

*Hsuan-Jen Chen (Taiwan)*

## Towards a Safe and Respectful Campus: Perspectives of Multicultural Education

**Abstract:** *This paper argues that multicultural education is an essential way of creating a safe and respectful campus. Examined from the perspective of power relations, schools are viewed as a site that helps maintain existing power relations by reinforcing the assimilation ideology. A drawback of this is that only one set of perspectives is valued. As a result, students who are not part of the norm are more likely to be treated unfairly in school. This may impose a negative effect on their learning as school is not a safe environment for them. To create a safe and respectful campus, multicultural education has to be incorporated as it helps students foster multiple perspectives and learn to embrace diversity. This paper first defines multicultural education. Secondly, it illustrates why multicultural issues should be examined in the framework of power relations. Then, it focuses on exploring the assimilation ideology and the role schools play in the process of assimilation. In this section, it analyzes how students are endangered by assimilation, and the case of the Yeh Yong-Zi event in Taiwan is also examined. Finally, it discusses in what ways multicultural education could help establish a safe and respectful campus culture.*

**Keywords:** *multicultural education, assimilation, safe and respectful campus*

**概要** (Hsuan-Jen Chen: 迈向一个更加安全的、充满尊重的校园之路：多元文化教育的视角)：

本文将多元文化教育描述为一条创建更加安全和充满尊重的校园环境的重要途径。从权力行为的角度来看，学校是一个通过强化同化的意识形态来帮助维持现有行为的场所。问题是并非所有的视角都得以被评估。因此，不属于该标准的学生在学校受到了不公平的待遇。这将对学习产生负面的影响，因为学校对于他们来说不是一个安全的地方。为了创建一个更加安全的、充满尊重的校园环境，必须有多元文化教育的融入。它有助于学生领会并拓展更加宽广的视角，并学会接受多样性。本文首先定义了多元文化教育。其次，它阐释了为什么在权力行为的背景下应当研究多元文化的问题。之后，探究同化意识形态和学校在同化过程中的作用。本文还分析了学生如何受到同化的威胁，并对台湾 Yeh Yong-Zi 事件进行了分析。最后，文章讨论了多元文化教育如何能够帮助建立一个更安全的和充满尊重的校园文化。

**关键词：**多元文化教育，同化，融合，更加安全并充满尊重的校园

**Zusammenfassung** (Hsuan-Jen Chen: Auf dem Weg zu einem sicheren und respektvollen Campus: Perspektiven der multikulturellen Bildung): *Dieser Artikel beschreibt multikulturelle Bildung als wesentlichen Weg zur Schaffung eines sicheren und respektvollen Campus. Aus der Perspektive der Machtverhältnisse betrachtet, sind Schulen ein Ort, der hilft, bestehende Verhältnisse aufrechtzuerhalten, indem er die Ideologie der Assimilation verstärkt. Ein Problem dabei ist, dass nicht alle Perspektiven bewertet werden. Infolgedessen werden Schüler, die nicht Teil der Norm sind, in der Schule eher ungerecht behandelt. Dies kann sich negativ auf das Lernen auswirken, da die Schule für sie keine sichere Umgebung darstellt. Um einen sicheren und respektvollen Campus zu schaffen, muss multikulturelle Bildung integriert werden. Sie hilft den Schülern, mehrere Perspektiven zu fördern und zu lernen, Vielfalt zu akzeptieren. Dieser Artikel definiert zunächst die multikulturelle Bildung als solche. Zweitens veranschaulicht er, warum multikulturelle Fragen im Rahmen der Machtverhältnisse untersucht werden sollten. Danach erfolgt eine Betrachtung der Assimilationsideologie und der Rolle der Schulen im Prozess der Assimilation. In diesem Abschnitt wird analysiert, wie Schüler durch Assimilation gefährdet sind, und der Fall des Yeh Yong-Zi Ereignisses in Taiwan wird ebenfalls untersucht. Schließlich wird diskutiert, auf welche Weise multikulturelle Bildung dazu beitragen könnte, eine sichere und respektvolle Campuskultur zu etablieren.*

