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A Multicultural Approach to Education in Early Childhood Pedagogy

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A Multicultural Approach to Education in Early Childhood Pedagogy

By

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A Starred Paper

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Chapter I

Introduction

I am currently a fourth-grade teacher in a public elementary school, and after observing and experiencing the recent changes in education have seen a drastic incline in the importance of a multicultural education approach. I have noticed that this ever-growing issue is beginning in the years of early childhood programs. Cultural diversity in the classroom is steadily increasing and so is the need for more resources and strategies to reach our students. It is essential that teachers are incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies every day to combat the increasing cultural diversity.

The Purpose of the Study

The focus point of this study is intended to determine the dimensions of a multicultural approach to curriculum and instruction specifically in early childhood education. Additionally, throughout this study, the ways that technology has enhanced education are looked at and compared in relation to the recent advances and changes in education. Incorporating any of the dimensions of multiculturalism, or any fundamental ideas serve various benefits for students both inside the classroom and out. Implementing appropriate strategies prepares students to live and survive in a diverse world (Krummel, 2013). We are able to do this by teaching them essential life skills, starting with their ‘experiences’ inside the classroom, which in reality are the culturally dense lessons we present to our students.

Research Questions

1. What are the five dimensions of multicultural education?
2. To what extent are the five dimensions of multicultural education implemented in early childhood programs?

3. How has technology enhanced a multicultural approach in early childhood?

Definitions of Terms

According to NAME the National Association for Multicultural Education, multicultural education is defined as a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies and organization as a means to ensure the highest levels of academic achievement for all students (NAME, n.d.). Multicultural education serves many different purposes for school systems, it helps foster equality among students as well as established philosophical ideas into the classroom that benefit student development (Jabbar & Mirza, 2017). Two additional terms that are used throughout this paper and a large part of multicultural education is equity and equality. Equal teaching would be defined as giving all students the same activity. Equitable teaching would be defined as ensuring that you consider each child's strengths and weaknesses and provide students with opportunities that will help them in reaching their potential (Kaiser & Raminsky, 2019). It is extremely important to differentiate between these two terms specifically, because they do not mean the same thing and they are both not always an appropriate way to teach our students. There is a very large difference between equitable learning opportunities and equal learning opportunities. Equitable learning opportunities are those that not only help every child individually by building off of individual unique set of strengths – including cultural background, language, abilities and disabilities, and experiences (NAEYC, 1997). Based on review, early childhood education can be formally defined as an education program that is focused on teaching kids ages birth to five the critical developmental milestones, skills, and concepts that children attain during this period of life and carry forth (American School, 2021).

Focus of Paper

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) is a “non-profit organization that advances and advocates for equity and social justice through multicultural education.” According to NAME, multicultural education is defined as: “a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, constitutions of South Africa and the United States, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations.” (NAME, n.d.). Multicultural education ensures that all students values and interests are both met and challenged. Doing so while acknowledging appropriate curriculum that provides students with a learning experience they can relate to in some variation and enjoy. Planting the seed in student’s minds at the young ages of early childhood that their learning *can* and should advocate for students’ own beliefs, experiences, passions, etc. by taking the time to get to know students to be able to do so (Hartman & Manfra, 2016). It has been identified that artificial blindness keeps us from recognizing, acknowledging, and appreciating important differences. Worse, it may lead to unintentional bias toward or disrespect for those who are different from us (Kaiser & Raminsky 2019). It is our duty as educators to not turn a blind eye to important differences in our students and instead embrace those factors in our teaching strategies and approach to student learning (Heller et al., 2012). We are taught by formal textbook definition that early childhood education requires elements of critical fundamental concepts that can only be delivered through content that is culturally enriched, yet we are still seeing a dramatic absence of this in many classrooms. Another positive aspect to incorporating multicultural education in early childhood programs that we are turning a blind eye to by not implementing is the benefit of exposing children to different languages, practices, cultures, and beliefs (Krummel, 2013).

