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Ethnicity and Race: Implications in Education for Becoming a Multicultural Society

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Abstract

The world is becoming a smaller place. Its inhabitants are interacting with each other more than ever before. Our personal knowledge of other places and others cultures needs to be increased. As our own population becomes more diverse, the needs of our educational system are becoming greater. Racial diversity is putting a demand on American schools that is not being met. As a result, immigrant children are not receiving an adequate education. Current psychological trends in multicultural education will be examined, as well as the perceived shortcomings in U.S. schools by immigrant students. America's place in the overall global picture needs to be reassessed and priority given to meeting the needs of multi-racial populations. The deficiencies in multi-cultural education need to be addressed and the prevalent mindset of the school systems needs to be reevaluated. By being ignorant to the complexity of the world, we are not only hurting ourselves, but the world as a whole.

Ethnicity and Race: Implications in Education for Becoming a Multicultural Society

Society today has become a complex mix of nationalities in the United States. This high level of diversity has brought new challenges to the field of education. As school districts and university systems make an effort to become multicultural, there are many remnants of the old way of viewing the world. It is due to this resistance that new ideas, perspectives, and procedures need to be analyzed and drawn up. Once education in America is able to be regarded as equal for everyone, immigrant and native alike; a greater cohesiveness will be supported.

This nation of ours was founded by Europeans migrating to a new land. When they came here, they brought their ideas, customs, and traditions with them. These cultural ideals have been the mainstream population's set imagery of the world. When new people came to this land, they found that the dominant culture was highly resistant to change. Immigrants have had to decide if they were going to assimilate to this new society or if they were going to resist by holding onto their homeland values and beliefs.

The significance of the research is to make people more aware of the need for multicultural education and training. It points out the shortcomings that are present in today's educational environment and makes suggestions for how the situation may be improved. The facts of America's ethnocentricity are highlighted and revealing facts are shared to get the message across that we have a long way to go before we reach a state of open-mindedness. Specific and specialized training is required and an understanding of the problems still readily apparent is presented. New empirical data show the negative effect of racial bias and prejudice.

My pertinent interest in this topic comes from my desire to become a high school guidance counselor. I was previously a teacher in an ESOL program and I saw firsthand the problems that are facing immigrant families. I hope to become more informed of the current

position of multicultural education and I also wish to learn new strategies for dealing with such. I know that if I am to work in a large metropolitan city, I will be exposed to numerous nationalities through the duties of my position. My background was rather ethnically sheltered and I realize that I could use more enlightenment, both to the reality of the challenges that face non-native individuals and to the steps that I may personally take to help change the situation.

This subject matter applies directly to the course objectives by investigating the central concepts of the field of multicultural education. It discusses what this is, how it has been developed, and what is holding it back. This material also identifies the manner in which multiple facets of social diversity impact educational practice and policy. If the minds of White people are closed to the information, then getting it distributed will be that much more difficult. And this paper does identify significant themes in the research pertaining to education of diverse student populations. It shows how many students believe there is much to be done and, at the same time, presents ways in which the teaching methods may be improved. (class syllabus)

This topic applies to the mission statement of the college by acknowledging that there is much preparation and research needed to be ready to assume significant roles in education. The studies that have been read are current, the information in depth, and improvement is always at the forefront. In relation to the mission statement of the department, multicultural education requires much foundational knowledge and professional knowledge. Methods and techniques for experiential learning are explored and the needs of the people of Florida (largely immigrant) are better served through this type of training. One of the highlighted components is that of “promoting, understanding, and appreciating diversity”. (COTE, Mission Statement, 2004)

Research Questions

I have developed two research questions that I chose to explore for my research. The first of which is: “Why is there such a strong need for multicultural education in America?” and the second is: “What are the implications of psychology on the implementation of multicultural education?” The first question refers to how the need appears to be stronger here than anywhere else in the world. The second question takes into consideration what could be both the aids and the barriers to instituting more diversity learning and / or teaching in our school systems.

By having two definite queries to investigate, I decided to use two completely approaches to obtaining the material. The subject was assigned to me at random, so it was just a coincidence that much of the class articles were related to my topic. So I used four research papers that were given in class to provide the foundation of material to be used for responding to the first question. With two of the sources coming from Drs. Cruz and Diaz each, I knew that I would have the most reliable information that I could find. Dr. Diaz’ papers were actually presented at conferences, so they were a new type of reference for me. However, after personally discussing multicultural education with him I knew these were superb sources for me.