**Schlüsselwörter:** *multikulturelle Bildung, Assimilation, Integration, sicherer und respektvoller Campus*

**Аннотация** (Хсуан-Йен Чен: Как создать школьное пространство, в котором ученику будет комфортно и где его будут уважать как личность? Перспективы поликультурного образования): В данной статье описывается поликультурное образование как значимый фактор, влияющий на комфортное пребывание ученика в школе и позволяющий ему чувствовать себя в ней личностью. Если рассматривать проблему под углом дискурса власти, то школы являются той структурой, которая помогает поддерживать существующий порядок вещей за счет укрепления идеологии ассимиляции. Проблема же заключается в том, что оцениваются не все перспективы этого процесса. Из-за этого ученики, не вписывающиеся в «норму», в школе чаще испытывают к себе несправедливое отношение. Это может негативно сказаться на успеваемости учеников, поскольку в этом случае школа не будет являться для них комфортным пространством. Для создания этой комфортной среды и для того, чтобы ребенок чувствовал уважение к себе как к личности, необходимо встраивать концепцию поликультурного образования. Поликультурное образование поможет ученикам раскрыться и научит их быть толерантными. В начале статьи дается определение поликультурного образования. Затем обосновывается, почему вопросы поликультурного образования должны рассматриваться в контексте дискурса власти. В последующем рассматриваются идеология ассимиляции и роль школы в процессе ассимиляции. В данной части анализируется, каким опасностям подвержены школьники в процессе ассимиляции, а также исследуются события в Тайване, связанные с делом Йе Юн-Ци. В заключении приводятся различные точки зрения на то, каким образом поликультурное образование может помочь в создании безопасного и толерантного школьного пространства.

**Ключевые слова:** поликультурное образование, ассимиляция, интеграция, безопасное и толерантное школьное пространство

## Introduction

Schooling is an important process of socialization. Existing and functioning within social contexts, school and its curriculum not only reflect power relations in society but also transmit ideologies of the dominant culture. Hence, schools tend to reproduce the current social structure. The cultures and ideologies of the subordinate groups are often ignored in school. As a result, students who are not part of the norm are more likely to be treated unfairly in school. An extreme example of this is school bullying. It may impose a negative effect on students' learning as school is no longer a safe environment for them. This study explored how to build a safe and respectful campus through the lens of critical theory. In contrast to quantitative studies that highlight hypothesis testing, this study emphasized the construction of a conceptual framework illustrating why multicultural education provides a possible solution to discrimination and violence on campus.

Critical theory is an important theoretical construct that shapes my perceptions of the social condition. Compared with the other two social science traditions, i.e., positivism and interpretive theory (hermeneutics), critical theory is similar to hermeneutics in terms of reality and value. For positivism, social reality exists objectively; therefore, the researcher has to use scientific measurements to figure out the structure or the laws governing the reality. For hermeneutics and critical theory, social reality can be understood by interacting with the subject involved. In other words, positivists believe the researcher has to be value-free or value-neutral when conducting a study, whereas hermeneutic and critical theorists recognize the value-laden aspect of inquiry and inquirers (Ashley & Orenstein, 2005; Creswell, 2012). Although critical theory shares similar perspectives with hermeneutics in certain aspects, it moves beyond hermeneutics as it expresses an interest in emancipation (Ashely & Orenstein, 2005). Critical theory is morally passionate (Ashely & Orenstein, 2005). For critical theorists, reality is socially constructed; yet, people are not always aware of the process producing the reality and the rules they live by, which creates an obstacle for them to make sense of their life experiences. To remove such an obstacle, critical theory critiques how particular social institutions constrain people to act and to identify themselves. It thus has an interest in analyzing how particular ideas help sustain authoritative relations that are inherently

unjust and repressive (Ashely & Orenstein, 2005). These critical theory approaches are revealed in this study.

