

WHY MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IS MORE IMPORTANT IN HIGHER EDUCATION NOW THAN EVER: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values that affirm cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world. There are currently two viewpoints or perspectives of multicultural education in the United States, namely the assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective and the pluralism or “global” perspective. The assimilation perspective of multicultural education is that microcultures must give up their original culture and identities in order to blend in or become absorbed into the predominant Anglo-Western European culture. The global perspective is that microcultures can retain many of their traditions such as language, religion, and social customs while adopting many of the aspects of the predominant Anglo-Western culture. The global perspective of multicultural education recognizes cultural pluralism as an ideal and healthy state in any productive society and promotes equity and respect among the existing cultural groups. This principle allows the global perspective of multicultural education to extend beyond equity pedagogy as the only way to counteract problems that have been created by the assimilation perspective. With the rapidly increasing interconnections among all nations, particularly now, as we face global issues related to the ecosystem, nuclear weapons, terrorism, human rights, and scarce national resources, institutions of higher education need to embrace the global perspective of multicultural education if we are going to remain models of democratic societies in a pluralistic world and stay academically competitive in relation to the rest of the world. The purpose of this article is to explain the global perspective of multicultural education and how institutions of higher education can use it to remain models of academic excellence in pluralistic and democratic societies.

Why the Global View of Multicultural Education?

The American Council on Education (Green, 1989), National Association for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS, 1989), and educators who have been personally involved in promoting multicultural education in schools and at institutions of higher education (Banks, 1987; Banks, Banks, and McGee, 1993; Boise, 1993; Clark & Gorski, 2002; Cushner, McClelland, & Stafford, 2000; Duhon, Mundy, Leder, LeBert, & Ameny- Dixon, 2002; Duhon-Boudreaux, 1998; Gollnick & Chinn, 2002; Hirsh, 1987; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Levy, 1997; Quiseberry, McIntyre, & Duhon, 2002; Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993; Silverman, Welty, & Lyon, 1994) have identified several long-term benefits of the global perspective of multicultural education. Some of these long-term benefits are as follows:

1. Multicultural education increases productivity because a variety of mental resources are available for completing the same tasks and it promotes cognitive and moral growth among all people.
2. Multicultural education increases creative problem-solving skills through the different perspectives applied to same problems to reach solutions.
3. Multicultural education increases positive relationships through achievement of common goals, respect, appreciation, and commitment to equality among the intellectuals at institutions of higher education.
4. Multicultural education decreases stereotyping and prejudice through direct contact and interactions among diverse individuals.
5. Multicultural education renews vitality of society through the richness of the different cultures of its members and fosters development of a broader and more sophisticated view of the world.

Until recently, the predominant view of multicultural education in the United States has been the assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective (McNergney & Hebert, 2001) in which microcultures are expected to give up their cultural identities in order to blend in or become absorbed by the predominant mainstream society or macroculture (Bennett, 2003). Figure 1 shows the “melting-pot” perspective of development of a shared culture, such as the American culture, from the various microcultures and cultural groups.