Exposing children to these things is beneficial because they are all brand new concepts to children, they are learning it for the first time which makes them better able and suited to develop their own deeper understanding of culturally based expectations. Since this information has surfaced, it has now become more of a conversation of why we are still not incorporating these ideas into early childhood classrooms.

Importance of the Topic

In my personal experience I have been able to see a tremendous incline in student performance and positive learning attitude when cultural ideas and practices relating to students' personal lives are implemented into learning. We are so quick to dismiss young children and what they are capable of, but truly they are more intelligent and able than we know. Based on Early Education Division (2022) research, at around as early as eight months children begin to copy and mimic words and actions that they see around their house and begin picking up on patterns of life. Children possess these competencies at such a young age, yet still overlook these key competencies and practices when incorporating teaching strategies into the early childhood classroom. This idea of acknowledging and embracing what children know and see at home supports multicultural education implemented in the early childhood programs (Anyon, 1980). Kaiser & Raminsky (2019) states that in order to accomplish these goals, multicultural education demands a school staff that is culturally competent, and to the greatest extent possible racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Recognizing that where students come from and what they are used to plays a large role in whom they are as a person and student, and how they are going to need you inside the classroom. It is essential that we are recognizing and implementing these practices into the curriculum that we teach. Providing students with a learning environment that supports this helps form positive self-concepts.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

In Chapter One, I discussed what the overall concept of a multicultural approach to education is, and what it should look like for students. In Chapter Two I will discuss the important dimensions of multicultural education based on my review of the literature. The extent of which the five dimensions of multicultural education implemented in early childhood programs will be explored in this chapter. First by covering the goals and dimensions of multicultural education. Second, the implementation of the five dimensions in early childhood programs, and third, the implementation of the five dimensions in a technology centered classroom.

Goals and Dimensions of Multicultural Education

To identify the components of multicultural education, I conducted a search on Google scholar using the terms, *multicultural education*, *multicultural approaches and strategies* and *early childhood*. I reviewed the Review of Research in Education published by the American Educational Research Association which identifies and explains in thorough detail the dimensions of multicultural education. Based on my review, I identified that there are overall five goals of multicultural education (Figure 1) that when implementing every educator should be striving to acknowledge and utilize, no matter the age of instruction. In the following sections I go on to describe each goal and provide examples that can be used in the classroom setting.

Content integration

The first dimension is content integration, this refers to the ways that an educator uses conflicting ideas and concepts to use in the classroom and influence student learning. Teachers

may use ethnicities as a benchmark for combining ideas and backgrounds depending on the students present in the classroom (Sleeter, 2011).

Knowledge construction

The second dimension of multicultural education is referred to as the knowledge construction process. This teaches students how to understand and interpret concepts from different cultural groups. This idea is a very important component of multicultural education, but it is also not a new concept for the education system. Teachers have always used the knowledge construction process when teaching foreign concepts as well as past history concepts. It has been proven to build a positive bridge between student learning and the content that is being taught (Banks, 1993).

Prejudice reduction

The third dimension of multicultural education is prejudice reduction. “Prejudice reduction describes lessons and activities used by teachers to help students develop positive attitudes toward different racial, ethnic and cultural groups.” (UW College of Education). This references our practice of being mindful and withholding from racial tendencies that intrude our mindsets and philosophies of learning, sometimes without us even realizing it is happening.