This study is essentially a theoretical inquiry, attempting to develop a plausible conceptual framework that is capable of offering insight, enhancing understanding and providing a meaningful guide to action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Such a goal is close to the notion of normative theory proposed by Eisner (2001) in his discussion of curriculum theories. Eisner made a distinction between normative and descriptive theory. Concerned with articulation and justification of a set of values, normative theory aims at providing “a persuasive case for the value of a particular end of state of being” (ibid., p. 35). Descriptive theory, on the other hand, attempting to explain, predict or control the events of the world, can best be exemplified by theories in natural science. The conceptual framework I attempt to establish in this study is similar to normative theory. Through examining culture and power relations, I strive to judge the value of promoting multiculturalism in the school curriculum. Therefore, in this paper, I first defined the term *multicultural education*. Second, I located multicultural and cultural issues in the framework of power relations. Third, I examined what kinds of role schools play in maintaining existing power relations and how this impacts students and their safety when they are on campus. Then, I discussed in which way multicultural education is essential for creating a safe and respectful campus, which is especially important for those culturally diverse students.

## Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a popular term which educators use increasingly to describe education policies and practices that recognize and accept human differences and similarities in race, social class, handicap, gender and sexual orientation (Sleeter and Grant, 2007). Based on a review of the literature on multicultural education, Gollnick (1980) has described multicultural education as aiming at promoting cultural diversity, human rights, alternative life choices, social justice and equal opportunity for all people, and equity in the distribution of power among groups. In short, it recognizes the difference existing among different people and different groups. It also emphasizes the importance of respecting those who are different from oneself. After all, it is the difference that constitutes this diverse world.

According to Tatum (2003), human diversity stands out in seven categories, including race, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, and physical or mental ability. In each category, there are usually two groups: dominant and subordinate. The dominant groups are “systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership” (Tatum, 2003, p. 22); vice versa, the subordinate groups are systematically disadvantaged or even discriminated against. Based on this understanding, each individual is likely to be dominant in certain categories and subordinate in others. Yet, certain categories can be more conspicuous than others due to the environment and personal experiences. Those categories usually stand out as one’s major identity. As Tatum (2003) pointed out, it is usually the categories where one is subordinate that stands out. In a little experiment Tatum conducted, she found that when it comes to do a self-description, men usually would not mention their gender, but women would; heterosexual people would not indicate their sexual orientation, but non-heterosexual people would. The result seems to suggest that members of the dominant groups do not have to deal with the inconvenience of not belonging to the dominant groups, so they simply view their advantageous status as the norm and it usually goes unexamined. On the other hand, one is often conscious of one’s subordinate identities. For example, a white, middle class female might first identify herself as female when she is among a group of white, middle class males.

Multicultural education aims at embracing human differences, so no one would be discriminated against simply because he or she is not part of the norm. When multiculturalism is promoted in schools and in society, it helps culturally diverse students to realize that it is okay to be different

from the dominant group and their being different does not imply inferiority. Being different would not deprive people of their rights of receiving education. This is the core of multicultural education, namely, to promote educational equity for all. To achieve this goal, educators need to be open to human differences and try to understand what culture is and what elements we should examine if we want to better understand culture? There are various definitions of culture. In this paper, culture is discussed based on the notion of power relations from the perspective of critical theory.

## Culture and Power

Culture controls our daily lives in many unsuspected or taken-for-granted ways. Hall (2000) argued, "Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants" (p. 82). According to Hall (2000), individuals who want to understand their culture need to study their own lives, their ways of thinking, and their position in relation to others. Traditional discussions of culture are typically disassociated from power. Culture is defined in the dictionary of sociology as "the accumulated store of symbols, ideas, and material products associated with a social system, whether it be an entire society or a family" (Johnson, 2000, 73). In a definition like this, culture tends to be reduced to a set of artifacts, detaching culture from power relations, thus failing to recognize how culture is reproduced and manifested in social relations (Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2015).

Created by human beings, culture cannot be detached from human activities and social relations (Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2015). Culture is much more than concrete artifacts such as food, clothing, and customs. Culture influences "the particular ways in which a social group lives and makes sense of its 'given' circumstances and conditions of life" (McLaren, 2015, p. 160). Individuals belonging to particular social groups inevitably have to interact with other social groups. As a member of society, an individual is engaged in interactions with other individuals in the society, with individuals who represent public institutions, in the work place, in recreational activities, as well as with family and friends. Through the various kinds of interactions individuals have, they build social relations that become part of their culture.

