students and students from Indian communities that spoke either Kiché or Q'eqchi'. The students who spoke Kiché went to schools that did not have content relevant to the Kiché language or culture. Students who spoke Q'eqchi' went to Escuelas Mayas, where the Q'eqchi' language and culture were a part of the curriculum. The results of the study were that students who attended Mayan schools, where their language and culture were a part of the curriculum, had significantly greater gains in their reading and mathematics skills than students who went to non-Mayan schools that did not include their language and culture in the curriculum. This improvement in reading and math skills is similar to that that was seen in the Tucson Unified School district, where students enrolled in Mexican American Studies were more likely to pass the reading, writing, and math sections on Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (SaveEthnicStudies.org, 2010). It is evident from these two cases that including multicultural education into the mainstream curriculum has positive effects on the students. An increase in the students' reading and math skills indicates that multicultural education promotes learning in general, but what other benefits could a multicultural education produce?

Assimilation, acculturation, and biculturalism

In the second-culture acquisition literature, assimilation is understood to be the replacement of one's native culture, including language, values, social competencies and sense of identity, with that of another culture (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). The assimilation process has various stages, including cultural and behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation, identificational assimilation, behavioral receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation (LaFromboise et al., 1993). The ultimate goal of this process is to become socially accepted by members of the dominate group; however, until this happens individuals will suffer from a sense of alienation, stress, and anxiety (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Given that the United States is a nation focused on race, people of color are highly susceptible to this stress and anxiety since they may never be fully accepted in an Anglo, dominated society.

Acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological changes that result from constant contact with another culture; these changes result from learning the language, values, social competencies and sense of identity of the new culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). Acculturative changes range from behavioral, psychological, and sociocultural shifts, for example changes in ways of eating and dressing, language, and self-esteem (Sam & Berry, 2010). The unidirectional model of acculturation, like assimilation, results in the cultural erosion of the native culture (Buriel, 1993). This model assumes that the native and new cultures are at "opposite ends of a single cultural continuum," and that one culture is superior to the other (Buriel, 1993, p. 532; LaFromboise et al., 1993). These aspects of the model can cause cognitive disturbance in regards to one's social identification. Social identity theory assumes that a person's self-concept and self-esteem

is partly derived from the status that is given to the groups this person is a member of (Gilovich, Keltner, & Nisbett, 2006, p. 445). As cited in Sam and Berry (2010), "Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued that individuals need to belong to a group in order to secure a firm sense of well-being," and that individuals tend to have a favorable bias towards the groups they are a member of (p. 475). In regards to acculturation, individuals run the risk of being a member of a group that is seen as inferior and must answer the question, "To which group do I belong?" (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 475). This can lead to acculturative stress, resulting in anxiety, depression, identity confusion, and feelings of marginality and alienation (LaFromboise et al., 1993).

Biculturalism is defined by Ramirez (1983) as "an integration of the competencies and sensitivities associated with two cultures within a person (cited in Buriel, Perez, DeMent, Chavez & Moran, 1988, p. 285). Biculturalism is the result of a two-directional model of acculturation (Buriel, 1993). In the two-directional model individuals do not have to choose between their ancestral culture and a new culture. A bicultural individual can be equally a part of both cultures and has the choice of changing their behavior to better fit a particular environment (LaFromboise et al., 1993). The ability to have this choice allows individuals to be less stressed and less anxious than individuals that must choose to acculturate or assimilate (LaFromboise et al., 1993).

Biculturalism has a positive impact on academic achievement. In Feliciano's (2001) study examining the effect of immigrant culture on high school drop out rates, she found that retaining one's ethnic culture equaled greater academic success. In her study the students who were least likely to drop out were those students who were bilingual and lived in a bilingual or immigrant household. She concluded that bicultural youth were

able to achieve in school because they had the ability to use resources present in

mainstream society and in the immigrant community (Feliciano, 2001). Buriel et al.