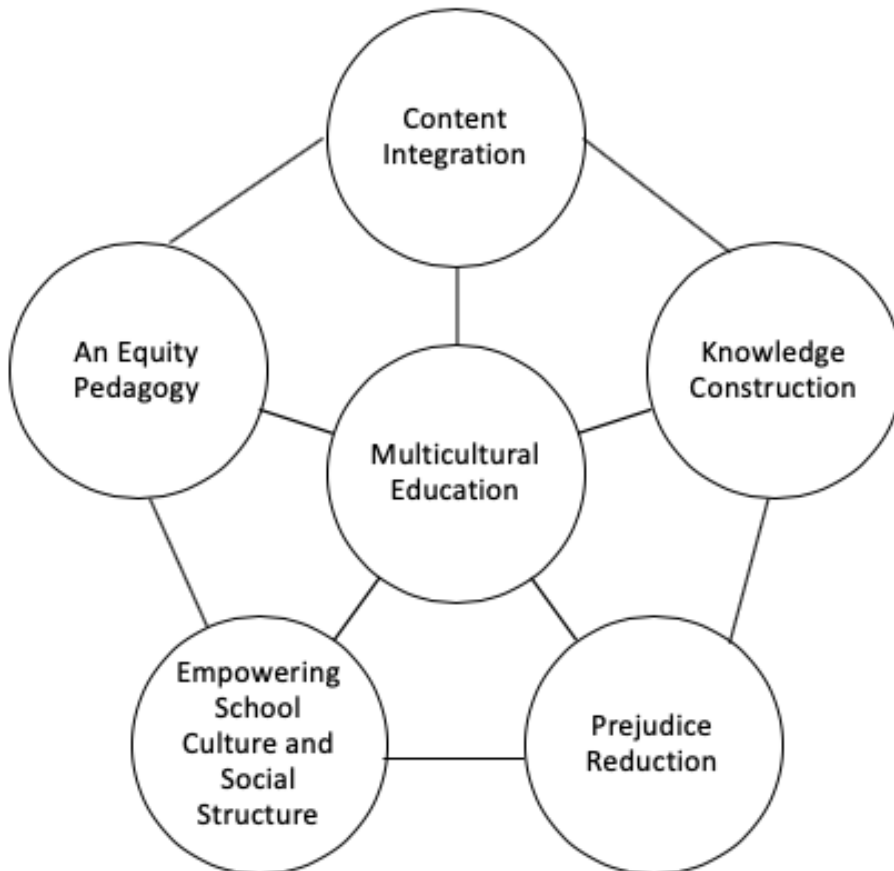
Equity pedagogy

The fourth dimension of multicultural education is equity pedagogy. This is the ideal pedagogy that teachers should strive to develop and deliver to students when implementing a multicultural approach. An equity pedagogy uses different lessons based on different races and ethnicities to provide students with an equal knowledge of all backgrounds and historically significant events and people. Equity pedagogy also refers to the aspect of learning environment that is learning in schools; cooperative, competitive, independent, etc. (Sharkey & Percy, 2018). Additionally,

these different types of learning environments can include what materials are available for students, school computer labs, student laptop, iPad, etc.

Empowering school culture

The fifth and final goal regarding multicultural education is empowering school culture as well as social structure, both in the classroom and whole school community. This refers to how specific schools change their own cultures and routines in order to accommodate the needs and backgrounds of all students. Doing this creates an environment of equality and fairness as well as automatic inclusion no matter where students and their families come from. This dimension of multicultural education requires the support and actions of not only educators and school staff, but also parents, guardians, and families as well in order to create a sense of community between school and home, which is a common struggle experienced with this dimension.

Figure 1*Dimensions of Multicultural Education*

Note. Banks, J.A. (1993). Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice. *Review of Research in Education*, 19, page 23.

Implementation of the Five Goals and Dimensions of Multicultural Education

The following literature review will cover the second research question in this paper, to what extent are the five dimensions of multicultural education implemented in early childhood programs. This question will be answered through analyzing various studies conducted on the implementation of the five dimensions when used in early childhood education. Throughout this

section, four studies are carefully reviewed and reflected on to develop a better understanding of the implementation of the five dimensions of multicultural education.

