

**Moving Multicultural Education Forward in Teacher Education:
Integration of Cognitive Learning Theory**

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Abstract

Multicultural Education as a field of study in education is intimately connected to Teacher Education. Most frameworks in Multicultural Education are primarily centered on the inclusion of cultural and linguistic diversity in schools. This often results in the integration of heroes and holidays within the curriculum, however this orientation can present a simplistic aspect of culture and does not address the process of learning. The purpose of this article is to explain why cognitive learning theory must be an essential element in frameworks of Multicultural Education and Multicultural Teacher Education. Teachers need to understand the principles of learning theory to create classrooms where students become self-regulated, successful learners.

Introduction

Today, Multicultural Education is an integral part of Teacher Education. One of the major aims of both fields is to train culturally-competent educators who believe in the values of equity, democracy, freedom, and social justice. To do so, the fields must include strong philosophical and pedagogical theories forming a belief system or framework that supports the development of effective, culturally and linguistically diverse schools. Any belief system put forth must include cognitive learning theory because teachers need to know how children and adults learn. The first section discusses a short history of Multicultural Education. The second portion describes three major frameworks that have been posed as a foundation for Multicultural Education. The third section discusses the integration of Multicultural Education into Teacher Education.

Within this context, Multicultural Education and Teacher Education have two major goals. First, scholars in both fields are dedicated to the development of highly effective teachers who hold a strong value of social justice in schools. They believe that all students should be provided equal educational opportunities and outcomes within an atmosphere of respect for human diversity. Educators also must hold high-academic expectations for all students regardless of their cultural differences such as religious affiliations, disabilities, sexual orientation, race, gender, social class, culture, and language. The second goal is to address the achievement gap between White students and culturally and linguistically diverse students. These goals and core values have been advanced by numerous Multicultural Teacher Education researchers (Alvarado, Pang, & Naranjo, 2014; Banks, 1984; Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Gay, 1994; Banks & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2010; Nieto, 1996; Bennett, 2001; Pang, 2010; Pang & Park, 2011).

Multicultural Education as a field has a strong history in curriculum development and educational legislation. Though many educators believe the field rose out of the political and social movement for Civil Rights, historically the field has roots in the Intercultural Education and Intergroup Education Movements of the early 20th century (Pak, 2006). Pak documented how Intercultural and Intergroup Education evolved out of the Great Depression and resulted from increased immigration to the United States. Many immigrants left civil strife in home countries such as Poland, England, and Ireland, but also hoped for economic opportunities in their newly adopted nation.

The Intercultural Education and Intergroup Education Movements were founded on the importance of intercultural relations and an inclusive democracy (Pak, 2006). These reforms from the 1920's to the 1950's took place when there was a national emphasis on an enhanced view of democracy. During this period, people in the United States grappled with the concept of who should be considered an "American" (Pak, 2006). Today, educators often take for granted the belief that diversity is an accepted value of our nation, however, this orientation was not generally agreed upon by most people at that time. There were race riots in Detroit and Harlem during the 1930's and 1940's that placed attention on the issue of racial inequality. During this time period educational leaders like Rachel David Dubois worked toward implementing an "ethnic studies" approach that focused on adding information about various racial and ethnic communities to the school curriculum (Pak, 2006).

The Intercultural and Intergroup Education Movements were bolstered by a societal force now called the Civil Rights Movement. Civil rights advocates placed more emphasis on our national values of democracy and social justice in areas such as voting rights, employment, housing, and education. The Intercultural Education and Intergroup Education Movements had already placed importance on the inclusion of the history, values, and beliefs of diverse racial

and cultural groups in curriculum areas such as social studies and literature, however there were and are many scholars who continue to call for higher levels of inclusion in all disciplines.

Multicultural Education scholars in the early 1970's such as James A. Banks, Geneva Gay, Carl A. Grant, and Carlos Cortés saw civil rights legislation as a core foundation for Multicultural Education. Within that context, they primarily focused on the inclusion of diverse communities into the school curriculum. These Multicultural Education and Teacher Education specialists believed in the integration of racial and ethnic history, knowledge, and contributions into textbooks and traditional academic disciplines. They also advocated for the addition of information, history, and role models of women and individuals from lower-income families. These and many other multicultural scholars believed that teaching about racism was highly connected to issues of sexism and classism. Later, multicultural education scholars pointed out the need for equalities for those who are members of diverse communities due to their exceptionalities, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations; these areas have been added to what is now defined by many educators as culturally diverse communities (Alvarado, Pang, & Naranjo, 2014). One of the best vehicles to ensure that we build a society based on social justice was to infuse Multicultural Education into Teacher Education. Teachers are key social agents who could bring a culturally diverse curriculum into education and ultimately bring about much needed policy changes to schools.