Social relations exist simultaneously with power relations. When different social groups live side by side, common rules are set up, by those with power, by which all are supposed to abide. Those who decide the rules, tend to create rules for behaviors that are acceptable to them. In this context, power is the ability to impose one's will on others. Power is also related to each cultural group's positionality, namely, the degree of respect one group receives in society (Marshall, 2002). One group's power and positionality determine the degree of adaptation its members have to undergo as they attempt to assimilate into the mainstream culture. If one group possesses power and its culture resembles that of the mainstream, the degree of adaptation its members need to make will be relatively low. In contrast, groups whose cultures are different from the mainstream possess less power and need to make more adaptation to be accepted in the mainstream. This is actually related to the distinction between the dominant and the subordinate groups (McLaren, 2015).

From the perspective of power relations, individuals occupy different social positions. Those in a similar position usually form a common culture. Any given society is constituted by various social groups; therefore, the structures, material practices, and lived relations typically demonstrate a combination of both dominant and subordinate cultures (Darder, 2012; Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2015). McLaren defined a dominant culture as "social practices and representations that affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society" (McLaren, 2015, p. 161). Take the United States for example. Generally, in the United States, the dominant groups are those who are predominately white. These groups control politics, economics, media, and state and federal educational policy by setting up rules to regulate the behaviors of others (McLaren, 2015; Tatum, 2003). Subordinate cultures exist in subordination to the dominant culture (Darder, 2012; McLaren, 2015). The dominant culture legitimizes the values

and interest of dominant groups, and dominant ideologies marginalize and negate what constitutes the essential elements of the subordinate culture such as its cultural values, heritage, language, and lived experiences. Such an understanding toward the difference between dominant and subordinate cultures leads us to explore further: what kind of role does school play in the unequal power relations?

## School and Assimilation

As part of the dominant cultural institutions, school is often an important agent for maintaining existing power relations because it emphasizes that every student should accommodate the dominant cultural model (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Nieto & Bode, 2011; Olsen, 2008). As a result, the psyche of the students of the subordinate group, such as students with lower socio-economic status or non-heterosexual students, is left untended (MacLeod, 2004; Tatum, 2003). How can schools overcome the existing dominant ideology and teach students from subordinate groups to value their being different from the dominant culture and to develop a positive sense of self? In this section, I first examined the notion of assimilation and its connection with power relations. Then, I discussed how schools promote assimilation. Lastly, the impact of the assimilation ideology on students, especially those who do not conform to dominant cultural norms or images, was explored.

## Assimilation vs. Integration

Assimilation, which emphasizes absorbing members of subordinate groups into “the social structures and cultural life of another person, group, or society” (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 24), typically leads to partial or total replacement of the home culture with the new culture. The English-only or the official English movement that advocates legislating English as the official language of the United States reveals the prevalence of an assimilation ideology (Thomas, 1996). Applied in the context of schooling, assimilation means adopting the dominant cultural ways of life by learning to eat, dress, talk, and behave in a way acceptable to the dominant culture (Nieto & Bode, 2011; Olsen, 2008).

Assimilation ideology is more likely to develop a monocultural society, where subordinate cultures are not valued as much as the dominant culture (Gordon, 1964). In contrast is the notion of integration, in which individuals from subordinate groups manage to retain their cultural identity and learn to value the dominant culture simultaneously (Berry, 1997). As integration signifies contact and identification with both home culture and new culture, it is usually considered as a better model of adaptation (Ryabichenko & Lebedeva, 2016).

The American historian, Arthur Schlesinger’s (1998) book, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, expresses the insecurities vis-à-vis the increasing diversity in the United States. Although Schlesinger recognized that “America was multiethnic from the start” (p. 15), he insisted the importance of maintaining the historical conception of America as a melting pot. In the conception of the melting pot, the differences of race, religion, wealth, and nationality are submerged in the exercise of democracy or civil principles. Schlesinger believed the melting pot conception is essential in reducing the differences among different groups. He perceived validating the existence of various ethnic groups as separatism that “nourishes prejudices, magnifies differences, and stirs antagonisms” (p. 22). Schlesinger supported his perspectives by connecting the disuniting of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia with the ethnic diversity within these countries. Schlesinger called ethnic groups’ standing up for civil rights in the United States an “ethnic upsurge” (p. 49) and a threat to the Anglocentric culture. He stated,



The ethnic upsurge (it can hardly be called a revival because it was unprecedented) began as a gesture of protest against the Anglocentric culture. It became a cult, and today it threatens to become a counter-revolution against the original theory of America as “one people,” a common culture, a single nation. (Schlesinger, 1998, p. 49)

Schlesinger contradicted himself by making this statement as he claimed he believed America is a multiethnic nation from the beginning. If different ethnic groups have to forfeit who they are to become American, then America would be transformed into a mono-cultural country. Additionally, Schlesinger viewed ethnic diversity as a source of ethnic conflicts that would disunite America as they did in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. Schlesinger expressed extreme insecurities over diversity.

