Theories of Inclusion and Multiculturalism

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Managing diversity is the most formidable challenge of a pluralist society and has become the principal undertaking of the 21st century for many Western nations in particular. Immigration trends and demographic changes within the United States are altering the complexion possibly even reconstructing the fabric of our nation (Smith, 2009). Amid such trends and changes social inequities and racial disharmony persist. However, the proliferation of distinct and diverse populations in the classroom and in the workplace makes meaningful discourse difficult if not strained. The education sector’s response was “Multicultural Education.” While multicultural education can be conceptualized in many different ways, several leaders in the field (Banks, 1997; Nieto, 1996, 1999; Rosado, 1996; Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008), define the goals and ideals of multicultural education similarly.

Multicultural education’s ultimate ambition is to inculcate social integration at all levels of society through social institutions, schools being the primary medium. Rosado (1996) describes multiculturalism as a belief system that encompasses 4 levels of social action and that culminates in empowering all individuals within a social structure or institution. In a social system where inequities and inequalities are pervasive, education is the single greatest equalizer, the factor that can level the playing field. We will identify common social themes influencing policy decisions and educational practice in adult education and compare and contrast the various theories of multiculturalism.

Banks’ (1995) belief that all students are entitled to equal education and learning opportunities regardless of their race, gender, or social-class is predicated upon the theory of liberal multiculturalism. The application of liberal multiculturalism in education advocates for students’ rights to quality education without discrimination (Loobuyck, 2005). Therefore, the
education system must be reformed to reflect the diversity of students’ cultures and identity groupings (Banks, 2008). Successful implementation of multicultural education would prepare students to function effectively in a multicultural environment (Banks, 1995).

Consequently, Banks (2008) developed the concept of the Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education, which included content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure. Banks (1995) described each dimension of multicultural inclusion accordingly: first, content integration represents the incorporation of cultural content to emphasize key concepts and theories. Second, knowledge construction process consists of the methods, activities, and questions used to facilitate understanding of the course material. Students discover how cultural diversity influences knowledge construction. Third, the prejudice reduction dimension relates to the students’ racial attitudes and the procedures the instructor can employ to aid the student in cultivating more democratic racial attitudes. Okoye-Johnson (2011) concluded from a meta-analysis, student anti-racist attitudes decreased through exposure to multicultural education. Fourth, equity pedagogy encourages the modification of teaching strategies to increase the academic achievement of among marginalized student populations. When strategies and activities are used that build on the students’ culture, students of color or low-income students achieve increased academic success. Fifth, the final dimension is empowering school culture and social structure. Effective implementation of school reform involves more than the adding a bilingual program or a Holidays and Heroes program, the entire system must be restructured (Nieto, 1994).

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) attacks more deeply the theoretical and practical foundations of structural racism. Closson (2010) reported that students experience isolation,
exclusion, and self-doubt as a result of microaggressions inflicted through racial interaction even on campuses where racism appears docile (p. 270). Proponents of CRT propose six foundational constructs of racial understanding (Ianinska, Wright, & Rocco, 2005): racism is a social norm; race is a social construct that promotes white dominance; interest convergence is the overarching principle in race relations; race and racism is endemic in all of our social systems; and racialization is unique to marginalized peoples and not experienced by whites. The above assumptions reflect how society has designed and structured adult education.

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) argued that the effects racism and exclusion are embedded in the fabric of our society, and the field of adult education is no exception. For example, people of color still sit in classrooms where they are missing from the text and curriculum, or are singled out to speak up for their group (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). The exclusive acknowledgement of the dominant culture fosters an environment of exclusion for marginalized adults. People of color recognize their exclusion as a means of keeping them faceless and imprisoned by dominant forces and ideologies (Ianinska, Wright, & Rocco, 2005). An adult educator can employ the Critical Race Theory lens to challenge and reform exclusionary practices endemic in education and facilitate political progress in educational institutions through social and educational policy change.

Evident in Nieto’s (1996), also a key proponent of CRT, socio-cultural theory are expanded ideas of multiculturalism that engage administrators, teachers and students alike in social and educational responsibility and reform. Nieto’s model offers a range of options to achieve multicultural integration/inclusion at the institutional level (Nieto, 1994). Level 1 begins with tolerance, identified by an awareness and respect for differences. At level 2, intellectual acceptance of the importance of differences is embraced. At level 3 respect for differences
develops intimating high esteem and valuing of differences. Finally, level 4 represents affirmation, solidarity, and critique, is a willingness to struggle with differences in a way that produces an intimacy and togetherness among diverse peoples.

Nieto’s (1996) levels of engagement result in innovative administrative and curricular changes, improved student relations, and general cultural awareness. Nieto’s levels of engagement speak directly to the issues of identity, equity, and access for all learners and instruct teachers and administrators in the fine points of cultural integration and inclusion (Nieto, 2000). For instance, people of color are regularly forced to seek learning away from a larger social framework because of its limiting and/or threatening framework. Nieto vies for a dialogue that includes all equally, without partiality. Consequently, educators must take a stand and challenge the actions of schools and society that inflict outmoded ideas on their students and permit monocultural education to persist (Nieto, 2000). Furthermore, if the main goal of multicultural education is transformation, then the removal of bias is essential to integration and inclusion. Social justice must become ubiquitous in the practice of multicultural education (Nieto, 2000).

Cochran-Smith (2003) called attention to the fact that multicultural teacher education reform has failed to produce any common ground concerning multicultural education policy or multicultural teacher education (pp. 7-8). There remains much debate and dissent regarding key issues of equity, teacher preparation, social change, and curriculum issues. Cochran-Smith suggests a simple framework of eight questions for organizing teacher education: diversity, social justice, knowledge, teacher learning, practice, outcomes, recruitment selection, and coherence. Armed with a sound understanding of these questions along with an understanding of external forces impinging on the educational process will enable teachers and administrators to
make sense of the multicultural landscape and address demonstrated needs within their student populations.

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) offered some insights into difficulties that teachers and students alike may encounter in less culturally enlightened environments. Some of these threats include but are not limited to isolation, alienation, and dismissal. Such affronts require teachers and administrators to be emotionally mature, socially aware, and skilled communicators, and to develop those qualities in their students.

The success of multicultural education and its implantation in society depends largely on teacher and school administrator preparation (Smith, 2009, p. 45). The effective preparation of school administrators and teachers ensures that multicultural education is buttressed by good multicultural policy and practice that establishes multicultural interaction as a way of life in and throughout the educational process (Smith, 2009, p. 47). Moreover, since schools are a microcosm of society, teachers are in the forefront of this charge and responsible for modeling before students a new paradigm of multicultural education and multicultural interaction.

Therefore, teacher education and training must simulate a multicultural experience for teachers and school administrators in order for teachers and school administrators to clearly understand the issues and concerns inhibiting multicultural interaction in their classrooms and throughout our schools.

In conclusion, the state of multicultural education in the nation is still in-flux Cochran-(Smith 2003). The politics of power and dominance must be neutralized, or at least minimized, in favor of authentic learning and genuine multicultural interaction. It is important to heed the voices genuine multiculturalism and comprehensive integration and inclusion for the sake of individual futures and the future of the nation.
References


