Final Paper

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**Meaning of Multicultural or Diversity**

Emerging from the “diverse courses, programs, and practices that educational institutions devised to respond to the demands, needs, and aspirations of the various groups,” (Banks & Banks, p. 5) multicultural education has increased educational equity for various cultural, ethnic, and economic groups. The ethnographies, *To Change Them Forever, Thinking Outside the Girl Box, and Subtractive Schooling,* have provided accounts of various multicultural groups. As I reflect upon the reading assignments in an attempt to provide a working definition of “multicultural education”, I must begin by considering the themes of each reading.

First, in *To Change Them Forever*, the theme of assimilation emerged. Assimilation appeared to be the least expensive way to transform the Indian population into the ideal American image. The ethnocentric behavior of the United States government viewed Native American culture as deficient with assimilation through education as the answer to transform these individuals. Nearly one hundred years later, the United States does not appear very different. The theme of insufficient will emerged as the government appeared to lack the will and the financial support to ensure the success of Rainy Mountain School. The gap between the rhetoric of policy makers and the actual commitment of the government still rings true today. Policy makers make promises but fail to follow through with the financial means and other necessary components. The theme of submission and adaptation emerged as the Kiowa begin to adapt to their new way of life as they accept white people are not going away.

Second, in *Thinking Outside the Girl Box*, the importance of relationships is exemplified throughout the reading. According to Mary Pipher, as cited by Spatig and Amerikaner (2014), “with girls this age, relationships are everything. No work can be done in the absence of mutual affection and regard” (p. 69). As an extension of relationships, a context of care is a recurring them in the book. The theme of empowerment through voice is shown as Shelley Gaines “identified girls’ find[ing] their voice as a key program goal, as a way to push the boundaries of the girl box” (p. 50). Girls learned they had a voice to be heard, valued, and respected as authority. Resilience, or the concept the youth hold “innate strengths and natural abilities that can be used to help them not only overcome challenges but become stronger and succeed” (p. 34) is a recurring theme. GRP participants were supported and challenged to think about the social issues which impacted their lives. Another recurring theme is of stereotyping and gender bias. The concept of Appalachians as hillbillies and other negative perceptions is difficult to overcome. Further, gender bias, with women and girls “bearing the brunt of the state’s economic disadvantages” with West Virginia ranking low in women’s political participation, social and economic autonomy, health and well-being, and employment and earnings. A final theme is overcoming adversity with the adversities or “girl box” ranging from “sexism, classism, ageism, regionalism, and homophobia” (p. 21).

Third, caring is a central theme in *Subtractive Schooling*. Based upon Noddings’ framework on caring, a caring teacher is to “initiate relation, with engrossment in the student’s welfare following from this search for connection” (p. 21). A teachers’ ultimate goal of apprehending their students’ subjective reality is best achieved through involvement into the “students’ welfare and emotional displacement” (Valenzuela, p. 61). Valenzuela believes priorities in education should lie in dedication to full human growth, not just focus on student achievement. According to Venezuela, “the subtractive process divests youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (p. 3). Much like the children of Rainy Mountain School, the students at Seguin are viewed with contempt where they feel they are “de-indianized” or stripped of their culture and heritage through subtractive assimilation. Venezuela found an “…erosion of students’ social capital…” (p.20) with assimilative school policies and practices. Lastly, social capital emerged as a theme with social capital consisting of trust, information, reciprocity, and cooperation. According to Venezuela, “this social milieu shapes and strengthens the bonds between the friends and reinforces their individual and group commitment to academic achievement” (p. 158).

Banks & Banks describe multicultural education as all children, “regardless of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics” (p. 3) having an equal opportunity to learn in school. Socially, schools must “educate students to be reflective, moral, caring, and active citizens in a troubled world” (p. 5). As shown in the ethnographies above, individuals learn “their culture” from social groups.

**Multicultural Education Definition**

Multicultural education means providing educational opportunities to every individual by respecting and appreciating individual differences including class, race, and gender.

**Application**

As I prepare to apply my working definition of multicultural education, I intend to follow the concept of content integration as described by Banks & Banks where “teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories” (p. 20). University of Charleston recruits students from many areas throughout the country and the world. Therefore, it will be imperative to seek opportunities to use examples and content from a variety of cultures. Further, as an educator, I have an opportunity to help students “understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases” within the business field “influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it” (Banks & Banks, p. 20). Educators can reduce prejudice through lessons and activities which expose students to different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. As business faculty, the glass ceiling concept is often addressed in many management courses. Promoting gender, racial, and social-class equity within the classroom integrates important components of multicultural education by ensuring equal opportunities for all.

During the reading of *Invitation to Anthropology*, I realized I am ethnocentric. My own experiences are limited and I tend to view the world through the narrow lens of my experiences. A study of anthropology has provided me with an understanding of how culture works from the viewpoints of different groups throughout history. Cultural practices, no matter how different they are from my own, are relative to each society or culture. Working in higher education, I have students from various parts of the world. This experience will allow me to better understand and respect each student’s culture.

In *Thinking Outside the Girl Box*, the “politics of caring” shows how important close relationships can be for youth. With my experience as a first-generation college student and through my studies of culture, difference, and intercultural interaction, I intend to make a greater effort of cultivating long-term relationships with my students. Many of which are first-generation college students and/or non-traditional students who are uncertain of how to navigate through the higher education experience.

As a teacher, I must initiate the relationship as Noddings notes “students’ weak power position relative to school personnel makes it incumbent that the adults be the initiators of social relationships” (p. 104). In preparation for the application of concepts gleaned from the reading, we must embrace differences. Educators must seek opportunities to engage students. Teachers must be cognizant of how they are perceived by students and make an extra effort to treat each child fairly.

**Dissertation Research**

Relating to my dissertation research, the study of multicultural education has made me realize I am a product of my social group. My behavior is a result of the groups to which I belong. As I prepare to embark on a dissertation, I must be cognizant of integrating a diverse population into my study. Through a study of multicultural and diversity issues, I have been reminded to embrace differences. Rather than looking at a situation through my ethnocentric eyes, I will be open and respectful of differences. The importance of the multicultural perspective is the wealth of information from diverse perspectives.

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