My master’s program is actually majoring in educational psychology, so I wanted to be able to incorporate this field into my project. This is why the second postulate relates to psychology and its effect on the main topic. With this in mind, I accessed the school’s ez-proxy and did a search using the PsychArticles database. There was a great deal of information and I found it no small task to narrow it down. The papers discuss both the mindset of students who are exposed to multicultural courses and the philosophies that should be accepted when preparing to actually teach these courses. So I found that I was able to bring both perspectives together with this research. One article is actually a summary report of the proceedings that were held at a multicultural educational summit / conference.

Review of the Literature

Addressing the first research question, I will now present the key points from the Cruz and Diaz articles. I feel that the ideas presented by Dr. Cruz are most relevant for establishing the foundation for this paper, so I shall begin there. A person of color is described as anyone who cannot be classified as White (Cruz-Janzen, 1999a). So, as you can imagine, there are great many people in this country who are not White. When asked how they felt about this classification, Cruz-Janzen noted that students did not agree with the concept of biological races and felt as though all humans belonged to the one race....human. Due to this lack of conceptualized understanding, many ethnic students were reluctant to accept the biased education that was given to them. They would willingly resist the curriculum and choose to not learn. They felt as though they were being told to make a choice between their native culture and that of the new homeland host.

Even from an early beginning, immigrant parents would wish for their children to succeed in “White World” (Cruz-Janzen, 1999a). The distrust that was instilled by their parents was brought to school with them. It was stressed to them that assimilation in the European-American world would equal success. If this did not occur, teachers would tend to have lower expectations of minority students. Cruz-Janzen pointed out that if they became behavior problems (for resisting), then they would be pushed out of the schools without adequate skills. Ethnic students felt as though only the negative aspects of their heritages were shown in school.

Continuing this train of thought into Dr. Cruz’ second article, *physiognomy* was the observation of bodily and facial features to judge human character and mental qualities (1999b). This view would not bode well for students of multiple heritages as schools encourage an environment that is racially and ethnically hostile to students of color. Simply because they were

not White, they would be subjected to harassment. Knowing that the parents of these children had experienced the same hardships, they taught their own children to not trust others as a means of survival (Cruz-Janzen). An ironic twist to this is that many minority students would discriminate themselves. Cruz-Janzen noted that many Black immigrants would disavow any connection to Africa. So if the minority is doing this to the minority, how will it be stopped?

Diaz (2002) highlights the fact that educational systems are designed to meet the needs of the majority cultural group who speak the native language. This would only make sense, as in catering to the majority. But if this is the case, then why is there the discussion about minority education? Dr. Diaz presents some rather enlightening information about the way that knowledge is transferred to others, in the form of traditional and transformative. Traditional teaching provides facts about a subject and doesn't require much background investigation. Transformative instruction presents the situation from various perspectives and incorporates a much larger picture to be evaluated. It allows for a multicultural, not monocultural, presentation.

The article goes on to describe how best to match learning styles of minority students with the teaching style of the classroom. Teachers learn that as the class becomes more diverse, the rules for a homogenous group become less applicable (Diaz, 2002). Unfortunately, past experience has shown that students of color receive less qualified teachers and less engaging learning activities. I was pleased to read about *voluntary minorities* who feel as though school is a way for them to succeed. When students feel that their culture is valued, they are more likely to have a positive outlook toward schooling. What is most frustrating is how studies have shown that English language learning has been increased through the use of the native language (Diaz). The reason that I say this is because most school districts don't have bilingual programs. And even worse, programs that do have such, usually limit participation to only three years.

The paper that was presented at a conference by Dr. Diaz was incredibly enlightening. He stressed the need for our citizens to be more globally aware and he stressed this by using an economically motivated model. Unfortunately, some view teaching global views to be anti-American and against the nation-state (Diaz, 2004). This would help to explain why many of our own prospective teachers have a very insulated view of the world. Not only were they taught this way, but they might also harbor views that are not accepting of a multicultural society. In a study that was referred to, the authors were quoted as saying there was “a high degree of inattention, insularity and lack of awareness among perspective teachers” (Diaz, p.4). This paper suggests that teacher education programs need to assess the attitudes and knowledge of their graduates. For if they don't have the professional knowledge and their thoughts toward others are negative, they could do more harm than good once working in a school environment.

