

## Evolution of a Multicultural Education Course Offerings to Pre-Service Teachers

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This article examines the history of how Multicultural Education has evolved in U.S. universities from the Civil Rights Movement to the twenty first century. Multicultural education is a school reform that emerged during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s with the goal that “students from all social classes, genders, racial, language, and cultural groups would have an opportunity to learn” (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 4). Many university courses are informed by multicultural education theory; courses in culture, place-based education, and social justice education prepare undergraduate Liberal Studies’ students with the knowledge, perspectives, and skills to teach cross-culturally. Since Multicultural Education is the lynchpin for today’s Social Justice Programs, several theories are discussed and explored.

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This article examines the historical trends that influenced curriculum and instruction for multicultural education courses offered at California State Universities. The United States of America has been a country of immigrants since the 1400s, when Western Europeans under British rule were the first documented group to arrive. Subsequent immigrants from Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia had different experiences and unique challenges. The following paragraphs discuss some of those immigrant groups' experiences.

The indigenous people of the Americas were tribal people who were viewed as separate nations to be dealt with by federal treaties negotiated through the Secretary of War, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, created in 1824. As a consequence of these negotiations and treaties, Indian lands were confiscated, and native peoples were slaughtered, with the remaining relegated to isolated and barren reservations. While Native Americans were the original inhabitants of North America, their current estimated population is a mere 2 million people (2010 Census).

At the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Africans experienced “forced migration and slavery, extreme brutality and oppression” in the American colonies (Feagin & Feagin, 2008, p. 166-167). Legalized slavery continued until 1863. After a short period of African American progress, Jim Crows laws were passed which prohibited African Americans’ freedom of movement, land ownership, integration into society, civil and human rights, while White leaders executed outrageous racist and discriminatory acts throughout the country (Pullian & Van Putten, 1995, p. 79; Webb, Metha & Jordan, 2003; Gutek, 2005; & Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, Hall & Gollnick, 1999; and Schaefer, 2012). In 1876, racial segregation laws mandated

segregation in public places between people of color and White Americans. The decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson* was termed “separate but equal” and was imposed as constitutional (Pullian & Van Putten, 1995, p. 79; Webb, Metha & Jordan, 2003; Gutek, 2005; and Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, Hall & Gollnick, 1999; & Schaefer, 2012). Seventy-four years later, in 1954, the Supreme Court reversed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 with 5-4 vote in the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education at Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 in that “separate but equal” was unconstitutional” ending the legalization of segregation in education in the U.S. (Pullian & Van Putten, 1995, p. 79; Webb, Metha & Jordan, 2003; Gutek, 2005; and Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, Hall & Gollnick, 1999; & Schaefer, 2012). However, other segregation laws continued until the mid 1960s. The African American population was estimated at 13.7% or approximately 45 million people as of April 2025 (US Census, 2025 Census); another source about the US African American population was estimated at 48 million out of the total US population according to the Pew Research Center (2025); yet, de facto segregation continues to be a challenge; the unemployed rate for African Americans is the highest in the nation reported at 5.6% in 2024.

With regards to the US Latino population, they have been harshly discriminated against as White Americans moved west to secure their place in the new frontier. Mexicans ceded vast territory to the U.S. as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which ended the Mexican-American War. The Hispanic or Latino Americans are currently the most significant minority in the U.S., accounting for more than 65.2 million of the U.S. population, with 19.5% being Mexican Americans (July 2023 Census). Besides being stereotyped negatively, the Mexican American population continues to be exploited as subservient laborers who work in the agricultural fields where they remain in poverty two or three times that of White people or other non-Latinos (DeNavas-Walt et al, 2010) with roughly 2.5 million considered to be migrant and seasonal farmworkers (Mental Health Plan [MHP] Salud, 2024) and approximately 11 million Mexicans are undocumented people who live in fear of US immigration laws.