## Assimilation and Power Relations

The notion of assimilation can be clarified more if analyzed from the perspective of societal power relations. As two cultural groups come together, their cultural influences on each other largely depends on each group's position in societal power relations (Darder, 2012; Giroux, 1988). If both groups possess a similar or equal social status, the cultural influence between the two groups is more likely to be bidirectional (Darder, 2012). This means that acculturation is more likely to occur as each cultural group adapts to the beliefs and traditions of the other group without losing its own cultural integrity (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). On the other hand, if a power differential exists between the two cultural groups, the cultural influence typically moves from the more powerful group toward the less powerful one, rather than bidirectionally (Darder, 2012). For example, between dominant and subordinate groups, it is the subordinate groups that have to adapt to the dominant culture in order to fit into the mainstream. In that process of adaptation, if they are able to maintain their own family or ethnic group beliefs and traditions while integrating dominant values, beliefs, and patterns of beliefs, they acculturate themselves into the dominant culture without losing their ethnic culture. Yet, this is usually difficult to achieve. Rather, the subordinate groups' adaptation to the dominant culture is often accompanied by their gradual loss of their own cultural integrity (Darder, 2012). Assimilation is not an issue that bothers the dominant groups. Possessing the privileges of being a dominant group, individuals would not have to think about assimilating themselves into the dominant culture because they are the dominant culture, they are the norm (McIntosh, 2000; Tatum, 2003).

Assimilation implies the acceptance of one set of cultural values as the preferred standard (Gordon, 1964). In the process of conforming to the dominant culture, the subordinate groups also internalize the values of the dominant group. Superficially, it is to the subordinate groups' benefit to accept the cultural values of the dominant group to succeed in the dominant culture. Paulo Freire (2000), the Brazilian philosopher and educator, used the term the oppressor and the oppressed to describe the relationship between dominant and subordinate groups in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (2000) stated,

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. (Freire, 2000, pp. 46-47)

Using the term prescription, Freire referred to rules. The oppressor is the one who sets up rules for the community or the society to follow. By requiring the oppressed to abide by the rules, the oppressor imposes his or her will/world perspectives on the oppressed. This explains how

assimilation functions to the benefit of the oppressor. As the oppressed assimilate themselves to the dominant culture, the dominant culture will be consolidated. The status of the dominant group can thus be easily maintained as the oppressed internalize the dominant cultural values and think in the same way as the dominant group. Now, the question is: what is the connection between school and students' assimilation process into the dominant culture?

## The Role of Schooling

On the top of the assimilation prerequisite is language ability. Becoming English speaking characterizes an important aspect of many immigrant students' assimilation into American society. To them, being American is synonymous with becoming English speaking (Olsen, 2008). This is also reflected in American public policy and is especially noticeable in formal school policy and program design. Hence, one of the important educational tasks is becoming English speaking (Olsen, 2008; Thomas & Cao, 1999).

As the English language is used as the medium of instruction in schools, young immigrant students quickly switch to the English language once they start attending schools, even if the literacy of the ethnic language is developed. Jiang (1997) conducted a study about the biliteracy development of a Chinese boy, Ty who moved to America at the age of four. With the efforts of Ty's parents, Ty developed abilities of reading and writing in Chinese early in his childhood, before his formal school education. His English literacy started to boom after he entered elementary school. Ty demonstrated early biliteracy in Chinese and English. Yet, due to the lack of a meaningful language use context, Ty's ability to write his first language, Chinese, deteriorated rapidly by the end of his second-grade year. Ty's literacy in Chinese was largely constructed by his memorization and continuous practice. Other than in his home, there were few opportunities for him to use Chinese to communicate with others. Also, his schoolwork placed a heavy demand on his acquiring English. His biliteracy became fragile. Within two years of schooling, Ty had switched to English as his preferred language.