I am now shifting the focus toward the second research question by presenting ideas from the journal articles that pertained to psychology and multicultural education. The first paper is an overview of guideline recommendations that were made by the American Psychological Association (APA) to both schools and practitioners. This article highlights the emerging data about groups who are historically marginalized or disenfranchised by psychology based on their ethnic or racial heritage. College enrollment increased 62% for students of color between 1988 and 1998, yet the college graduation rate for African Americans was still 10% less than for Whites (APA, 2003). In addition, of all the college degrees awarded in psychology, African Americans received only 10% of the undergraduate and 5% of the doctorate degrees (APA). This leads to the reasoning for why there is so little research that is done on minorities and on lower socio-economic populations. There just aren't nearly as many minority scientists.

The article by Reid delves into the aspects of viewing multicultural education through the *cultural lens* of underrepresented minority women. Typically, when one thinks of diversity one wouldn't be inclined to view women as such simply due to their gender. However, through the teachings of this course, I have learned that gender is one of the classifications. To add to this, the third paper on psychology explores the challenges of the disabled, whom I also learned were to be considered a minority group. Reid explicitly states that "researchers who examine ethnicity or race often define their interests narrowly to ignore issues of gender and the impact of sexism" (2002, p. 104). From this there comes a shortage of studies on minority women. However, to fully understand their position in the world, one must view the entire context of their situation. For most women of color in the United States, this refers to lives embedded within an ethnic minority family, which is typically in the context of an ethnic minority community, which is itself embedded within the dominant White society (Reid).

In the paper on the summit, it is stated that "Multiculturalism, in its broadest terms, involves topics of gender, sexual orientation, and disability" (Bingham, Porche-Burke, James, Sue, and Vasquez, 2002, p. 75). It is noted that 20% of adults with disabilities have not finished high school and that only 29% have any type of employment (Bingham et al.) Knowing these facts, the U.S. Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 to try to create more opportunities. The experiences of people with disabilities may somewhat parallel those of minority individuals, but only the disabled have laws "that institutionalize their separateness" (Bingham et al., p. 85). So now many times it becomes a debate over who is the more oppressed. Psychologists have to be able to deal with these difficult dialogues if they hope to build cooperative partnerships with those who are affected. If the counselor and teachers hope to improve these situations they have to understand that there is no one way to envision human behavior.

As is the case in elementary school and graduate school alike, different students react in various ways to the curriculum that is imparted upon them. However, when courses dealing with multiculturalism are discussed, there are many deep feelings that may be drawn up due to past experiences. These emotional reactions in students could take the form of anger, silence, avoidance, and passivity (Jackson, 1999). For dealing with these situations, it is recommended that counselors and instructors receive training in a three-stage process that includes cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to work with multicultural populations (Jackson). Much is the case with the current course that is requiring this paper. My instructor, Dr. Cruz, has incredible cultural awareness, a wide knowledge base (as exemplified by her research), and the tools required to interact with her diverse class population. When minority students don't accept what and how they are being taught, they are likely to experience some type of resistance. This resistance can interfere with communication with the instructor (Jackson). These are broken down into *character resistance* (person's general level of personality functioning), *resistance to content* (whereby students feel trapped by material), and *transference resistance* (negative and positive reactions of students toward the faculty (Jackson).

Critical Reflections and Recommendations

I found that there is an incredible need for multicultural education in this country. We have the most diverse population in the world, and yet we also are the most narrow minded. We need to start paying more attention to the masses of people who have come to our country and have become citizens of our land. They now own property, have voting rights, fight in our military, and repopulate our great nation. This country is doing a great disservice to these people. When we have a land of uneducated people we only make our own country weaker.

There is such a strong need because we have not come to understand the importance of the rest of the world. Our own ignorance is hampering our own growth. By having a better concept of the world we will be able to prosper economically and personally. The current educational environment is incredibly weak in what it provides for non-native students. However, the shortcomings run deeper than just fiscal policy. There are many people working in universities and school districts who have not opened their minds to the idea of being “one people”. They harbor prejudice and cynical views of others. We can’t expect young people to have positive views and set goals for themselves when our own schools only teach what is negative about their peoples and cultures. This shows in the interest level in the curriculum.

I actually found the second group of articles to be more enlightening than the first. There are significant implications on multicultural education in the field of psychology. How can we even begin to teach them properly if we don’t understand the experiences and mindset that they have? By opening our minds to others’ point of views, we place ourselves on a more equitable level. Empirical facts show that there needs to be more research conducted to understand the plight of minority cultures. With this new information, school administrators will be better able to design curriculum that is more appropriate for the minority population that it is intended to help.