A large portion of research was dedicated directly to the implementation of the five dimensions of multicultural education specifically in early childhood programs. Ensuring equitable, quality education for all children in their early years, especially for those living in most disadvantaged conditions, has become essential in the current society (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2016). Due to the significance of this rising issue, a systematic review was conducted to see the pedagogical and structural aspects that both foster a positive classroom climate in multicultural education settings, as well as support the five dimensions of a multicultural approach (Khalfaoui et al., Garcia-Carrion, Villardon-Gallego, 2020). The review noted that both teacher-student supportive interactions and teacher training on emotionally supportive environments positively effect student success and overall enjoyment at school (Khalfaoui et al., Garcia-Carrion, Villardon-Gallego, 2020). These factors both reflect two dimensions of multicultural education; prejudice reduction and empowering school culture and social structure. The environment that teachers create and allow for young students at school contribute to an enhanced positive classroom climate, increasing student participation and fostering safe and respectful learning experiences for all students. Additionally, providing teachers with adequate training and knowledge to be able to facilitate the five dimensions inside the classroom has a tremendously positive effect (Mashburn et al., 2008). It was reported that teachers who had been trained to promote prosocial behaviors and limit disruptive behaviors had fewer conflicts in the classroom and made better use of the learning time, and student-teacher relationships (Morris et al., 2013). Additionally, a study conducted by McNally and Slutsky (2018) showed that teachers' that had access to professional development related to interactions that contribute to emotionally

supportive environments translated into fewer disciplinary situations, and more emotionally supportive, trust-based behaviors. It has been consistently proven that implementing any of the five dimensions of multicultural education in early childhood education, therefore it is essential to continue learning and adapting to the approach and providing teachers with easy access to the approach.

To take a closer look at the principles of multicultural education; and its dilemma facing early childhood programs. Additionally, specific ways of integration, and varying classroom environments will be analyzed. “As the early childhood population becomes more diverse, there is a need to incorporate programs and practices that are reflective of multicultural education” (Ogletree & pg. 11, 2010). Research from this study as well as others have shown that there is expected to be a dramatic increase in the number of students being enrolled in early childhood programs, and an even larger increase in cultural and linguistic diversity amongst this new group of students. The study also shows more data supporting the lack of inclusion practices and strategies being used in early childhood programs and the effect that is leaving on students as they progress towards upper elementary.

The early childhood population is ever growing, and so is the need for varying practices and strategies to continue meeting students and families wherever they are. There are over twenty million children between the ages of 0 to 4 in the United States and almost 120,000 childcare facilities including early childhood education centers (NACCRA, 2009). Therefore, teacher training, materials and resources as well as professional development opportunities must continue to grow with that number (Reyes et al., 2012). There are numerous ways to implement the dimensions of multicultural education into early childhood settings. Research has shown that by the age of three or four, construction of gender and racial identity has already started in a

child (Araujo & Strasser, 2003; Ramsey, 2008). A study conducted by Araujo and Strasser (2003) used data from the American Census to view first how the population is changing, and then once change has been identified, why this change is occurring. The study references the National Association of the Education of Young Children to distinguish common patterns amongst these populations. Within this study NAEYC reported that the three largest early childhood developmental theories that are used are linear and do not align with the ideals of multicultural education, resulting in the disconnect between school and families/students. Because of this, students are not being given individualized instruction and support while at school. An additional study done by Ramsey, 2008 used direct data from student surveys to address the concept of developmentally appropriate content. Students reported that when they are allowed to share their stories and feelings with a teacher their learning needs are being better met. The study also noted that stories shared from students' families is also detrimentally important to appropriate instruction. This relates directly to the dimensions of equity pedagogy and knowledge construction. Both of these areas can quickly become an issue in early childhood programs because different information being given to different students of varying developmental levels appropriate for each child (Reyes et al., 2012). However, these concerns can easily be corrected through differentiated instruction.

Early childhood educators have found great success in implementing varying levels of the dimensions through small group or center work instruction where teachers can work with students in a more intimate manner (Perkins & Mebert, 2005). Working with students in a more individualized manner helps to reduce prejudicial behaviors that are more common when only a whole group instruction is used. This has been tested and proven through the ways in which children pick up important social cues about ethnic differences through observation and

