

My Philosophy of Multicultural Education

From my perspective, to be educated does not mean to have one's head filled with facts and ideas. Rather, I find an educated person to be one who is capable of forming opinions about situations he or she is presented with in life and who is capable of drawing on a knowledge base to support the stance taken. In addition, this educated person should show an understanding of the array of viewpoints on the given topic and should be able to relate his/her own opinion to the others through the comparison of arguments. I have experienced this process while considering multicultural education, exploring ideas and viewpoints about anti-prejudicial education to form my own opinion. I now understand what my view is, why, and how it is similar to and different from other views. That, to me, is what makes a person educated. It is possession of an epistemology—a way of knowing—and recognition that there exist other, perhaps equally valid ways of knowing the world.

When in possession of these resources, a person should be able to make what one might call “educated” decisions in life. This would help a person not only in everyday situations but also in larger decisions, such as voting and political activism, choosing options after high school, and picking a career. America's schools in their present state, to my knowledge, are not accomplishing these things. I feel that the only way to move toward these goals is to move away from the banking education that has been recently reinforced in U.S. educational reform and to move on to a critical pedagogy that allows all students to process higher order questions and to relate knowledge to their lives and to the society in which they live. It is important for students to belong to schools that are less separated from their everyday lives as community members and citizens. To have lessons that show value and practicality in the world outside school will create more interest in the knowledge, making it remembered and valued.

Therefore, my position on multicultural, anti-prejudicial education is one of support. I am in favor of it because I don't believe schools can truly be a part of a democratic society without it. Under the current Eurocentric, patriarchal, middle-class system practiced in most U.S. schools, a large part of the population is neglected and put at a disadvantage. By virtue of its democratic ideals, the United States is supposed to be a nation of equal opportunity. To deny citizens equal opportunity through one of the nation's largest institutions would be to disregard the very foundation of what makes this country free. Therefore, I see no alternative but to implement a multicultural, anti-predjudicial education in America's schools.

Multicultural education seeks to create a sense of understanding and respect among people of all ethnicities and to improve social situations in the process. By doing this, educators can reduce hate crimes committed against minority groups, create increased community togetherness, and reduce the feelings of competition among groups.¹ Under a Eurocentric, patriarchal, middle-class education, prejudices are not confronted but are, in fact, perpetuated, and this ignorance is what furthers the damaging separations among minority groups that have been the standard for hundreds of years.² It is time to move closer to a truly democratic society and to break free of ignorance and hatred, and multicultural education can help us in doing this.

As a result of multicultural education, students may grow up to be adults who are more politically aware of the needs of certain groups, who seek equitable representation of all groups in politics, and who have a sense of pride and importance about the political needs and opinions of their own groups and others'. These are people who know they must and will be heard in the political arena and who will work to make sure of this. Because multicultural education places emphasis on the value of *all* groups, students are more likely to wish to participate in democracy.

A Eurocentric, patriarchal education centered on middle-class values does not allow for the investigation and respect of non-dominant cultures, which sends a message to children that the Middle-class Euro-American voice is the only one that matters. This discourages the political involvement of many people. If schools intend to cultivate citizens for participation in a democratic society, then this type of education is undermining the very reason for schools in America. Jim Cummings and Dennis Sayers envision a future where the current standard falls by the wayside, due to the shift to a more global society:

Multicultural education's emphasis on the valuation and understanding of other cultures could prove to be a very lucrative tool in business during this century. As more and more companies move toward a multinational scope, businesspersons who are able to think outside their own cultural borders will be in a desirable position.³ In addition, if there is a transformation of Eurocentric schools into places where education is related to each student's life, where epistemology is flexible (not rigid and of European ideals,) and where the diffusion of knowledge is equitable, then students of non-European ethnicities will have the opportunity to succeed in school and in the workplace, where they were once forced to assimilate or be forgotten.

Since the legal deconstruction of racial segregation nearly half a century ago, the United States has seen the amalgamation of many ethnic communities in school, the workplace, and social groups.⁴ However, this coexistence has not been one of equality. Rather, it has been one of assimilation of minorities into the dominant group.⁵ The idea of a more democratic coexistence is of one that values, respects, and builds itself upon the differences and similarities of its people. The process of progression toward this democratic ideal is not one that can be accomplished quickly, nor can an end be identified. Centuries of prejudice are evidence of that. The important thing is to make an effort in the direction of democracy and equality. To do this, we must start with the very young—those who are our future. We must make it the duty of our nation's schools to honor the ideas of equality and respect. Harper Lee made this suggestion over forty years ago in her novel, To Kill a Mockingbird. One of the strongest messages in her

book lies with the children portrayed. They are the future, and that future is progressing, toward a non-prejudicial way of life.⁶ In order to preserve our democratic ideals and continue advancement toward a “more perfect union,” we must use our nations schools as tool for paving the road to equality in our land.

Notes

1. Cummins, Jim and Dennis Sayers, Brave New Schools: Challenging Cultural Illiteracy Through Global learning Networks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 110.
2. Gordon, Edmund W., Education and Justice: a View from the Back of the Bus (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1999), 159.
3. Cummins and Sayers, *Brave New Schools*, 110.
4. Gordon, *Education and Justice: a View from the Back of the Bus*, 159.
5. Ibid.