

The Dimensions of Multicultural Education

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ABSTRACT: *The author describes the goals of multicultural education and its five dimensions. The dimensions are designed to help practicing educators understand the different aspects of multicultural education and to enable them to implement it comprehensively. The dimensions help educators understand, for example, that content integration is only one important part of comprehensive multicultural education. Other important dimensions of multicultural education are a school culture and a social structure that promote gender, racial, and social-class equity.*

THE AIMS AND GOALS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The heated discourse on multicultural education, especially in the popular press and among writers outside the field (Fullinwider, 1996; Graff, 1992; Sleeter, 2001; Taylor, 1994), often obscures the theory, research, and consensus among multicultural education scholars and researchers about the nature, aims, and scope of the field (Banks, 2004b; Gay, 2004). A major goal of multicultural education—as stated by specialists in the field—is to reform schools, colleges, and universities so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality.

Another important goal of multicultural education is to give both male and female students an equal chance to experience educational success and mobility (Sadker & Sadker, 2004). Multicultural education theorists are increasingly interested in how the interaction of race, class, and gender influences education (Banks, 1997; Cyrus, 1999). However, the emphasis that different theorists give to each of these variables varies considerably. Although there is an emerging consensus about the aims and scope of multicultural education, the variety of typologies, conceptual schemes, and perspectives within the field reflects its emergent status and the fact that complete agreement about its aims and boundaries has not been attained (Banks, 2003; Garcia, 2005; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999).

There is general agreement among most scholars and researchers in multicultural education that, for it to be implemented successfully, institutional changes must be made, including changes in the curriculum; the teaching materials; teaching and learning styles; the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of teachers and administrators; and goals, norms, and culture of the school (Banks & Banks, 2004). However, many school and university practitioners have a limited conception of multicultural education; they view it primarily as curriculum reform that involves changing or restructuring the curriculum to include content about ethnic groups, women, and other cultural groups. This conception of multicultural education is widespread because curriculum reform was the main focus when the movement first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and because the multiculturalism discourse in the popular media has focused on curriculum reform and has largely ignored other dimensions and components of multicultural education (Hughes, 1993).

THE DIMENSIONS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

If multicultural education is to become better understood and implemented in ways more consistent with theory, its various dimensions must