

## Examples of Current Issues in the Multicultural Classroom

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### Abstract

Classrooms are becoming increasingly multicultural, and this leads to new challenges for teachers. Traditionally, students coming into the multicultural classroom are at a deficit because they must learn how to navigate unfamiliar people, their cultures, and language. Thus, teachers have the added responsibility of leading students through this unfamiliar territory towards achievement. This requires specialized learning techniques, practice, and education in order to effectively accomplish. Teachers who unite classrooms with activities both inside and outside of the classroom stand a better chance at boosting student achievement and ameliorating the negative effects that have been observed in multicultural classrooms in the past.

**Keywords:** Issue in multicultural classroom, methods of teaching, Teaching and learning

### Introduction

There is an important relationship between culture and education since the culture of teachers and students affect education processes in the classroom. Thus, culture includes everything that makes one group or community within a society distinctive from another: language, values, literature, worldview, food, religion, clothing, holidays, beliefs, and behavior that construct a specific group's lifestyle (Perso, 2012). Multicultural education encompasses practices and theories that support equitable opportunities and academic achievement for all students (Barndt, 2007). Therefore, I agree with some studies that report some issues of teaching and learning in the multicultural classroom because there are several cultures in this classroom.

Culture, schooling, and education are in democratic multiculturalism approaches of teaching, learning, and education programs. For example, the population of the United States is composed of people of many cultural backgrounds with a diversity of traditions, values, and beliefs. Thus, there is the relationship between multiculturalism and education processes through teaching and learning methods and approaches (Witsel, 2003). This paper will focus on the scholarly literature to show what multiculturalism should become, i.e. a basic approach to any teaching and learning. Therefore, my goal for this paper is to explore some issues in the multicultural classroom that teachers and student may face; most specifically: low academic achievement, adjustment to a new cultural environment, and trust problems with self as well as the new culture. Figure 1 presents a visual overview of basic points of this study.

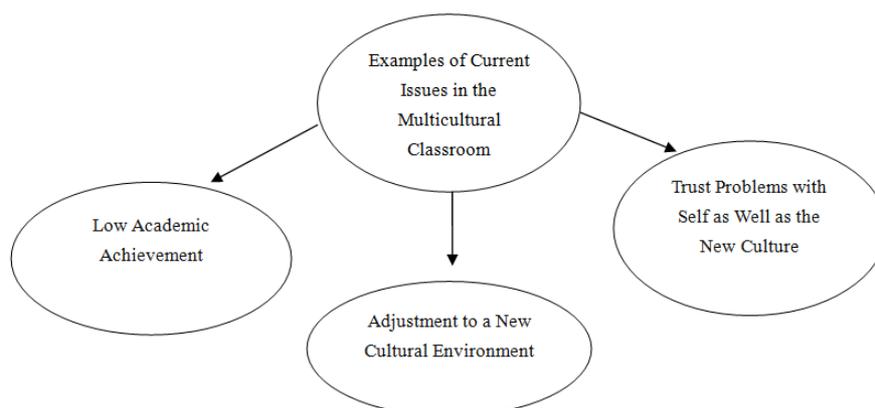


Figure 1. Example of current issues in the multicultural classroom.

### 2. Literature Review

There are several studies that explain the issues in the multicultural classroom.

#### **First of all, Low Academic Achievements are an obvious issue.**

Witsel (2003) noted that teaching and learning are not easy work, even if students and teachers are of the same societal, economic, and cultural background. Therefore, they may face some difficulties in the classroom when they deal with students and teachers who are from a different cultural background. This negatively affects the academic levels of students. Thus, teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities that

assist them in learning how to assess, train, teach, and be motivated to use multicultural teaching. This study also suggests that teachers should be trained to use several approaches in the multicultural classroom before they start teaching (Witsel, 2003).

Some studies reported that because the education system of students' cultures are different from the culture of their new classroom, the academic achievement of students may be low or bad. This study also gives an example of some cultures that use and prefer indirect relations over directness, open expression, or frankness. For instance, a Chinese student, who was in multicultural classroom in a Western educational system, asked the teacher if he/she could please not ask him any questions in class. He was afraid of criticism and giving wrong answers in class because the direct questioning approach in education was unfamiliar in his culture. The teacher faced difficulties to teach and deal with this Chinese student since he did not have an effective and positive role model in his the education and learning process of his home culture and classroom. As a result, we can anticipate that the student will have low results in his academic achievement (Thomas, 1995).

There are significant variations between cultures in communication or interpersonal contacts of students in the multicultural classroom because they have a different style of nonverbal communication. These differences negatively influence international students' academic achievement. If teachers and students in the multicultural classroom have different nonverbal styles of nonverbal communication, then they can not understand and express themselves directly and clearly to each other since they do not have the same; thus, the result is that students have low academic accomplishment (Bohm, Davis, Meares & Pearce, 2002).

Another study indicated that because students in the multicultural classroom are often learning content in a second language, and this will badly affect the students' achievement if they do not have language proficiency (Cooper, Helmes & Ho, 2004).

#### **Adjustment to A New Cultural Environment**

Some studies indicate that the new cultural character of the classroom is one of the issues for international student in western education. This research reported that East Asian students are reluctant to participate in activities or speaking in the multicultural classroom because they are learning in a new environment that is unfamiliar to them. As a result, teachers and students may have problems in communication, teaching, and learning because students do not adapt to the classroom's environment (Cooper, Helmes & Ho, 2004).

This same study shown that some activities in the multicultural classroom, such as group study, lectures, individual learning, or cooperative learning, which require interaction and communication, may not be familiar to all international students. Thus, a new, unfamiliar environment is an issue for some students that badly affects the students' achievement because this educational environment differs culturally (Cooper, Helmes & Ho, 2004).