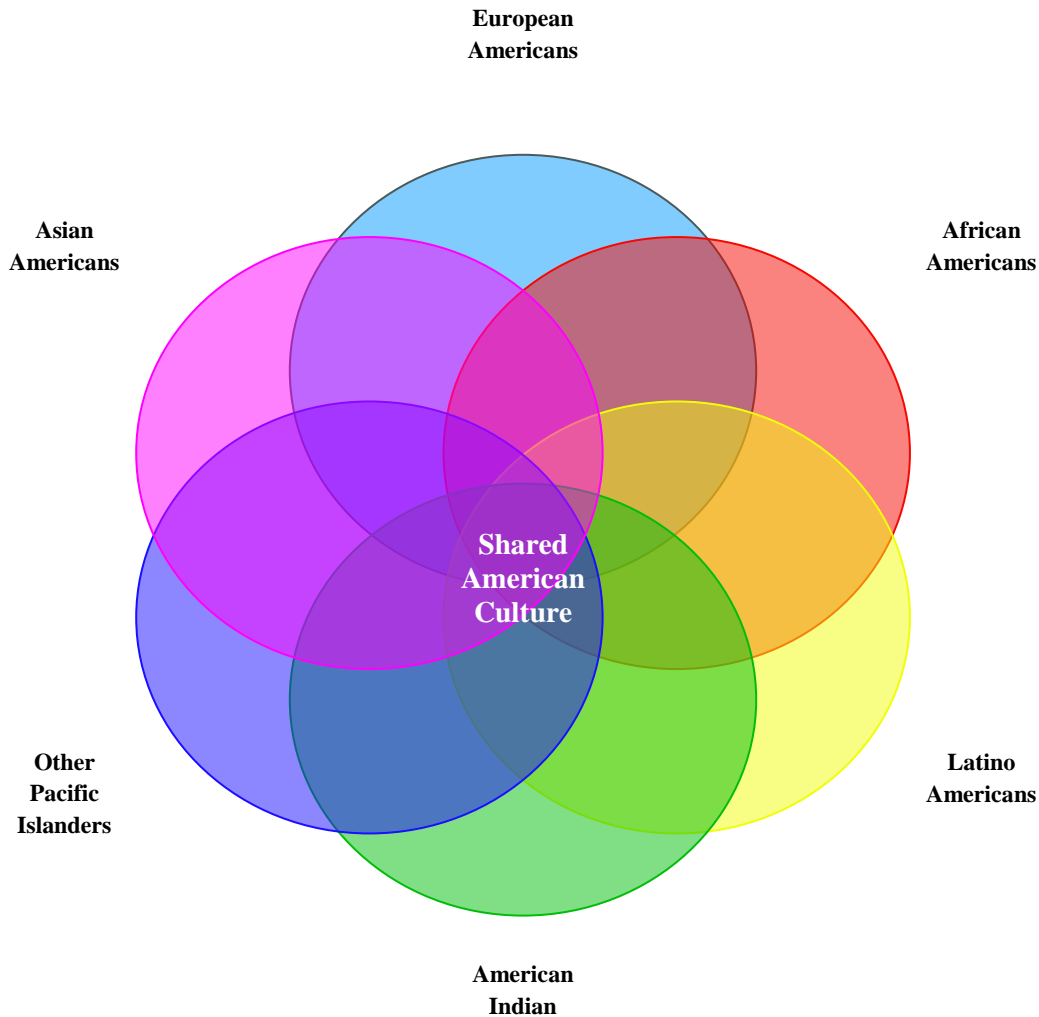


Figure 1: "The Assimilation" or "Melting-Pot" Perspective of Culture Development

In the assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective of development of a shared culture, the members of the microcultures are accepted only once they give up their original identity, values, behavioral styles, language, and nonverbal communication styles. Also, in the assimilation perspective, other cultural distinctiveness and identification with other ways of life are viewed as unacceptable, inferior, and a threat to national unity. Everything possible is done by the popular culture to suppress the other cultures and contributions of other groups (Bennett, 2003). Although the initial purpose of assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective was to bring unity through development of a shared culture as each microculture becomes absorbed into the shared macroculture, it is becoming more difficult to achieve widespread democracy among the microcultures because the resultant culture does not reflect the cultural diversity within the nation (U.S. Census, 2002).

Today, suppression of the microcultures and inequality among people in society have resulted from the assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective of multiculturalism. There is, therefore, real need now more than ever to expand multicultural education to go beyond the “melting-pot” perspective which has focused mainly on equity pedagogy as a means of correcting the inequalities among people in society while other aspects of human development and values have been neglected. There is real need now more than ever to include the global perspective in which cultural pluralism is recognized as an ideal and healthy state in any productive society. With the rapidly increasing interconnections among all nations in the world, particularly, as we face global issues related to the ecosystem, nuclear weapons, terrorism, human rights, and scarce national resources, the scope of multicultural education needs to be broadened to include democratic values, cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies, national, and global interdependence. The global perspective of multicultural education allows promotion of these values as well as promotion of equity among all cultural groups in society, the latter especially having been exacerbated during the assimilation or “melting-pot” era of multicultural education. The global perspective of multicultural education allows individuals to develop respect and appreciation for all existing cultural groups. Figure 2 shows the global view of culture development.