In Laurie Olsen's (2008) study about immigrant students in an American public school, she observed that in the process of Americanization, immigrant students have to learn English and give up their native language; learn the American way of eating, dressing, behaving, and dating and giving up ways of living in their native culture; and they must learn to identify themselves in the American racial spectrum and give up their national identity. In order to become American, immigrants have to forfeit who they really are and embrace the American dominant cultural standards. Under the pressure of assimilation, immigrant students in Olsen's study were worried about: "how American can I be and still be me" (ibid., p. 44). This suggests that Anglo-conformity ideology remains powerful in American society and overshadows the immigrants' life as they can sense the pressure for them to disassociate with their past. Olsen observed,

Learning English is a fundamental requirement for acceptance and participation in an English-taught curriculum and English-dominant social world. Teachers, immigrant students, and native U.S.-born students alike, all agree that to be American one must speak English. (Olsen, p. 91)

If immigrant students cannot speak English well, they tend to believe their inability to speak English prevents them from being real Americans (ibid.).

Beyond what is overtly expressed in the curriculum planning, students also learn in the schooling process their social roles (e.g., gender roles) and attitudes toward various aspects of life. This part of the curriculum, usually unrecognized by students, is categorized as the hidden curriculum. To define the hidden curriculum, McLaren (2015) stated,

The hidden curriculum deals with the tacit ways in which knowledge and behavior get constructed, outside the usual course materials and formally scheduled lessons. It is a part of the bureaucratic and managerial “press” of the school—the combined forces by which students are induced to comply with the dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behavior, and morality. (McLaren, 2015, p. 147)

Often unstated and covert, the hidden curriculum is revealed in what is assumed to be standard or important in the context of schooling. Through the hidden curriculum, the values of the dominant culture are transmitted to students of diverse backgrounds. In schools the hidden curriculum can be found when heroes are introduced and heroines are excluded; when female students are assumed to do less well in math and sciences; when students of color are placed in the lower track, regardless of their academic abilities (McLaren, 2015; Wink, 2010). The hidden curriculum reflects how sociocultural dynamics impact the schooling process even though most people are not consciously aware of it (McLaren, 2015). Consequently, in order to explore how schooling assimilates students into the dominant culture, it is necessary to move beyond the level of content-knowledge only. The sociocultural context of schooling serves as an even more powerful text (McLaren, 2015).

## Assimilation and Campus Safety

As stated earlier, when assimilation is emphasized, the psyche of the students of the subordinate group is left untended. In the long run, this may lead to their lack of a positive sense of self. An immediate effect of being different from the norm is verbal bullying from the peers. If students are continually harassed in school because of their clothes, their size or family income, school would cannot be a welcoming place where learning takes place (Harrison, 2005). Instead, going to school can become a nightmare. In some cases, the verbal harassment is intensified into violence. Either verbal harassment or physical violence turns a campus into an unsafe place.

The Yeh Yong-Zi event in Taiwan was an extreme example of campus violence. In the spring of 2000, a ninth-grade male student at a junior high school in Pingtung County was found lying unconscious in the school toilet, in a pool of blood. That was Yeh Yong-Zi, a student who demonstrated a great deal of feminine characteristics as a teenage boy: he spoke gently; he enjoyed cooking, singing, knitting and chatting with female classmates. These qualities turned him into a target of physical attack and bullying. He was constantly harassed by other male students, especially when he was using the school toilets. As a result, Yeh Yong-Zi was afraid of going to the school toilets by himself. He would only go there when no-one was there, either before a class dismissed or after a class started (Bih, 2006).

The tragedy happened one morning, five minutes before a music class dismissed. As usual, Yeh Yong-Zi asked for his teacher’s permission to leave as he needed to go to the toilet. He never returned. He was found lying unconscious in the school toilet during the class break. After being sent to hospital, he passed away the next morning.

Yeh’s death initiated a lot of discussions on gender equality. According to the court judgment, Yeh’s accident was caused by the slipperiness in the school toilet. Yet, what needs to be explored further is why this young boy would avoid school toilets. Discrimination and violence against Yeh’s femininity turned the campus into an insecure place where Yeh eventually lost his life.