Being a psychology student myself, I found the recommendations for teaching to be quite novel. How can professors deal with ethnic students if they haven’t come to terms with their own views on racism and prejudice? I believe that improved teaching programs will translate in greater strides being made in the future by this new wave of instructors. By understanding the experiences of distinct groups (such as the disabled), future psychologists will be better able to treat the depression and resentment that is likely to occur. The APA is most aware that they need to jump to the forefront of multicultural education, both in practice and in reality.

I found it interesting to learn that resentment can build up in minority students for getting what they wished for. If they wanted to be considered White, they were then likely to resent White people. They felt as though they had now been forced to give up their own personal cultural identity. I was also surprised to learn that minority groups compete amongst themselves for attention and status ranking, such as when dark Hispanics disavowed any connection to Africa. It is true what they say about more differences within group than outside of group. So to this end, if the minority people are going to suppress others, then how do they expect to not have the dominant culture believe what they are doing is acceptable?

I read Dr. Diaz' first paper with a complete sense of disbelief. I find it very hard to accept the fact that so many educated individuals did not know such prominent cities of the world or specific world leaders. Simple exposure to the news over time would enlighten most to the basics of world geography. The quote from NPR about learning geography only in time of war really hit home. Even I can't admit that I really knew a great deal about Afghanistan before the present conflict. However, interest does play a particular role in learning. I was not aware of the high Muslim population in Indonesia. But then again, why would I know? That means that I should know about all the other religions of the world too, and I don't. I will agree that if someone is planning to become a teacher, then they should be more culturally aware than most.

I stated earlier that I am still uneasy about referring to the disabled as a minority group. Yes, in the true sense of the word "minority" they are, but they also belong to a cultural group. I had to think harder when I read about the laws designed specifically for them. All I could come up with was how the federal government has made special laws for the Native Americans. They may run casinos, get free college educations, and be tax exempt in certain areas. So I didn't quite agree with the statement that the disabled had the only laws designed for them.

When viewing a particular population, I never considered seeing them in the whole of their separate microcosms. To view someone as a gender first, then a race member, and then a community inhabitant helped me to put things into more perspective. It was as though there was a compounding of negative circumstances to exacerbate the situation. I also found it sad to think that young people are deliberately trying not to learn while they are in school. Unfortunately, they are too young to realize that even a tainted education is better than no education at all. This is the one caveat that I have reflected upon the most, for I taught minority students when I first moved to Florida. We had specially designed texts for the ESOL curriculum, so I'm really hoping that none of them experienced any resistance to the material.

I find this knowledge to be invaluable to my future as a high school guidance counselor. I can already foresee students coming to me complaining about the class material. I am going to have to be able to impart to them ways that the content does apply to their lives. I have to be able to stress to them that learning overall is the most important objective of getting an education. Through my learned skill of research, I will be able to direct them to appropriate sources if they should feel the need to acquire additional input / background. I am going to have to deal with older instructors who have not been taught the newest methods for imparting lesson plans. I will have to educate them as well as comfort distressed students of ethnic backgrounds.

I will pay more attention to the schooling that is received by others in my field. I am becoming more aware of the university programs that require multicultural education as a component. When I entered this class I really had absolutely no idea where the curriculum was supposed to lead me. However, as the semester has progressed, I have gained an immeasurable amount of insight about the world around me. And I'm even referring to the highly diverse populations of southern Florida. I don't have far to look for practical applications in my life.

I would actually like to suggest that teacher education programs require even more multicultural training than they do. I can't even begin to realize how valuable this information would have been to me when I first came to Florida. Many in the world are not aware of the large migratory populations present within our own country. I had never even heard of ESOL before I left New England. I was in for a major culture shock when I entered that classroom!

The research I read covered a great range of topics, but as I read them new questions were formed in my mind. I would like to see more studies down on why minorities look down upon other cultures when they themselves have been oppressed. I would like to read about how other cultures outside of our country view us. How do they perceive our knowledge and outlook on the rest of the world? And I would really like to know why some people insist on entering teaching programs when they know that they harbor racist views themselves? What are they trying to accomplish and don't they understand that they can't pick who their students are?

Overall, I found this assignment to be worthwhile, but the material in the textbook chapter had to be narrowed down. I am trying to understand minority education myself, so choosing to research multicultural education seemed like a perfect fit. I sometimes wonder how the ethnic students would react if they were sent to the same school system that I attended when I was younger. They may feel that socially they don't quite fit in, but I guarantee that the quality of their educational environment would be higher. So which is more important: how well you belong to the native population or how much you learn from the experience? Maybe that is the best research suggestion of them all.....?

Appendix

All of the research articles have been included and turned in to the instructor.

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