modeling, done most often through interpreting different methods of instruction. Castelli, De Dea and Nesdale (2008) conducted a study that consisted of 157 children between the ages of 40 and 78 months. The goal of the study was to see if children were being influenced by adults' nonverbal behaviors and whether or not their perception was generalized to others that stem from the same racial and cultural background. In the first part of the study students were put into small groups and given a video to watch of a white adult interacting with a black adult. Throughout the video the teacher remained neutral and did not display any personal attitude towards either of the individuals in the video. Children were then interviewed and asked a few questions describing their personal feelings about the black adult in the video. The second part of the study built off of these findings, to determine whether or not children generalized their attitudes towards other black adults. Results showed that children did generalize their developed perception to other black adults (Castelli et al., 2008). The concept of multiculturalism is continuously growing in early childhood education and is a concept that must be addressed. It is essentially a teacher's role to eliminate any tendencies and behaviors that reflect prejudice, for that is a direct impact to students. Teachers can do so in a proactive way by implementing the dimensions of the approach in an individualized instruction approach catered to student needs.

Use of Technology for a Multicultural Approach

Throughout this study I reviewed several different examples of how technology has enhanced a multicultural approach to education. In this section, I will be addressing the research question that is in what ways has technology enhanced a multicultural approach in early childhood. I will be using various articles and research to support these findings. The use of technology is a resource that has always been present within education, for as long as it has been around. However, there has been a recent shift in the manner that technology is being

implemented in the classroom, and the effects it is having on student learning when implemented.

According to Gibson and Obiakor (2018) research, a large factor contributing to the way technology enhances education is the interpretation and knowledge of those using it. “The second reality centers on the educational environment and the ongoing battle between people who readily accept and use technology and those who resist it.” (Gibson & Obiakor page 85, 2018). A study was conducted to understand how the implementation of technology effected students’ learning. A mixed method approach was used, and a fourteen-question survey was developed and administered through Qualtrics to collect data. The survey used various formats of questions; open-ended, multiple choice, and Likert scale and was sent to Preschool-5th educators at a local school district in central Illinois. In summary, the study concluded that participants view technology as a tool that enhances learning and engages students and can be used for a variety of purposes. A large common drawback associated with the study was the need for more staff and student training on devices. Many teachers revealed that their confidence in technology is not strong, and without adequate training they will never be able to use it at its full capacity and potential. The study concluded that the more guidance that is needed for students and staff with technology takes away from instructional time throughout the day. What this means is that technology and the purpose it serves in the classroom is only as beneficial and successful as people’s own willingness to use it and learn about it (Mantilla & Edwards, 2019). In our current society and education system, technology tools can assist students in being the producer of the technology, adding to the appropriateness of learning, motivation, and usability of technology tools (NAEYC, 2023). In conjunction with this, technology learning tools support each of the five dimensions of multicultural education when implemented correctly.

An additional benefit of implementation of technology in early childhood is the increased engagement and collaboration, both that support the dimensions of multicultural education. According to Maureen et al., (2018), the use of technology in classrooms helps students stay engaged longer and leads to an increase in different academic skills compared to students without technology as an intervention. The study was conducted on approximately 45 students aged five and six years old, it showed that both paper and digital literacy activities kept students' and increased overall literacy skills. However, the group using digital formatted activities showed a much more significant increase in engagement compared to the group with a paper format (Maureen et al., 2018). The study concluded the benefit of using a technology approach to learning as it allows early childhood children to boost their attention span, and engagement levels during instruction. Aside from the stated benefits these skills contribute to students' collaboration, motivation and creativity, essential skills to carry on throughout educational journey.

Many practices aim to cultivate the idea that a multicultural approach to education fosters creativity, an essential lifelong skill for students to learn. As technology continues to grow in our society, so does the role that technology plays on children in the classroom. According to Madanipour & Cohrsen (2020), augmented reality (AR) which is an ever-growing technology resource is an extremely beneficial tool specifically in early childhood education. Augmented reality provides students with topics and resources that stray from typical ideas and concepts, a prominent factor in each of the five dimensions of multicultural education. Research conducted by Madanipour and Cohrsen (2020) argue that this technology allows students to interact with real and virtual objects, which provides young students with the opportunity to understand abstract concepts they are not regularly exposed to. In addition, this technology amongst many

others enhances the essential skills focused on within the five dimensions of multicultural education.