#### **Problems with Self as Well as the New Culture**

Trust problems with self as well as the new culture are issues in the intercultural classroom. Another study found that an emotional relationship, especially confidence between teachers and their students in the intercultural classroom, is important in establishing trust between students and the teacher. This study also suggested that the teaching material and approaches of teachers should be modified to recognize the students' cultures and to gain students' trust. Therefore, students will feel respected and safe with their teachers and classmates (Multicultural education & curriculum, 2012).

### **3. Analysis**

This study is based on a review of current research. This research led me to deeper thoughts, leading me to investigate some of the problems in the multicultural classroom. I agree that the teacher training program is important to teach because it prepares student-teachers for working in the classroom—especially in multicultural classrooms. Also, teachers in multicultural classroom should be provided with the knowledge about several cultures of their students, their experiences, communication styles, and learning approaches that are harmonious for all students in the multicultural classroom.

Because I was a teacher of Arabic reading and writing for second grade girls in a school with several nationalities, such as Saudi Arabian, Iraqi, Syrian, and Egyptian, I personally experienced some issues in teaching in the multicultural classroom. Also, I am an international student in the multicultural classroom in the U.S.A that includes different cultures, such as American, Chinese, Japanese, and Saudi Arabian, so I found some issues with learning as well. As a result of these experiences, I agree that there are some problems in this type of classroom regarding the environment and trust, which influences the achievement of both teachers and students because the educational systems represented in the multicultural classroom are culturally different.

I agree that there are significant points or attributes of culture that are appropriate for teachers in the multicultural classroom. Learning more about different cultures and the experiences of their students by using action research and data collection tools is of strong importance for teachers to develop culturally relevant teaching and learning in the multicultural classroom. Moreover, believing all students in the multicultural classroom can achieve regardless of race and communication skills, as well as activities involving the sharing of

knowledge, experiences, and cultures between teacher and students in the classroom, are all things that can help student achievement.

I agree that the education system in different cultures impacts students' academic achievement in the multicultural classroom. For example, if the education system in the cultures of students is traditional, this matter negatively affects the benefits from the intercultural classroom's environment because some international students do not participate effectively in the classroom; they just receive the information. Thus, teachers should build interactional relationships between them and their students that help students express themselves and raise their academic achievement.

In my second grade classroom, I had some questions about how I could deal with my students and how the children might apply what I taught. How could I incorporate the children's knowledge and cultures into my lessons? Those were significant questions when I worked with students in the multicultural classroom. Therefore, I tried to enhance the children's lives by attempting to explore more active methods of implementing lessons that were agreeable to the students' cultures. Also, I diversified my approaches, such as simulation, role-playing, problem solving, and cooperative learning. I practiced these methods many times with students, so the students adjusted with the new classroom's environment and achieved.

I agree that the educational processes and aspects, such as instructional materials, methods of teaching, teacher attitudes, and the manner to assess the performance of students should be taken into account to create a multicultural classroom environment. Moreover, teachers have to modify their curricula and methods to be appropriate for all students in the multicultural classroom.

Finally, I believe that trust between teachers and their students in the multicultural classroom plays an important role in class motivation to learn in a challenging environment where differences of language and culture can be barriers to learning. Thus, students should work hard to perfect their language skills in order to help them to understand and communicate better and achieve in the multicultural classroom.

#### **4. Practical Implications**

There is a relationship between education and culture. Because culture is an important part of the education system, the education should reflect it, and it has to be an appropriate for students and their cultures. For example, when a teacher's directions in the classroom are in harmony with students' cultures, these instructions may enhance the students' achievement and confidence of students due to increased comfort.

In addition, methods of teaching and personality of teachers should play an obvious and important role in development in supporting the confidence and achievement in the multicultural classroom. Teachers in this type of classroom should make or create activities inside and outside classroom, such as group study and field trips. These types of activities require students to interact with people from different cultures and can thus raise direct cultural awareness between pupils.

Moreover, education in the multicultural classroom should focus on the value of multiculturalism and skills that contribute and encourage students to have trust amongst one another and their teachers. Education must quickly adapt to a new cultural and educational environment, and teachers should develop their academic skills. The students should understand the importance of multiculturalism so they are able to make smart decisions and practice in the future. Acclimation and awareness of multiculturalism in the environment are important because this practice and awareness introduces new thoughts and ideas to students.

When the curricula, approaches, activities, and policies are concordant between the teachers and students of several cultures, students will be comfortable and aware of the importance of the multicultural education in their lives because they practice them directly. In addition, since the teacher is a strong factor in the educational process, he/she should be an ideal character for his/her students. For example, sometime, the teachers teach a kind of culture in the multicultural classroom and encourage their students to respect, apply, or practice a part of their classmates' cultures. However, when these teachers do not follow it themselves, their students will not bother practicing the other students' cultures. Thus, the teachers should lead by example. For example, when a child practices any parts of his/her culture, like trueness or collaborating as a good value, the teachers should reward him/her to drive to continue practicing virtues. Over all, if teachers focus on multicultural teaching and learning, they will be more effective, and they will gain the trust of their students in the multicultural classroom, and will gain trust of students through encouraging intercultural integration within the classroom which helps bridge cultural differences among all students.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, teachers who learn more about their students' backgrounds, cultures, and experiences will feel more capable and efficient in their work as teachers. Teachers should work continuously to improve the lives of their students (Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Also, teachers can reduce issues in the multicultural classroom through improving their teaching approaches and learning. Flexibility is more important than knowledge in dealing with multicultural issues. Therefore, teachers should explore the issues in the multicultural classroom as

they arise and deal with these problems. Also, teachers should try to find, create, or design manners to raise and improve the academic achievement of students, and to build an effective or strong relationship with students.

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