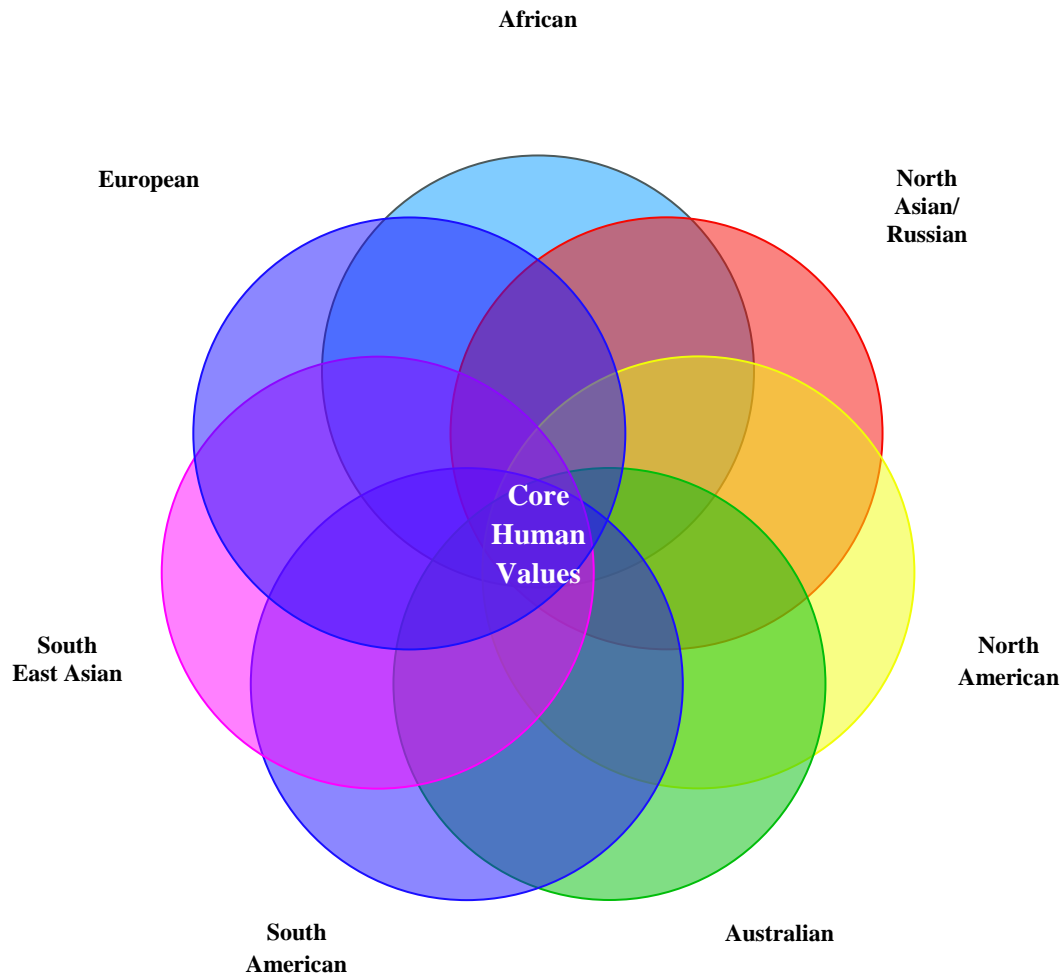


Figure 2: The Global Perspective of Culture Development

Conceptual Framework of the Global View of Multicultural Education

The conceptual framework of global perspective of multicultural education is derived from four major interactive dimensions, namely, multicultural competence, equity pedagogy, curriculum reform, and teaching for social justice. Figure 3 shows the four key components in the conceptual framework of the global perspective of multicultural education.



Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of the Global Perspective of Multicultural Education

Multicultural competence is the process in which a person develops competencies in multiple ways of perceiving, evaluating, believing, and solving problems. The purpose is to focus on understanding and learning to negotiate cultural diversity among nations as well as within a single nation by becoming aware of one's own perspectives as well as becoming conscious of other cultural perspectives as a foundation of informed cross-cultural interaction.

