

**Personal Life Experiences and Work-related Factors
Associated with Educators' Approaches to Multicultural Education**

Proposal for the AMATYC Conference

Diversity: What does it mean to you?

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by

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Introduction

Since the middle of the sixteenth century, one hundred million people have emigrated from their home lands to new places. Across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans they went, to what are now the world's multinational societies (Yans-McLaughlin, 1990). One of these societies is the United States of America with its unalterably pluralistic population: Beginning with Native American tribes and the estimated 30 to 40 million immigrants arriving from Europe (Suzuki, 1984), up to today, when the United States absorbs people from Vietnam, Indochina, Latin America, and the Philippines. For example, between 1981 and 1986, about 89 percent of legal immigrants to the United States came from non-European nations. Almost 47 percent came from Asia and 38 percent from Latin America (Bureau of the Census, 1989). Norton, et al. (1991) estimated that the United States absorbed more than 4 million immigrants and refugees and perhaps twice that number of illegal aliens between 1970 and 1980.

Besides these immigration patterns, the world is faced with challenges that cannot be ignored. Modern technology has given us access to each other through new forms of communication and the acceleration of global interdependence. The expansion of political, cultural, economical, and ecological networks require cooperation among cultures. Consequently, more face-to-face encounters with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are part of our lives. Suddenly we are exposed to people with different values, feelings, and behaviors and we have to learn to respect and to live with one another's differences.

The 21st century with its changing demographics, global interdependence, and technological progress resulting in increasingly heterogeneous societies brings along social problems of such magnitude that they pose a serious threat to the ideals of American democracy (Banks, 1972). Besides environmental pollution, war, deteriorating cities, poverty, and increase in violence and ethnic hostility can not be denied, both in schools and in society.

These circumstances necessitate effective educational leaders trained and committed to multicultural education (Larke, 1990) who prepare young people for a future in a culturally pluralistic nation and a rapidly shrinking world. Many attempts have been made to adapt to the growing diversity, such as revisions of curriculum, instructional strategies, changes in leadership, as well as implementations of policies against racism, conflict resolution strategies, and anti-prejudice training. This study is based on the belief that educators' philosophies of multicultural education are critical to the promotion of multiculturalism.

Theoretical Framework

Multicultural education is a current education buzzword, widely referred to in the popular press and it reflects a major area of discussion at various education meetings. The widespread use of the term multicultural education has obscured rather than clarified it as a concept. In recent years several theoretical frameworks of multicultural education have been developed. Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant reviewed the existing literature which claims multicultural education as its subject and developed a taxonomy that illustrates what multicultural education means (Sleeter and Grant, 1987):

1. *Teaching the Culturally Different (CD)*: This approach simply recognizes distinct personalities. Teachers assist students in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes allowing them to participate successfully in, as well as to compete with, the public culture of the dominant group. Even if students are encouraged to maintain their own cultural identity, teachers see the

goal of multicultural education as providing transitional bridges for their students of color to assimilate into the cultural mainstream and into the existing social structure.

2. *Human Relations (HR)*: This approach focuses on cooperation and communication between people of different backgrounds. This conception is aimed mainly at the affective level - at the attitudes and feelings people have about themselves and others. It attempts to foster good relationships among students of diverse heritage to replace tension and hostility with acceptance and care.

3. *Single Group Studies (SS)*: This approach fosters cultural pluralism in recognizing all cultural groups as equal and in honoring the intrinsic worth of all human beings. Respondents to this approach strive to develop acceptance, appreciation, and empathy for a rich cultural and linguistic diversity. This approach implies a transmission of the traditions of all cultures equally and respectfully so that students not only cherish their own ways of life but also respect those of others.

4. *Multicultural Education (MC)*: This approach promotes cultural pluralism and social equality by appreciating, protecting, and enhancing diverse cultures. Gollnick (1980) summarized the five major goals of this approach as (a) promoting strength and value of cultural diversity; (b) developing a sense for human rights and respect for cultural diversity; (c) changing discrimination in society; (d) developing acceptance for social justice and equal opportunity for all people; and (e) developing a sense for equity distribution of power among all individuals and groups.