Multicultural Education: Diverse Definitions

Geneva Gay, one of the founders in the field of multicultural education, identified various definitions and orientations (1994). Though many scholars believed in social justice and equality, there were many different assumptions and values that educators held about the field. Gay explained them as follows (1994, 3-8):

- A philosophy emphasizing the importance of diversity in the lives of individuals, groups, and nations;
- “A reform movement that changes all components of the educational enterprise...to reflect cultural pluralism;”
- Institutionalization of "the philosophy of cultural pluralism within the educational system, which is grounded in principles of equality, mutual respect, acceptance and understanding, and a sense of moral commitment to social justice;"
- A humanistic concept based on the strength of diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative life choices for all people;
- An approach where democratic values are at its core and the curriculum targets educational equality;
- An education that includes study of the experiences of cultural groups who have endured continual social oppression, prejudice and alienation;
- Policies and practices respecting cultural diversity and individual differences in all aspects of education; and
- A process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for students that challenges all forms of social oppression.

These definitions show that Multicultural Education scholars hold slightly different positions about the goals and principles of the field. The goals range from teaching democracy to total school reform that reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of the nation. The next section discusses three major frameworks in Multicultural Education and why scholars will be in

a more compelling position to move the field forward if they include a strong cognitive learning foundation to their philosophical framework.

Three Major Types of Frameworks for Multicultural Education

The field of Multicultural Education has three major frameworks; they include a curricular approach, an orientation that challenges economic and political inequities, and a democratic approach that weaves together several overarching philosophical and cognitive theories.

Curricular Framework. The first is a curriculum reform orientation (Bennett, 2001) that was developed between the 1970s and 1980's. Since the field arose out of the Intercultural Education movement that primarily dealt with curriculum (Pak, 2006), this led to a curricular framework that called for the inclusion of historical, cultural, political, psychological, and sociological information from diverse cultural and linguistic groups (Banks & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2010). James A. Banks designed a conceptual framework that included five dimensions: 1) content integration which involves the infusion of multiple ethnic perspectives and discipline knowledge into the school curriculum; 2) knowledge construction refers to understanding the assumptions used in choosing discipline knowledge included in schools; 3) equity pedagogy involves the integration of teaching styles so that all students learn; 4) prejudice reduction requires teachers and students to examine their biases and to address their prejudices and stereotypes throughout the curriculum; and 5) an empowering school culture, which necessitates that schools provide equal educational opportunities for all students. This is the framework that is often referenced in traditional teacher preparation programs.

Critical Multicultural Education Framework. As the field of Multicultural Education evolved, in the 1990's Sonia Nieto (1996) intensified the call for social justice by advocating for a critical theory orientation based upon the work of Paulo Freire. Nieto believed in schooling where students and teachers question and challenge the status quo of institutional inequalities and personal prejudices. Though other scholars discussed the need for teachers to train students to examine power and authority issues, Nieto clearly put forth a Multicultural Education framework with a more political and advocacy orientation. Critical Multicultural Education developed because educators felt scholars should consider the political nature of education; Nieto believed the call to integrate culture and language into the curriculum was not enough to result in total school transformation. Other educators such as Marc Pruyn organized a group of social studies teachers in New Mexico who were dedicated to social justice. They developed an approach called Critical Multicultural Social Studies (CMSS) with Curry Malott (The Borderlands Collective for Social Justice, 2006). Their pedagogical orientation was based upon the importance of integrating social justice and equity in the teaching of social studies and history. The educators called themselves the Borderlands Collective for Social Justice; their goal was to create a powerful and alive curriculum by teaching students how to become actively involved in social issues through readings, questioning, collaboration, dialogue, and community service. However, educators found it difficult to teach about social stratification when schools are shaped by testing, federal legislation, and initiatives such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. These rigid programs often leave culturally and linguistically diverse students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families "behind." Most students are not taught higher order thinking-skills or how to address social problems. Rather they are encouraged to learn knowledge that will prepare them for the workforce and a corporate agenda (The Borderlands Collective for Social Justice, 2006). In addition, teachers are extremely

concerned when teacher effectiveness is primarily measured by student achievement on high-stakes standardized and standards-based tests. This policy orientation does not allow for extensive time teaching civics, citizenship skills and the discussion of social problems.