Secondly, the curriculum needs to be reformed with inclusion of curriculum theory and historical inquiry so that bias in textbooks, media, and other educational materials can be detected easily by educators, students, and other stakeholders. Curriculum reform strives to expand the traditional course contents that are primarily monoethnic and Anglo-European (in the United States) through inclusion of multiethnic and global perspectives. For most educators, this reform requires active inquiry and development of new knowledge and understanding of the historical contributions of contemporary and past ethnic groups to the current body of knowledge in the content areas and academic disciplines (Wiles & Brondi, 2002). Equity pedagogy becomes an important component of multicultural reform.

Equity pedagogy aims at achieving fair and equal educational opportunities for all of the nation's children, including socio-economically disadvantaged and ethnic minorities in the microcultures. It attempts to transform the total school environment, especially the hidden curriculum that is expressed in teacher expectations for student learning and the differential disciplinary policies and practices and related community relations by reversing these trends and by addressing the problems that these underrepresented students face.

Equity pedagogy also requires that educators develop an understanding of the different learning styles students develop from their own cultural upbringing so that educators can employ alternative instructional strategies to help all students learn the key concepts, principles, facts, and generalizations in the various content areas and academic disciplines. To be able to do this, educators will need to develop pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions that allow them to adapt alternative teaching methods or modify instructional strategies in culturally diverse classrooms. Equity pedagogy is to ensure the attainment of the highest standards in academic excellence among all students. School and classroom climates must also be changed so that academic success is achievable by students from all cultural groups.

Lastly, but not least, teaching toward social justice requires adequate understanding of the demographics of the students, culture, and race in popular culture, and development of social action skills. It also emphasizes the clearing up of myths and stereotypes associated with gender, age, and the various races and ethnic groups by stressing basic human similarities (Nieto, 1996). In addition, teaching toward social justice promotes developing an awareness of the historical roots and an understanding of the evidence of individual and institutional prejudice and discriminations such as cultural racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Goals of the Global View of Multicultural Education

The global view of multicultural education goes beyond providing equity education. Table 1 provides a summary of the goals of the global perspective of multicultural education.

Goal 2: To develop multiple historical perspectives.		Goal 3: To strengthen cultural consciousness and to strengthen intercultural competence.
	Goal 1: Core Values To develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility to the world community. • Reverence to the earth. • Acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity. • Respect for human dignity. 	
Goal 5: To increase awareness of the state of the planet and global dynamics.		Goal 4: To combat racism, sexism, other forms of prejudice and discrimination, and to build social action skills

Table 1: Goals of Global Perspective of Multicultural Education

Emphasis is on multiple historical perspectives, strengthening of intercultural consciousness, and reduction of prejudice and all forms of discrimination as all members of a nation develop social action skills, become aware of the state on the nation, planet, and global dynamics. Rather than promoting only one way of thinking and one way of life that one cultural group identifies with while despising the ways of life of the other cultural groups, the global view of multicultural education seeks to promote respect and appreciation for the various cultures by strengthening cultural consciousness and intercultural dependence. Everyone in society develops the core human values that allow for the development of acceptance and appreciation for cultural diversity and respect for human dignity among all cultural groups in the nation and across nations. There are interactions among the various groups of people, strengthening of intercultural competence, and increased awareness of the state of the planet and global dynamics.

Why Institutions of Higher Education?

Institutions of higher education in the United States and in other parts of the world today are made of culturally diverse student and faculty populations. This cultural pluralism makes such models of the pluralistic democracy. As such, the application of the core principles of the global perspective of multicultural education in the teaching and learning practices among diverse populations at these institutions is more important now than ever. Most institutions of higher education have become models of the communities in which they are located, and as such have become pillars for academic excellence, models for multicultural competence in society, and models for an interdependent world, as well as models for equity and democratic values.