5. *Multicultural Education and Social Reconstructionist (SR)*: This approach goes a step beyond the preceding approach by requiring multicultural education to also prepare students to question the status quo and to challenge the existing social structural inequalities. It invites students to become skilled workers and thinking citizens who are also change agents and social critics. This definition implies a common responsibility to work actively towards social structural equality and equal opportunity in schools.

Purpose

Many educators and scholars have given immense attention to the importance of multicultural education leading to more and more in-services and staff development programs. Since most educators consider themselves to be sensitive towards diversity in one way or another and it is not uncommon for them to feel intimidated by the number of staff development programs that they are urged to attend. These concerns could be addressed if these individuals (a) were aware of their own philosophies towards diversity, (b) would realize how these personal conceptions fall within the theoretical framework determined by Sleeter and Grant, and (c) would be aware of the personal life experiences and/or work-related factors which might have influenced their philosophies.

Method

Before conducting the actual study, two instruments were developed:

1. The instrument "Assessment of Multicultural Education Philosophy" (AMEP) was designed to categorize educators into one of the five approaches to multicultural education determined by Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant (1987). The classifications given by the AMEP provide an indication of the overall tendency toward one approach with the caveat that most respondents have tendencies towards other approaches as well.

2. The study explored variables that may influence an educators' approach to multicultural education. These personal life experiences and/or work-related factors were combined in the so-called "Factors Influencing Approaches to Multicultural Education Questionnaire" (FIAQ).

For the actual study, the above mentioned instruments were combined in a survey which was distributed to 530 teachers of Junior High Schools and Senior High Schools in the San Diego Unified School District, thus, representing over 25 percent of the teacher population in these 2 school-types during the school year 1995-1996. The teachers were selected through a three-fold sampling procedure. First, the schools were categorized into one of three different groups based on the ethnic composition of their student populations. One category included schools with a majority of students of color and less than 10 percent White students. A middle category accounted for schools with an ethnic mixed student population based on White students and students from 2 different minority groups contributing 20 percent each to the student population. The last category consisted of schools with a majority of White students. A second step was to choose schools in the form of a convenient sample. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from six Junior High Schools and five Senior High Schools. The third step was a cluster sampling method since all teachers of the participating schools were encouraged to volunteer for this study. Since the researcher went to each of the participating schools to present the study, a response rate of 96 percent was obtained which is equivalent to 509 participating teachers.

Results

Study results indicated that HR was the most common approach with 35.2 percent of the educators selecting it. The second most common approach was SS with 23.6 percent followed by MC with 17.5 percent. SR and CD turned out to be the least common approaches with 13.7 percent and 10.0 percent respectively.

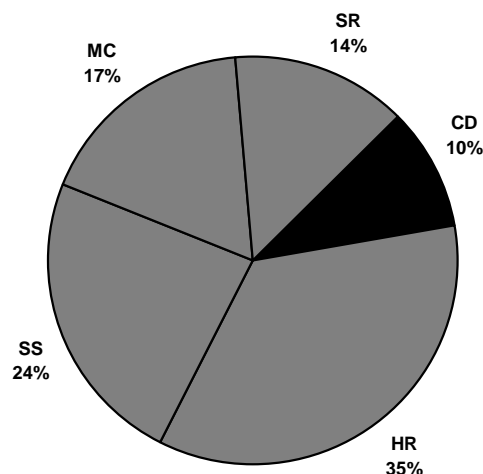


Figure 1. Frequency of the Approaches to Multicultural Education in the San Diego Unified School District.