Comprehensive Framework. The third framework integrates several overarching philosophical and cognitive theories. Pang (2010) developed the Caring-centered Multicultural Education framework; this framework connects the educational philosophies of Dewey (1916) and Noddings (1984) and the social-cognitive theory of Vygotsky (Cole, 1996). The interrelated theories focus on relationships, culture, and community (citizenship). This orientation moves beyond curriculum integration of history, literature, the arts and social categories such as social economic status, sexual orientation, and disabilities. This framework acknowledges the complexities of society and posits a belief in the intersectionality of various aspects of individuals; this orientation is opposed to the separation of students into one distinctive category such as race, ethnicity, or social class. Students come to school as complex people with varied beliefs and experiences. For example it would not be accurate to place a young gay student from a lower-income family, who has been identified with Asperger's syndrome and speaks Spanish, English, and Japanese, into a single category of being Latino because his mother is from Colombia. This would be a narrow way to view his rich life.

The Caring-centered Multicultural framework brings to the forefront the cognitive theory of Vygotsky. Teachers must focus not only on the integration of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic discipline-content into the curriculum, but they must know how to develop instructional strategies based on cognitive research. Vygotsky believed that social interactions, language, and culture form the foundation of learning. This connects with Noddings' Ethic of Care theory where social relationships are also believed to be the underpinnings of learning and personal development.

The Ethic of Care focuses on the importance of developing trusting, reciprocal relationships; respectful and sincere relationships must be created between teacher and student, teacher and teacher, student and student, and teacher and parents in order for the full potential of students is to be achieved. As Noddings has theorized, trusting, reciprocal relationships are at the core of effective learning communities, especially in a democracy which supports the philosophy of John Dewey. Much focus is placed on the creation of a compassionate and cooperative public where members address issues of social oppression and public policy using a social justice lens. Relationships along with cultures are seen as crucial elements in teaching and learning because social interactions are foundational to the cognitive process. Within this framework, teachers can utilize student-lived experiences and knowledge as building blocks in the learning process so that students construct meaning themselves (Pang, 2010).

The more comprehensive Caring-centered framework for Multicultural Education is culture-centered and relationship-centered with foundations in educational psychology, the ethic of care, and citizenship education. Though other multicultural educational frameworks do not include cognitive theory, in order to address achievement issues, it is critical that teachers have strong knowledge of how students learn.

Integrating the work of Vygotsky guides teachers to understand the importance of social interactions as core to learning. Teachers use language, cultural models, and examples from the lives of students as tools which act as bridges between what students know and what they are learning. Within this process, teachers serve as knowledgeable mentors who can assist student performance as she/he develops her/his potential (Glassman, 2001).

Multicultural Teacher Education

If the goal of Teacher Education is to prepare teachers who can deliver rigorous instruction to all students including diverse learners, then the professional development of teachers must be intimately connected to Multicultural Education. Educators know that teaching demands content knowledge mastery and pedagogical knowledge expertise; however, many agree that new teachers complete their pre-service credential programs not fully trained to effectively reach socioeconomically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. Many educators believe that if teacher education preparation programs are to produce highly-effective multicultural teachers, they must include culturally responsive and relevant education in their K-12 curriculum and instructional preparation (Banks & Banks, 2010; Bennett, 2001; Gay, 2010; Pang, 2010). Hence, pre-service teacher preparation programs must guide teacher candidates to reflect on their instruction not only as being culturally relevant but also as transformative, an educational experience that focuses on social change. In order for teaching and learning to be transformative, teachers must realize that students are not empty vessels; instead, they must accept that students arrive at schools with beliefs, values, abilities, social group identities, and social norms – the students’ cultures, which define who they are and shape their thought processes and behaviors (Gay, 2010). This is what Gay refers to as culturally responsive teaching where teachers use cultural traits, experiences, and perspectives of students as assets and means by which to leverage teaching, thereby making learning more personal and relevant.

