

Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Content Integration: Content Integration: Using resources and texts from various cultures as teaching tools.

Cinderella Stories:

A good way to integrate multicultural education into the elementary school literature curriculum is to do a unit on Cinderella. The Cinderella story has been written and adapted in many different ways. Almost every culture has their own version of this story. By reading and studying different Cinderella stories, the class could chart the differences in the plots, main characters and the goals the characters are trying to reach. With older classes, the students can then dig deeper into the culture that each Cinderella story comes from and discover how the cultures' beliefs are expressed through the story.

Another approach would be that the class could talk about a different country every week. Then the students would also get the Cinderella book that was from the country they were talking about.

Famous Mathematicians:

A good way to integrate multicultural education into a high school math class is to do a section where students do reports on famous mathematicians. Mathematicians come from a variety of cultures. Have the students each or in small groups pick a mathematician from a list the teacher has chosen (this way you are sure to have a variety of different cultures). They can choose from people such as Sophie Germain, Emilie du Chatelet, John Griggs Thompson, Pierre de Fermat, and many more. While looking up information for their reports, students will also be learning about that person's culture. Then, the students will share what they learned with the rest of the class, so they too can learn about a particular mathematician's culture.

Around the World in Five Days:

In physical education you can have a week called "Around the World in Five Days." During these days you move around the globe doing activities from five different cultures around the world. The activities would be ones that are not commonly practiced in the United States. This would give the students five new forms of physical activity they can participate in. A great example of an activity would be a dance called Tinkling. It is done in the Philippines quite often and is a sacred dance there. While doing the activities the students would not only be physically active, but also learning about where in the world the activities come from. Also they will be learning why the people in these places do the dances.

Thematic Units:

Introducing a variety of cultures could be accomplished by having thematic units based on different cultures. Learning about different cultures is important to teach children tolerance and acceptance of people who are different from them. For instance, if students were learning about Mexico, they could read a book that deals with issues of the Mexican culture for their age group. They could have a "fiesta" where the students could break a piñata and prepare Mexican foods. The teacher could invite someone into the classroom as a speaker to discuss with the class their heritage and culture so the students could form a relationship to their own...either through differences or similarities. For math, students could learn to count in Spanish. The geography class could learn about Mexico, i.e. global position, demographics and climate. Ancient civilizations could also be taught in this manner.

Knowledge Construction:

"The knowledge construction process relates to the extent to which teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it" (Banks, *An introduction to multicultural education*, 2002, p. 14).

Activity:

In the classroom, or at recess, stage an event without announcing it to the class. For example, have two or three people burst into a classroom with different genders, races, cultures, or ages. Let them act out for about 60 seconds before they leave. When things quiet down, have the students write down the event to the best of their knowledge. Then only select a particular group of students as being the correct view based on gender, race, or culture. Make a big deal out of their correctness. Have them make assumptions and draw conclusions about what they saw. Then have them share their versions as experts. Be ready for some fireworks. Since we all tend to focus on things that are similar to us, the chosen students will probably have a different slant than other students. Ask them how they came to their conclusions? What did they base their truth and accuracy? Even if they are wrong in their conclusions, their opinions stand as truth because they are the dominant, chosen group with the power to make their beliefs stick, even if they are mistaken.

Then tie this into the view that many white Americans have about other cultures coming to the U.S. today. Or how the black Americans view the Koreans or Vietnamese in Los Angeles or New York. Or to the Civil Rights movement. Or to the fact that no woman or Black or Hispanic or Asian or Jew has been President. Who makes these decisions? What do we base our choice and electoral votes? What do we assume about these people? What do students assume about each other or their teachers? What information do we accept as truth, and what do we ignore?

These are all examples of the many IMPLICIT cultural assumptions we use in our knowledge construction process.

Teaching Different Perspectives through Literature

Teaching multicultural education can be difficult. Literature gives teachers a good starting point to introduce these difficult topics. One piece of literature that an elementary teacher could use in their classroom is *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. This story is told from the wolf's perspective. This could teach young students that everyone has a different view on many different topics. They could learn that it is not fair to pass judgment on anyone until they know the whole story. The students could then rewrite a different story using a different character's perspective. They could do this in groups so they can see how difficult it is to get everyone to agree on how the story should go. By the end of the lesson, the teacher could go over some societal issues on racism and prejudice (age appropriate of course) and have the students try to think about the problem from the other perspective. They could talk about whether it is fair to pass judgment if we do not know the whole story. This would be a fun way to talk about a serious issue.