Furthermore, this study determined personal life experiences and work-related factors that are associated with teachers' approaches to multicultural education. The demographic analysis revealed the following significant differences:

1. School-type,
2. Educators' Ethnicities,
3. Educators' Age, and
4. Educators' Knowledge of Foreign Languages.

In addition, an exploratory factor analysis using an oblique rotation method was employed which revealed four factors that are associated with educators' approaches to multicultural education:

5. School Community Support for Multicultural Education,
6. Social Activism,
7. Classroom Work, and
8. Exposure to Cultural Diversity.

Discussion

Considering our goal to be educating students for the 21st century, the results of this study showed that educators' are more likely to use the approaches to multicultural education that do not promote this goal. The remaining study results indicate that factors associated with educators' conceptions of multicultural education gain distinctive importance since these factors might enable educational leaders to facilitate an educator's move towards one of the more activist and responsible positions of multicultural education (MC or SR).

The results of the demographic analysis imply the following:

1. *School-type*: Junior High School teachers consider HR to be the most appropriate approach for the age-level of their students more often than Senior High School teachers. It needs to be kept in mind that children are so exposed to violence in the media that tolerance seems to be an unfamiliar concept. Especially in Junior High Schools, respect for human beings as well as respect for diversity should be fostered as pre-requisite for more activist approaches to multicultural education.

2. *Ethnicity*: Since teachers of color are generally over-represented in the activist positions of multicultural education, more teachers of color should be added to the teaching staff. Contrary to this recommendation, the racial composition of the teacher population is becoming more non-minority (Burstein and Cabello, 1989; Grant and Secada, 1990; Larke, 1990). Teachers of color are expected to decline from about 12.5 percent of the nation's teaching force in 1980 to about 5 percent by the year 2000 (American Council on Education, 1988). The National Center for Education Statistics (1994, table 67) calculated for the school year 1990-91 that of the 2,559,488 teachers in public elementary and secondary schools 8.3 percent are Black, 3.4 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0.8 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native in comparison to the 86.5 percent White teachers.

3. *Age*: Since mostly younger teachers who recently received their teacher education are represented in the activist conceptions of multicultural education and veterans teachers who received their teacher education many years ago are striving towards the approaches CD and HR,

more staff development should be offered which concentrates on the situation of more experienced teachers.

4. *Foreign Language Knowledge:* Since speakers of foreign languages tend to strive towards more activist positions of multicultural education, the learning of a foreign language should be encouraged throughout the teacher education program as well as during the teaching career. Schools could offer special programs for the staff members that would assist them in learning a second language.

The results of the factor analysis imply the following:

5. *School Community Support for Multicultural Education:* Schools need to be aware of the support a teacher needs from parents, principals, and fellow teachers. A principal's support is not sufficient in his/her multicultural education efforts. Educational leaders also need to encourage parents and fellow teachers to be supportive for multicultural education efforts.

6. *Social Activism:* To engage in social activism is a decision every individual needs to make by himself/herself. However, schools could, for example, provide information on social activist movements, encourage participation, as well as recognize and honor a teacher's engagement.

7. *Classroom Work:* This factor includes constraints through the large number of students in the classroom, the time a teacher has with these students, and strict requirements from the curriculum. Since these constraints are often state regulated, the administration of a school rarely has opportunities to limit them. Although the time teachers have, and the number of students is regulated, administrators could encourage creativity, show their appreciation for extra efforts of teachers, and offer teachers time for redesigning their lessons, for example, during staff development days.

8. *Exposure to Diversity:* This is hard to regulate by the school. Educators had their experiences in schools, college, and in the neighborhoods they lived in as a child. This experience is unalterable. Furthermore, it can not be expected that educators would move into a more diverse neighborhood to foster his/her own development in multicultural education. However, networking of educators from different ethnicities or encouragement to volunteer in a community different from one's own could be effective. For example, a principal could encourage educators networking and then, instead of an ineffective staff development day in multicultural education, join the teachers on a trip to Mexico to bring food and clothing to the poor.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Frequency of the Approaches to Multicultural Education in the San Diego Unified School District.