

Cultural diversity

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Cultural diversity (also known as multiculturalism) consists of a group of factors that make up the individual as age, culture, religion, ethnicity, social status, and sexual orientation. If we consider religion for instance, there are religions which claim to be universal while others are uniquely related to local experience. Although the diversity between different religions as Christians, Islam, Buddhism are obvious, a Christian in the middle east has a very different experience and engagement than a Christian in Ireland or France for instance. In the same way, concerning social class, the experience of a rich Indian is radically different from a poor one.

However, mixing culture can sometimes lead to negative effects such as prejudice and stereotyping. Research has been investigating how to tackle these issues and showed that integrated curriculum, staff training and administrative support help eliminate stereotypes, prejudice, racism and fear (Bennett, 1995).

Multicultural education

‘Multicultural education’ relates to valuing the differences between people and the ways in which these differences can contribute to a richer, more creative and more productive working environment. Education and instruction should then be designed for the cultures of several different races in an educational system through an approach based upon consensus, respect and fostering cultural pluralism. The goal is to help students understand and appreciate cultural differences and similarities and to consequently recognize the added value of diversity.

To achieve these goals, multicultural education must have the following characteristics: a) a learning environment that supports positive interracial contact; b) a multicultural curriculum; c) positive teacher expectations; d) administrative support; and, e) teacher training workshops.

One of the pioneers of multicultural education was James Banks who stressed the importance to change all aspects of education in order to create a multicultural school environment. Based on his research, observation, and work, he highlighted five dimensions of multicultural education in which teachers and researchers are involved (Banks, 2010):

- *Content integration*: relates to the extent to which teachers use examples and content of cultures in their teaching.

- *Knowledge construction*: based on the belief that knowledge is culture based, this dimension stresses on the need for teachers to help students understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions within a discipline influences the way knowledge is constructed.
- *Equity pedagogy*: teachers must modify their methods of instruction in a way that would facilitate the academic achievement of children from diverse backgrounds.
- *Prejudice reduction*: this dimension focuses on the characteristics of children attitudes and how they can be modified by teaching method and material. It can also consist in teaching tolerance of for instance various sexual preferences, disabilities or religions.
- *Empowering school culture*: different aspects of education that hinder interactions and empowers student from different backgrounds should be identified and used for enhancing the full development of students.

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