(1988) also found that biculturalism had a positive effect on academic performance. In

their study examining the relationship of language brokering to academic performance,

biculturalism, academic self-efficacy, and social self-efficacy, they found that "even after

accounting for the effects of motivational (academic self-efficacy) and linguistic (total

brokering) variables, biculturalism made a unique positive contribution to academic

performance" (p. 294). Buriel et al. explained that competence in two cultures allows

individuals to better adapt to dual cultural demands, and "may provide bicultural students

with more problem-solving strategies, interpersonal skills, and self-confidence for

accessing academic resources at school and in their communities" (p. 294). This

reasoning could also help explain why increased reading and mathematic skills were

present in Tucson and Guatemala classrooms. As evidenced in the literature,

acculturation and assimilation can have negative effects on an individual's well being;

however, maintaining one's ethnic culture does not hinder success. Thus, including

multicultural content into the curriculum could lead to greater cultural competency and

increased skills that help students succeed in school. These skills would not be limited to

members of ethnic groups, and could help all students better navigate the multicultural

world they live in through better interpersonal skills and the usage of various resources.

Intergroup Relations

Stereotypes are beliefs about attributes that are thought to be characteristic of

members of particular groups. Stereotypes tend to be false and can have real, negative

consequences in the lives of those people who they are applied to. Stereotype threat, in

particular, has been found to negatively affect the performance of members of groups that are associated with negative stereotypes. Steele (1997) defines stereotype threat as:

> the event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one's self definition" (p. 686).

Schmader (2002) and Davis, Aronson, and Salinas (2006) have found that stereotype threat effects the academic performance of negatively stereotyped groups. Davis et al. (2006) confirmed that stereotype threat existed by the fact that strong racial identities were able to buffer its negative effects, resulting in better intellectual performance by individuals with strong racial identities. As described in Steele's definition of stereotype threat, Schmader (2002) found that the effects of negative stereotypes were greatest among individuals who strongly identified with the stereotyped group. The results of this study showed that women who considered their gender to be an important part of their identity performed worse than men on a math exam when they had to indicate their gender on the test.

Although stereotype threat has been shown to exist, Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, and Master (2006) have demonstrated that positive self-concepts can neutralize stereotype threat and increase academic achievement. Their study focused on the concepts of self-affirmation and stereotype threat. The students in their study were all randomly assigned to one of two conditions, either the affirmation condition or the control condition. In both conditions the students received a packet that included a list of values. The students in the affirmation condition were asked to indicate which value was most important to them and

write a paragraph about why this value was important to them. The students in the control condition were asked to indicate their least important value and write a paragraph about why this value would be important to someone else. They were all asked to indicate their level of agreement with a statement concerning their chosen value. All students were also asked to do a set of word completions. All the word fragments could either be completed as a stereotype-relevant or irrelevant word. By using students' official transcripts, researchers found that African American students in the affirmation condition received higher fall-term grades than those in the controlled condition. African Americans in the affirmation condition also produced the fewest stereotype-relevant words, while African Americans in the control condition produced the most. In sum, a positive self-concept greatly reduced the effects of stereotype threat and increased academic achievement. Perhaps a multicultural curriculum could produce positive self-concepts in students whose ethnic histories are usually left out of the curriculum. Including their histories in the curriculum would show that their history and culture is important, and would validate their experiences (Vasquez, 2005). In addition, research has found that a multicultural course can result in stronger cultural identification (Cherry, 2002). Maintaining an ethnic identity can combat the negative effects of acculturation and assimilation, and strong racial identities can buffer the negative effectives of stereotype threat (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Davis et al., 2006).

Prejudice is defined by Stephan and Stephan (2004) as "negative attitudes toward social groups" (p. 782). Stephan and Stephan (2004) state that "prejudice occurs when individuals are prejudged and disliked based on their group memberships" (p. 782). People who are high in prejudice have stereotypes that are activated (Stephan & Stephan,

2004). Given the harmful effects that stereotypes can have, i.e. reduce academic

performance, it is important to reduce prejudice. Multicultural education may be one way

to reduce prejudice. In a study discussed earlier, Falbo and De Baessa (2006) found that

"students who increased or stayed the same in terms of their ethnic identity achievement

became more positive about interacting with people from other ethnic groups" (p. 612).