Chapter III

Limitations, Findings, and Conclusions

In chapter two I discussed impactful research that has been done on the benefit and importance of a multicultural approach to early childhood programs and technology classroom settings, as well as the five dimensions of the approach. The information that was analyzed and obtained from that chapter were extremely beneficial and helpful in summarizing my overall educational philosophy in multicultural education, implemented in early childhood. That, along with additional limitations to this specific study and their findings are discussed in Chapter III.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study regarding multicultural education consists of the differing components as the learning environment created for students, relationships, inclusion at school, equal learning experiences, material and content being used i.e., the curriculum that teachers use to base instruction off of. I feel that these are possible limitations of this study because all are contributing factors that affect how a multicultural approach is being implemented, and if it is being done so in the correct way. Another large limitation that I view for this study is the location of school and economic status. Economic status is a factor because this determine the amount of support and resources that are given. An additional limitation to this study would be the documentation, assessment and evaluation process in early learning contexts should include participation and contribution from all educators (Johnston, 2021). Without this there is a lack of perspective and knowledge needed in order to create inclusive and equitable early learning.

Further Research

For further research on this particular of study a crucial element to analyze could be the different types of early childhood programs. For example, how a multicultural approach is

implemented in a Montessori classroom compared to a traditional classroom where the majority of the research and data conducted in this paper came from. An additional area for further research could be the effects of a multicultural approach in a STEM program and how the implementation of abundant materials and resources support the five dimensions. Multicultural education is a very large and growing idea with numerous areas for further research.

Conclusion

Teachers play a large role in the integration of multicultural education because they are the primary connection that students experience learning through. But even more so, early childhood teachers are truly at the forefront because for those students and families they are the first experience with education and what practices are acknowledged in specific educations. Not only do teachers need to understand multicultural education as a concept individually, but they also must provide students with adequate opportunities and resources to experiment and experience on their own while in the classroom. This can be a challenge because just the same as any other concept, our learning styles differ. However, that stems back to the idea of educators first being fully competent with the concept of multicultural education before they can effectively teach it to others. However, a common struggle many educators experience comes from the idea of being more focused on students' academic success rate rather than students' abilities to be a functioning human today which requires the implementation and exposure of a multicultural education, and this unfortunately often times begins in early childhood (Zirkel, 2008). When discussing these ideas of a multicultural approach to education especially at younger ages a common misconception is that the students are too young, and they don't realize the difference or need to be thinking about these differences (Affholder, 2003). Multicultural programs are specifically designed for early childhood environments because of the importance

and integral relationship between language and culture that is most prominent in early childhood. Especially at the younger ages where students are nearly learning everything else from scratch, there are many easy and effect strategies teachers can implement in their classroom that still reflect the foundational aspects of multicultural education. To do this teacher can take simple steps like getting to know their students before they begin teaching them, taking the time to learn their students' interests, what their families are like, students' individual identities, etc. This process has shown to contribute positively to both student learning success as well as the way that students perceive and view their teachers as an important person in their life.

In conclusion, there is a constantly growing need for this area of study to be focused on because of how beneficial and important multiculturalism is for students that I have seen through my own experiences, despite the constantly increasing lack of inclusion in many schools and classrooms around the nation. A multicultural education approach to education has the ability to positively influence students in such a simple and effortless manner without adding onto the plates of teachers. This being because it is simply embedded into our education system, only when implemented correctly. Whether we are aware of it or not there are almost always ideas and concepts that support multiculturalism embedded within curriculum, all of the way from a first-grade curriculum to an eleventh-grade curriculum. It is how we adapt to these ideas and execute them in our teaching to influence student learning that creates a multicultural education, and in my opinion, makes us a more influential educator. A multicultural approach to education at any age in early childhood, or older, requires teachers as well as students to look at and acknowledge ideas and concepts that are different from our own and question these ideas to better understand them. Doing this is a skill that requires us to learn and adapt to backgrounds

that we are unfamiliar with which is a common struggle for many educators that leads to the lack of multicultural inclusion throughout many classrooms.

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