Asians immigrated to the US for financial reasons and other hardships. With the exception of the Japanese the early Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Asian Indian Sikhs, were restricted to male only immigration laws prohibiting the immigration of Asian women to the United States, e.g., the ratio between male-female: Chinese 26:1, Filipino 14:1, Korean 100:1, Asian Indian Sikhs 6,000:1, nor were they allowed to marry White women under the anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting the development of family life for Asian Americans (Fong, 2008). There was also a fear of the Yellow Peril, which was the notion that Asian people would weaken the purity of the White race. Currently, Asian Americans are stereotyped as the model minorities or ideal minorities despite their experiences with prejudice and discrimination (Schaefer, 2012, p. 315; Lee, 1996; Schaefer, 2012; Feng, 1994; Gordon, 1996; Thao, 2005; Thao, 2023). Vietnamese, Mong and Laotians immigrated to the US after 1975. Their political connection to the US is significant. These new immigrants benefitted from the civil rights movements of the past and yet like many immigrants, the Vietnamese, Mong and Laotians endured many hardships. As of the 2023 census, there were 25 million Asians representing 7% of the population and the fastest increasing minority groups in the U.S. since 2000 (Thao, 1999; Thao, 2023).

The women’s group is considered a gender minority. Women account for more than 51% of the U.S. population, or approximately 170.73 million people, or 50.50% of the US population (2025 Census). Women are born into their sexual identity (ascribed status) where they were

considered valuable “commodities” both for their skills and labor and as a sexual property. Until the 20th century, women were not permitted to own property, attend school, or vote. Today, women continue to be discriminated against in areas of education, employment, income, and sexual harassment (Parillo, 2006, pp. 474-506).

These minority groups either collectively or separately took action: protested, demonstrated, and took legal action to challenge discrimination practices. Social equity issues have improved for many minority Americans, yet far too many continue to struggle against systemic discrimination to achieve educational equality in the U.S. (Banks, 1989 & 2001; Davidman & Davidman, 1994; American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2025).

## **Purpose**

The demographics in many nation states worldwide, including the United States, have begun to shift toward the types of education that accommodate multicultural populations. The world has become more diverse and more visibly rich in terms of many cultures, races, ethnicities, and religious groups. Culturally relevant pedagogy, curricula, and instructions need to be inclusive of all groups to accommodate the change in demographics. All aspects of schooling should examine policies, teacher preparations and attitudes, instructional materials, assessment methods, and teaching styles to ensure that students are well represented and that the curricula are relevant and engaging.

## **Theoretical framework**

Banks (2001) envisioned that using models of multicultural education within curriculum development would integrate and engage all students, regardless of their gender, social class, ethnicity, racial, cultural characteristics, and abilities. Grant and Sleeter (2001) expressed that multicultural education should include a variety of programs and practices relating to educational equity for ethnic groups, language minorities, low-income groups, women, and people with disabilities. As a pioneer in the discipline, Banks (2001) examined schools as social systems from a cultural context and emphasized the following dimensions for guiding the implementation of multicultural education. Banks’ (2001) framework included content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, an empowering social culture, and social structure as a systemic school reform (pp. 20-24).

Banks (2001) outlined the four level of integration of ethnic and multicultural content into the curriculum, consisting of:

- Level 1: The Contribution Approach focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements;
- Level 2: The Additive Approach includes content, concepts, themes, and perspectives that are added to the curriculum without changing the structure of the curriculum.
- Level 3: The Transformation Approach, where the structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups; and
- Level 4: The Social Action Approach, where students make decisions on critical social issues and take actions to help solve them (p. 229)

## **Modes of Inquiry**

There is a preponderance of literature in multicultural education that is used in teaching courses at California State Universities. The materials addressed in this paper were textbooks, videos, original manuscripts from past pioneers, and current research in the discipline. Through numerous collaborations with university colleagues, personal interests, research, and manuscripts, the authors developed their own theoretical framework for multicultural education instruction. The authors teach future teachers and expect students to transgress prior knowledge and expand world views that value teaching for pluralistic societies. Knowledge about the history of the Multicultural Education theory helps educators frame the reform's relevance fifty years after its foundation. The authors teach history-based diversity and multicultural education courses for the Liberal Studies Department at CSUMB.