Thus, gains in ethnic identity achievement positively enhanced other group orientations.

This is directly the opposite of what opponents of multicultural education believe it does,

that being promoting resentment toward a race or class of people and causing division

within the United States. In addition, in Buriel's (1993) study his participants were

students enrolled in a bicultural educational program and he found that these students all

had high respect for cultural differences. This can be expected from multicultural

education, given that prejudice reduction is one of its five dimensions.

Engagement, critical pedagogy, and empowerment

Shade, Kelly and Oberg (1997) state that in order for children to learn they must

feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging in the classroom. They believe that "the

most important aspect of learning is the involvement of the student with the content and

material in ways that it becomes an important part of his cognitive or affective repertoire"

(Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997, p. 42). One way of doing this is to include diverse cultural

content into the material. Vasquez (2005) found that for Latino students reading Chicano

texts gave them a sense of ownership of the text and therefore the classroom, and gave

them a "feeling of personal and ethnic legitimization" (p. 919). Another way to increase

engagement is to change teaching strategies. Shade et al. (1997) note that students from

diverse ethnic backgrounds each have their own culture, and the different ways they have

been socialized present themselves in the classroom. For example, Shade et al. (1997)

state that "African American students are brought up to be more active, emotionally

responsive, and assertive than most middle class Euro-American students" (p. 46). Thus,

culturally responsive teachers who are warm, supportive, and personable are able to relate

to their students, resulting in higher academic performance (Shade et al., 1997). In

addition to changing their behavior, teachers can change the way the classroom operates.

Nieto (1999) asserts that an important way for students to become actively engaged in

school is through dialogue in the classroom. One way that teachers can facilitate

dialogue, and that is consistent with a collectivist culture, is through collaborative

learning. Used appropriately, collaborative learning creates "a more equal status among

[the] students," and "enhances interethnic understanding and solidarity" (Nieto, 1999, p.

94). Through dialogue and by acknowledging the different forms of knowledge students

possess (i.e. cultural, linguistic, social class) critical pedagogy becomes a part of the

classroom. Critical pedagogy is defined as "an approach through which students and

teachers engage in learning as a mutual encounter with the world" (Nieto, 1999, p. 103).

Critical pedagogy is based on students' engagement with learning and is not a "banking"

approach where students reiterate what their teachers have stated (nieto, 1999). In a

critical pedagogical approach it is expected that students will critically analyze issues and

situations from a variety of perspectives and ultimately be moved to social action.

Consequently, empowerment is the "outcome of critical pedagogy," and is "used to

liberate" (Nieto, 1999, p. 105). Multicultural education, implemented correctly, offers

students new and diverse perspectives from which to critically analyze reality and reach

empowerment from.

Conclusion

Multicultural education is a comprehensive reform movement whose aim is to promote educational equality and social justice. It has been misunderstood to be only the integration of ethnic content into the curriculum; however, its other four dimensions prove otherwise. Partly through its application of culturally relevant material and culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education combats deculturalization, reduces prejudice and the effects of stereotypes, enhances other-group orientation, and promotes critical thinking skills and empowerment through the use of critical pedagogy. Multicultural education has multiple benefits, and as showcased in Tucson, it has had positive effects on the students. Discussed in this paper were the benefits that could be attained through multicultural education and why people who oppose it are wrong. Therefore, allowing bills like and including HB 2281 to go into effect would further impair our already broken educational system.

Although I argue the benefits of a multicultural education, I do acknowledge that much research must be done on the subject. Research must be done to analyze how closely schools are implementing Bank's dimensions of and approaches to multicultural education. More research must be done to assess the direct impact of multicultural education on the benefits I've discussed herein. Research must be done to evaluate the longitudinal effects of a multicultural education. Also, research should compare the effects of multicultural education on members of the dominant group and members of marginalized groups.

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