Institutions of Higher Education Are Models for Academic Excellence

The principles and tenets of multicultural education make it possible to promote excellence in performance of all students (Sleeter & Grant, 1999). The fundamental principles of the global perspectives of multicultural education that make it possible to increase academic excellence among diverse groups of students on many campuses in the nation (Green, 1989; Gollnick & Chinn, 2002) include the following:

1. Cultural differences have strength and value.
2. School and institutions of higher learning should be models for the community in reflecting respect for cultural differences and expression of human rights.
3. Social justice and equality for all people should be of paramount importance in the design and delivery of curricula.
4. Attitudes and values necessary for the continuation of a democratic society can be promoted in schools and institutions of higher learning.
5. Schooling can provide the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for redistribution of power and income among diverse groups of people.
6. Educators at institutions of higher learning work with local communities to create an environment that is supportive of respect for diversity and multiculturalism.

Institutions of higher education whose leaders embrace these principles of multicultural education and attain high academic standards become models for the various public schools and for the communities in which these schools are located. The practices adopted by persons at the institution of higher education also become exemplary to the individuals in the public schools and the communities.

Institutions of Higher Education are Models for Multicultural Societies

In a country that champions equal rights and opportunities for all individuals to improve the conditions of living for all, educators' major concerns at institutions of higher education should be to promote the academic, social, and political success of all students (Green, 1989). The 2002

United States Census Bureau recently predicted that a few years from now nearly one-third of the nation and by the year 2020 nearly one-half of the nation will be composed of minority citizens. This increase in diversity reflects the diversity of our nation and the world (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). What this statistics means is that there is now a real need more than ever to include minority citizens in the economic, social, and educational mainstream (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). This reality becomes more apparent on campuses where there is increasing diversity in minority student as well as faculty populations than in those that are less diverse.

Institutions of Higher Education are Models for an Interdependent World

The students, faculty, and staff on many campuses in the world including those in the United States today come from various countries. These students, faculty, and staff have various cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, today it has become mandatory for universities to admit students and employ faculty from various cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. It has also become mandatory that university communities provide a supportive environment that respects diversity and provide programs that are inclusive for all who are part of it. University administrators and professors should be aware of the various cultural elements in order to be able to provide equitable services.

Institutions of Higher Education are Models for Democratic Human Values

Studies on human relations on university campuses in the past 25 years have shown that student performance, student-student interactions, and faculty-student interactions and expectations reflect the abilities, perception, values, and attitudes among those in the campus communities and type of curricula offered to the students attending the students (Pang, 2001; Wiles & Brondi, 2002). College and university administrators and professors at the 2002 National Conference on Multicultural Affairs in Higher Education (Twitty & Mesaric, 2002) reiterated the importance of welcoming diversity on college campuses throughout the nation by highlighting approaches to develop inclusive programs for all students at institutions of higher education. These approaches were provided in the conceptual framework in Figure 3. The long-term benefits of the global view of multicultural education greatly outweigh the short-term detriments that usually result from the anxiety experienced by ill-prepared or un-informed educators and administrators (Blair, 2003) who use the self-defeating assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective (Bennett, 2003). Adequate understanding of the various cultural elements and how they differ among people from diverse cultures is a promising way to develop positive relations among persons from different cultures and to provide inclusive programs for diverse student populations (Schulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993).

Conclusion

Until recently, multicultural education focused primarily on the equity pedagogy as a means of counteracting the problems created by the assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective of multicultural education. Today, with the rapidly increasing interconnections among all nations in the world, particularly as we face global issues related to the ecosystem, nuclear weapons, terrorism, human rights, and scarce national resources, the scope of multicultural education must be broadened to include global perspectives. Institutions of higher education are models for the communities and nations in which they are located and can serve as the loci for embracing for the global perspectives of multicultural education. The four major interactive principles and dimensions of the global perspective of multicultural education that allow the global perspective to be a more useful in promoting core human values than the “melting-pot” perspective are multicultural competence, equity pedagogy, curriculum reform, and teaching for social justice.

Institutions of higher education whose leaders embrace the global perspective of multicultural education will not only reap the benefits of multicultural education but also become pillars of academic excellence, models for democratic pluralistic societies, and attractions for international economic and human resources as they promote good human relations within their own nation and with other nations in today's increasingly interdependent world.

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