The authors believe that without historical knowledge of various minority groups, educators would not have the grounding to teach the intrinsic value of cultural differences. It is through knowledge of our collective histories that educators can address cross-cultural relationships. Through historical knowledge, educators can teach about the lives of exceptional people within various groups that children could aspire to be. It is through knowledge of the past that educators can skillfully assist in transforming the lives of present and future children. With knowledge of our collective histories, educators may avoid making decisions based in good intentions without cultural knowledge. The authors have taught diversity and multicultural courses for a combined 20 plus years.

Dr. Thao teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in linguistics and language development, language acquisition, comparative and international education, and immigrants and equity issues in education. The course introduces multicultural concepts of culturally diverse groups in the U.S. by examining equity issues and different perspectives among immigrant groups, including the historical struggles and how power determines social, economic, and political stratification associated with race, gender, sexual orientation, and abilities. It also examines five major Southeast Asian groups, which include the Cambodians, Laotians, Mong/Hmong, Iu Mien, and Vietnamese to fulfill the General Education Area E Ethnic Studies at California State University Monterey Bay. These newer immigrants migrated to the U.S. beginning in 1975. The course explores U.S. policies relating to social, economic, and political forces towards the Southeast Asian region.

Dr. Bynoe teaches a course on Cultural Diversity in which students examine equity issues related to the education of diverse students. Topics include the social construction of difference, power, privilege, and discrimination. Students critically analyze their positionality as it relates to their future profession. Dr. Bynoe's class, Social Foundations of Multicultural Education, examines issues, problems, and solutions to equitable schooling in a pluralistic society. Students view schools as social institutions that transform society's cultural and political dynamics. The course focuses on history, politics, and theories of education for culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Many universities students-both White and of color-when initially exposed to a pluralistic, antiracist curriculum in which centuries of falsehood and defamation are scrutinized and the whole

human experience is explored, regret and resent the banality of their kindergarten through grade twelve education (Sleeter & Bynoe, 2006, p. 167).

## Results

In today's society, teachers at every level need to be culturally competent because of demographic shifts in student populations. In the U.S., by 2020, four states, which include New Mexico, Hawaii, California, Texas, and the City of Washington, D.C., would have the "minority majority" population. By 2030, half of the elementary school children will be children of color (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 11).

In order to work with this exponentially increasing diverse student population at every level, Diller and Moule (2005) proposed two models for educating young citizens in the United States: 1. Cultural competence and 2. multicultural education.

1. *Cultural competence* is defined as "the ability to effectively teach cross-culturally" (p. 12). This model is based on the work of Cross (1988), who was the Executive Director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association in Portland, Oregon. Cross (1998) developed a model of cross-cultural service delivery for use in the field of social services and then adapted his model to the field of education (p. 13). The model consists of two components:
  - (i) A set of basic assumptions which include the "continual acquisition of knowledge, new and advanced skills, and ongoing reflective self-evaluation of progress (pp. 13-14) and
  - (ii) Development of individual cultural competence skills (pp. 15-17).

The authors conclude that Cross' model only proposes the basic history of oppressed people and their cultures. This model does not provide a deeper understanding or the experience necessary to apply the relevance of cultural differences to the development of a pluralistic worldview for students. The authors believe that educators need a historical and cultural understanding of their students to appreciate current struggles that they may face.

2. *Multicultural Education*. Banks et al (2001) offered a different approach that defined professional teacher standards consisting of the five principles of culturally competent teaching and educational delivery. The five principles include teachers, students, cross-cultural relations, school structure, equity, and evaluation. To extend the role of education internationally, Gutek (2006) presented the possibilities of using multicultural education as a means of reducing national and ethno-national tensions. Another goal of Gutek (2006) would be to change the perspective on national security development, development education, globalism, colonialism, nationalism, and ethno-nationalism.

