

What is multiculturalism and multi-cultural education? assignment

[Sociology](#)



What is multiculturalism and multi-cultural education and why are these terms at the center of such great controversy? This is a concern to me as a student training to be a future teacher here in the United States. It seems that these two topics are generating a great deal of concern among teachers and creating a “ mix” in feelings on how to handle these issues in the classroom. Multiculturalism is “ a social and political movement and position that holds differences between individuals as groups to be a potential source of strength and renewal rather than strife” (Carson, 1999).

It values diverse perspectives people develop and maintain thorough a variety of experiences and backgrounds stemming from racial, ethical, gender and class differences in our societies. It is a belief that strives to hold the ideals of equality, equity, and freedom that the United States was founded on. One of the most unique aspects of the United States is the diversity of its people. The Statue of Liberty states “ give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breath free,” and America has indeed upheld this idea and has become a mixture of people of different races, religions, and creeds.

Multi-cultural education is an “ education and instruction designed for the cultures of several different races in an educational system” (Wilson, 2007). It is an approach to teaching and learning that is based on conscious building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies. So why is the United States and most importantly the teachers in the classroom at odds with the idea of a multi-cultural nation and classroom? Some people believe that these vary ideas are at the foundation of our country. We are the “ melting pot” of the world.

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Since some sociologists predict that by the year 2025 half of the public school students will be “people of color” (Santrock, 2004), shouldn't there be representation for them in our schools? Some believe that multi-cultural education is beneficial to our schools because it can help with the reduction of fear, ignorance, and personal detachment that some students deal with in the school system. It would teach students about the similarities and differences of all cultures in our society and help give them a respect for and an understanding of these differences.

It can allow for students to see the positive contributions other cultures make to our culture and how without them the American culture would not be what it is today. “If America is to embrace diversity, the conscious and unconscious expressions of racism within our society must be identified and done away with” (Hilliard/Pine, 1990). It is believed by some that multi-cultural education is the potential answer for bringing all races together in harmony. Multi-cultural education has a set of goals that help to unite a culturally diverse classroom and society.

These three goals are to develop respect for all people by teaching all students about cultural pride, cultural respect, and cultural information (Feinberg, 1996). Teaching students about the first goal, cultural pride, in schools is not just about teaching them to feel partial about the members of their own culture but to explain why it is people feel the way they do about their own culture versus someone else's. It can show students how one culture has affected another positively or negatively and explain why there are certain feelings and beliefs toward other cultures.

It can also give students a better understanding of how such prejudices and predisposed feelings on culture starts. The second goal of a multi-cultural education is teaching students about cultural respect. It is not teaching students to “ respect cultural formations under any and all conditions, but rather teaching respect for formations under the background of modern social conditions” (Feinberg, 1996). It is respect is in terms of understanding the role the culture plays in the development of ones self. Culture has much to do with how we become the persons we are.

Students need to understand how culture effects each person to give them a better understanding of each person. A persons culture not only provides the foundation for their development but it also provides the initial conditions for self recognitions. It shows students that the “ other” is the same as they are. The final goal is “ to inform students about other cultures and to present the problems of interpretations and executions” (Feinberg, 1996). It is to give non-neutral information and present the facts form other perspectives.

It is to help students make more well informed decisions based on analysis and not just opinion. Even though there are those who think that this is the best way to reduce or eliminate cultural bias and tensions within the schools concerning ethnic groups, there are those who disagree. Some believe that multi-cultural education does not bring ethnic groups together but instead alienates and further fragment the communication and rapport between these ethnic groups (Wilson, 2007). “ To dwell on culture differences is to foster negative prejudices and stereotypes, such as those who are different are inferior” (Wilson, 2007).

Instead of allowing students to make their own decisions about a specific culture, it is forcing these particular cultures on the students and that then is fosters resentment. Children do not recognize ethnic groups when they are little until it is brought to their attention. A child views “ children of color” as “ friends” nine-times out of ten unless told other wise. There are those that also see the idea of multi-cultural education as a form of control. It is said to be “ a theory that emanates itself neither from the Left, Right, or Center but from the top” (Peter, 2007).

It is a strategy designed to grant ethnic minorities some representation in society but still not enough to have any significant effect for them politically and/or socially. It allows representation within the schools to appease the ethnic minorities. It is a way to keep people in check and not to upset the status quo. And finally it is is said that multi-cultural education “ rejects the historic American goals of assimilation and integrations of ethnic cultures into the majority culture” (Wilson, 2007).

It is believed that the world would no longer view America in the traditional view of a country that involves individuals making decisions for the good of the order, but instead as a country of distinct ethnicity. When there is no longer unity there is a break down within society. We are a democracy because we believe that we best serve our citizens by presenting the best possible outcomes in all situations that will benefit the good of ALL society, but when we start distinguishing between cultures we are no longer being a democracy because we are now focused on the select few and not the whole.

I personally believe that we need, to some extent, have an understanding and a respect for all cultures present in our society. I also think that a multi-cultural educational plan could work in school if it achieves the greatest good for all. You have to have an environment that supports interracial contact in a positive manner. You also have to have a multi-cultural curriculum, with the positive expectations of the teachers and administrative support to make it all possible. I think that giving students the knowledge of other cultures may help lessen the clusters of segregation within the student body.

It can also lessen the racial tension in schools and increase classroom performance for students who are most affected by these issues. I strongly believe that there is an American culture that this country was founded on, and no matter whose views it was at the time, it is what our country stands for and that needs to be respected first and foremost. We are an English speaking country and that also needs to be addressed. Student's who do not have a choice in the matter, should not be punished for the lack of ability to speak and understand English.

There is however a point that should be made clear that it will be required to be the primary language outside the home. I know that others may feel differently but that is on thing I most identify with as being an American and I think that it is a way of giving respect back to this country. I think society and classrooms should promote people from different cultural formations and orientations to express their way of life within a separate cultural sphere, but are also treated as equal individuals in a common social sphere.

There should be equality of education to assure that children will be rewarded in merit both in school and afterwards in the work place. There should also be freedom of association because that is crucial to what a democracy is. Individuals are guaranteed the rights to form whatever friendships, alliances, and interest groups they want to as long as in doing so it does not hinder the rights of others. And finally, there needs to be room for individual growth for students.

Children have the rights to develop their talents in whatever way they like. Children need to be challenged in a way that is different from their home and communities. All in all I feel that multi-cultural education could be achieved and beneficial to all in society as long as it is done in a way to promote positive interactions within the different ethnic cultures to further develop what is thought to be in the best interest of the whole. Multiculturalism can not be everything to everyone, but hopefully it can be the best for the majority.