Prejudice Reduction

Prejudice Reduction: According to Banks, this dimension is important in creating a "more positive racial and ethnic attitudes." Basically, this dimension is the aspect of education where the teacher helps to lessen the amount of prejudice within students.

Pen Pals:

An example of how prejudice reduction can be implemented in a classroom is by creating a pen pal system with another school. These students could learn of each others' backgrounds and get the chance to learn about their characters. At some point in this process perhaps the "sister" classrooms could meet at a field trip where the students could see first hand how that people from different walks of life are important and should be respected.

When we were discussing the 5 dimensions of multicultural education for the very first time, a good idea, regarding prejudice reduction was shared. The idea is to have pen pals with another school that has a different cultural mixture, is more diverse, or simply comes from a different environment. These pen pals could be within the same general area. For example, a school in Bethalto could pair up with a school in Cahokia, or they could be from a different state entirely. Another example would be a school in Chicago could pair up with a school in Dallas, Texas. Students would write back and forth, develop a relationship with their pen pal, and in the process, learn about the different cultures and lifestyles. The teachers could try their best to pair students up that have some similarities. If the pen pal schools were located close to each other, it would be rewarding for the students to get together on a field trip, so the students could finally meet their pen pal, face to face. I think this would help students to see that just because someone looks different, talks different, or simply lives in a different city than them, they really have a lot in common. In the process of making a new friend, students will also be learning about different cultures.

This activity could be applied to a middle school English classroom. Often times, teachers have difficulty moving past only using diverse literature and authors. This activity is a way for students to get more personal experiences dealing with diversity. Writing to a pen pal would not only correspond with any language arts/literature curriculum, but I believe that the students would truly enjoy it. The teacher could monitor their involvement with their pen pals by having them keep a journal each week stating something new they learned about their pen pal, their pen pals' school, or their pen pals' community. I could try to pair these activities with multicultural books or have the students read books about a certain culture and then try to make contact with students in that culture through a pen pal service. I could monitor this by having students compare and contrast their pen pals' lives to discussions about literature or with any stereotypes that the world may have about a particular culture.

A quick Google search gave me several educational pen pal services, as well as, online pen pal services. Online pen pals would be a way to add age-appropriate technology to a literature/language arts based curriculum. There are so many ways to explore diversity and multicultural education with this idea, which also promotes the idea of prejudice. According to James A. Banks in his book, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, "Involving students in vicarious experiences and in cooperative learning activities with students of other racial groups will also help them to develop more positive racial attitudes and behaviors"(p 16). Pen pal activities are one way to promote Banks' ideas of prejudice reduction.

Equity Pedagogy

Using different teaching styles to meet the diverse needs of your students.

Activity: Embracing linguistic diversity in journal work, fiction writing, free writing, and in-class discussions.

An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure

Empowering School Culture and Social Structure: Using the other four dimensions to create a safe and healthy educational environment for all.

Activity: Encourage diversity in school activities (i.e. prom, sports, academic clubs, etc.).

The Cultural Difference Paradigm

On p. 50 in *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* under the subheading of "The Cultural Difference Paradigm," Banks states, "Unlike the cultural deprivation theorists, cultural difference theorists reject the idea that low-income students of color have cultural deficits. They believe ethnic groups ... have strong, rich, diverse cultures."

It is our RESPONSIBILITY as teachers to respect, not pity, our students' cultures, lifestyles, and histories. We must attempt work with our students to encourage them to write, create, and express who they really are as individuals, not who society deems as acceptable statistics.

Coming from VERY dire childhood experiences socially, personally, and economically, I remember those few teachers in the 1960's and early 1970's who went beyond the bias and bigotry of our cloistered white community to expose us as students to the beliefs of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. We lower class students were spoken to as people by those few teachers, no matter what we were wearing on our feet. We were "forced" to learn about other cultures, lands, and peoples. We were equally as important to those teachers as those students who lived in brick houses and heated their homes with gas or electricity. Surprise, surprise! Middle-class white America in southwestern Illinois wasn't the center of the world!

Today I believe that my experiences of picking cotton as pre-schooler in Arkansas, stoking a coal furnace in the dead of winter as an elementary student, or wearing my first store-bought-dress in the 8th grade are examples of the "microculture" (pp. 53-55) within my community that was a much richer life experience than the gentler lives of many of the wealthier families. They were looked up to as the standard to be respected and feared. The question isn't whether those people were good or bad, the importance is how I saw myself through my heart.