In order to enhance the professional development of teachers, Multicultural Teacher Education frameworks must include cognitive theory. For example, Vygotsky’s theory includes not only discussion of developmental maturity of the learner, but also the importance of learner culture as part of social interactions (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). The addition of learning theory can assist teacher educators in two ways. First, Vygotsky’s cognitive theory calls for teacher self-regulation which begins by mentors questioning, scaffolding, modeling, and providing feedback to apprentice teachers (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This self-regulation is followed by a period of extensive reflection. Teachers learn to make decisions about their instructional strategies based on knowledge of Vygotsky’s cognitive principles. Educators are able to think about their own practice, and develop structures and instructional strategies that enhance the learning of their students based upon Vygotsky’s theory. Teachers believe that learning is, initially, a social process, and therefore students develop individualistic functions of the mind (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). The second way that Vygotsky’s theory assists teachers is that they learn how to reflect on the lived experiences of their students. Teachers are taught to consider and create ways to structure connections for students in the learning process; teachers may use many local examples, cultural models, and student knowledge from the lives of their pupils in order to assist them in making connections between the known to the unknown (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Programs that consider students’ lived experiences and effectively utilize culturally relevant approaches to teaching and learning can range from mathematics instruction to early childhood education.

The Algebra Project is one example of a culturally relevant and transformative curriculum; it grapples with the relevance of algebra by declaring that algebra is inaccessible to many students of color, and therefore constitutes a civil rights issue. According to Moses and Cobb (2001), mathematics must become a tool of educational and political liberation; they believed that math literacy and economic access give hope to young generations. Why algebra? According to Moses, algebra provides the means by which the hidden language of mathematical symbols is visibly manifested, which in turn, has an effect on one’s success in the workforce.

What makes the Algebra Project culturally relevant is its transition curriculum which uses cultural models and real-life situations such as riding the subway, and converting their informal talk about an event into formalized mathematical language. One of the math and science concepts taught by Moses was displacement, and the construct is not only culturally relevant but can be modified depending on the region in which algebra is taught. Students become self-regulated learners whose performance and mastery of the content increases as a consequence of being taught by teachers who use a culturally and transformative curriculum in the learning process.

Another example of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning can be seen in the Kamehameha Early Education Project (KEEP). The central goal of KEEP was to develop literacy and cognitive development in Native Hawaiian children who were not doing well in school; this included sight vocabulary development, analytic phonics, and comprehension (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The research program included kindergarteners through grade-three students from Hawaii. Teachers were the more knowledgeable mentors who assisted students in developing language skills and cognitive processing. In these classrooms, teachers carefully listened to children and simplified their own language if students did not understand lessons that they were conveying. The educators in this program provided students with opportunities to interact with each other. Teachers discovered that students were most comfortable working together rather than studying independently. The students did not want to present themselves as individual "stars." Students were more secure encouraging and interacting with each other; they liked learning in teams. This cultural orientation became an important structural element of the classroom. The research demonstrated that specific cultural practices did make a difference with Native Hawaiian children, and also the overarching use of culturally-relevant instructional strategies can be utilized with many different populations.

Conclusion

Multicultural Education is a field in education that focuses on the integration of the values of social justice, equality, and culture. Since Teacher Education is a field that is highly aligned with Multicultural Education, it is the professional responsibility of teachers to learn about and expand on their philosophical and knowledge base of Multicultural Education. It is crucial that Multicultural Teacher Education includes a framework that builds in cognitive theory such as in the Caring-centered Multicultural framework. The inclusion of learning theory provides a much needed foundation for teachers who must reflect upon and decide which strategies of learning are most effective with their students.

Teachers must take a comprehensive orientation towards Multicultural Education which includes understanding how people learn. In this way educators will create environments where students become engaged in the learning process and create their own meaning of what is being taught while becoming self-regulated, successful learners. Educators must put into practice theoretical understandings about cognitive development to ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve and develop their individual potentials regardless of their linguistic diversity, gender, social class, ethnicity/cultural backgrounds, racial memberships, disabilities, sexual orientation, and/or religion. Cognitive theory must be a core facet of Multicultural Teacher Education.

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