Armed with a multicultural perspective, K-12 students would become literate and socially adept in cross-cultural interactions and possibly decrease and or eliminate discrimination, racism, and ethnocentrism. Many multicultural educators theorize that university students who are taught Multicultural Education courses would be the catalysts to improve race relations, decrease racial misunderstandings, and become stewards for a pluralistic society.

## **The California State University System**

California has two equivalent levels of public institutions of higher learning. One system is the University of California system and the other California State University system. Within the California State University system, there are 23 campuses located throughout the State of California with 45,000 faculty and staff educating 447,000 students statewide.

Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, minorities and women insisted on courses that related to their histories and experiences as a means to level the playing field (Banks, 1989). Affirmative Action was an executive order signed by President Kennedy that challenged discrimination in hiring and acceptance in higher education for people of color and women. The goal of the law was to redress past discriminatory acts. Other groups, such as gay, lesbian groups, the elderly, and people with disabilities, became more visible and also pushed for their voices to be heard. The downside of course offerings in specific ethnic and women's studies was that students were not encouraged to participate in cross-cultural interactions.

In the 1980s, James Banks examined schools as social systems from a multicultural context and developed a theoretical framework. Other scholars, such as Carl Grant and Christine Sleeter (2008), Christine E. Sleeter (1996), Geneva Gay (2010), and Sonia Nieto (2000) developed deeper frameworks for teaching anti-racist education and social Justice. Other scholars, such as Spring (2011), Giroux, Ovando, and McLaren (2000) took multicultural education to another level. They proposed an education oriented towards critical thinking, equal opportunity, and social justice, including power, privilege, and economics. Today, we find educators asserting the need for ethnic studies courses in high schools and community colleges. Ethnic studies courses were tried in Tucson, Arizona, in 2011, and the results were astonishing. Students became engaged in their overall learning experience; fewer dropouts occurred; and their grades improved quickly.

In the 1990s, while these pioneers in multicultural education developed their theoretical framework, few universities offered terminal degrees in multicultural education. Having a terminal degree in multicultural education was such a phenomenon that educators worldwide attended these distinctive programs.

California State University campuses continued offering traditional courses in ethnic and women's studies, but with the opening of California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) as the 22<sup>nd</sup> campus of the California State University system in 1995, significant curriculum changes occurred. CSUMB's founding faculty members, Christine Sleeter, Victoria Jew, Maria de la Luz Reyes, and others developed the Vision Statement for CSUMB with the goal of teaching multicultural education for the first time. Many of the curricula proposals were non-traditional, from the course naming to the curriculum development. For example, all course offerings needed to develop along the lines of the Outcomes-based Education (OBE) model.

## **Discussion**

Despite some of the treatment and negative experiences from several immigrant groups, the United States is still a country of immigrants. There is still room for newer immigrants to

seek asylum and social mobility. The United States is still the land of opportunities; only the sky is the limit. Continuing national discourse and debate among educators and citizens may transform American society into a just society. America will continue to grow as the beacon of democracy and present hope to the world.

Today, all CSU campuses offer multicultural education courses as part of the Liberal Studies and Teacher Education Credentialing programs. California State Universities continue to offer ethnic and women's studies in various departments, albeit they recently came under scrutiny. The authors foresee that offering courses in multicultural education to undergraduate students is the first tool in creating a culturally competent population. The vast numbers of students throughout California are expressing cultural knowledge, with access and equity, and in social justice in their classes and their service learning efforts as they acquire hands-on experiences in teaching K-6 children of various cultures and ethnicities. The value of multicultural education is not just relegated to the population within the same country. Through globalization, the need to be open-minded, respectful, and knowledgeable about accepting other cultures is essential to all countries of the world. The authors believe that prejudice, discrimination, and racism can be eliminated and or reduced by creating a more culturally competent citizenship. The authors believe that if the US is serious about improving the conditions of all people, it must start by educating children to be culturally competent beings.

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