The assimilation ideology aims at educating individuals to behave and to perceive the world similarly. Because of the assimilation ideology, being different is not valued. Rather, students are humiliated or degraded because they are different. In Yeh Yong-Zi’s case, the dominant culture was the mainstream masculine value (Bih, 2006). As Yeh did not fit into the traditional masculine image, he was teased and harassed in the school. Such a situation should be and could be avoided.



Promoting multicultural education is a possible answer to an unsafe campus caused by the assimilation ideology.

## Creating a Safe and Respectful Campus through Multicultural Education

Multicultural education can help create a safe and respectful campus mainly because of its nature. Banks (2010) stated, "Multicultural education is at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process" (p. 3). A central belief of multicultural education is that all students should have equal opportunities to learn in school, no matter what their ethnicity, social class, gender, and religion are. However, school, like a miniature society, also structures students into different social and cultural groups. As the assimilation ideology is imposed, the students who do not belong to the dominant groups have to learn to become someone they are not. In the United States, English is spoken as the main medium of instruction. In order to succeed academically, immigrant or ethnic students who focus on learning English are likely to lose their native tongues, which, after all, are not valued in school (Olsen, 2008; Thomas & Cao, 1999). In Taiwan, Mandarin is spoken as the official language. Those whose mother tongue is Mandarin begin to learn the language from Day 1 after birth while those who do not speak Mandarin at home finally learn the language when they attend school. Are some students in a more advantageous status than others? The answer is positive. Those who do not speak Mandarin at home are apparently less advantageous. They might struggle at the beginning of school life. In addition, these students' accents are more likely to be teased. Rather than trying to blame someone for the situation, it is probably more constructive to understand such situations and events as part of the societal power structure, so that it is important to educate students to respect different accents as a way to create a safer and more respectful learning environment.

Aiming at promoting social justice, multicultural education emphasizes tolerance of differences among people (Nieto & Bode, 2011). It is difficult to find two totally identical persons. Thus, being different should become more widely accepted and tolerated. When we view someone as being different, we actually judge from a set of standards in our mind. What are the standards? Who sets up the standards? Are the standards part of the norm and the dominant culture? If so, in whose interest are the standards set up?

As a baby boomer, James (2003) used to think Miss America was always white and black females' beauty was not as valuable. She constructed these conceptions based on the messages she received from the media. Yet, in the process of her identity development, she incorporated various frames of reference, including family stories from her father's side, mother's side, and her personal experiences interacting with society. By comparing and contrasting these different perspectives, James was able to detect the contradiction and get rid of the misconception embedded in each perspective. For example, James's family stories helped her recognize that the negative images toward blacks in the media were not true.

James's experience in identity development illustrates the importance of fostering multiple perspectives when examining any incident, which is a notion greatly promoted by multicultural education (Spring, 2000). By multiple perspectives, I refer to adopting different perspectives from various sources. If students understand the existence of multiple perspectives, they can see that it is okay to be different from the norm and their being different does not imply inferiority. This way, students would not hurt or humiliate someone simply because the person is different.

This world is diverse in nature. The ideology of assimilation penetrates the educational experiences of the subordinate groups (Olsen, 2008). Based on Freire's (2000) concept of oppressors vs. the oppressed, assimilation is in the interest of the oppressor, members of dominant groups. Because of assimilation, the oppressed, members of subordinate groups, easily stand out and become the

target of verbal bullying or physical violence. To change the situation, the mentality toward being different should be transformed. We should learn to respect human rights by accepting diversity in various aspects of life rather than judging an individual based on dominant cultural values. If multicultural education is promoted, both educators and students are more capable of thinking outside the box. They would become more tolerant towards various forms of diversity. This way, assimilation would not be the only way of life, and people could be who they are. With multicultural education, a safer and more respectful campus is created for learning to take place.

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## About the Author

**Dr. Hsuan-Jen Chen:** Associate Professor, Language Center, National Chiayi University (Taiwan).  
Email: [hjc@mail.ncyu.edu.tw](mailto:hjc@mail.ncyu.edu.tw)

