Because "Multicultural Education" has come to have many different meanings and conceptualizations as it evolves, I feel it is important to provide insight into a number of different definitions, goals, assumptions and principles of multicultural education as described by various people in the field. The following is a collection of these conceptualizations, cited and referenced here.

Defining Multicultural Education
by Paul Gorski and Bob Covert (1996; 2000)

Since its earliest conceptualizations in the 1960s, multicultural education has been transformed, refocused, reconceptualized, and in a constant state of evolution both in theory and in practice. It is rare that any two classroom teachers or education scholars will have the same definition for multicultural education. As with any dialogue on education, individuals tend to mold concepts to fit their particular focus.

Some discuss multicultural education as a shift in curriculum, perhaps as simple as adding new and diverse materials and perspectives to be more inclusive of traditionally underrepresented groups. Others talk about classroom climate issues or teaching styles that serve certain groups while presenting barriers for others. Still others focus on institutional and systemic issues such as tracking, standardized testing, or funding discrepancies. Some go farther still, insisting on education change as part of a larger societal transformation in which we more closely explore and criticize the oppressive foundations of society and how education serves to maintain the status quo — foundations such as white supremacy, capitalism, global socioeconomic situations, and exploitation.

Disclaimer: The research materials are collated from web based resources.
Despite a multitude of differing conceptualizations of multicultural education (some of which will be laid out more fully below), several shared ideals provide a basis for its understanding. While some focus on individual students or teachers, and others are much more "macro" in scope, these ideals are all, at their roots, about transformation:

✔ Every student must have an equal opportunity to achieve to her or his full potential.
✔ Every student must be prepared to competently participate in an increasingly intercultural society.
✔ Teachers must be prepared to effectively facilitate learning for every individual student, no matter how culturally similar or different from her- or himself.
✔ Schools must be active participants in ending oppression of all types, first by ending oppression within their own walls, then by producing socially and critically active and aware students.
✔ Education must become more fully student-centered and inclusive of the voices and experiences of the students.
✔ Educators, activists, and others must take a more active role in reexamining all educational practices and how they affect the learning of all students: testing methods, teaching approaches, evaluation and assessment, school psychology and counseling, educational materials and textbooks, etc.

While it is important to develop a deeper understanding of the various models of multicultural education and where these points fit into them, I feel it is equally important that I, as the site author, equip the user with my own working definition.

A Working Definition of Multicultural Education
by Paul Gorski (2000)

Multicultural education is a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education. It is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally. Multicultural education acknowledges that schools are essential to laying the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of oppression and injustice.

The underlying goal of multicultural education is to affect social change. The pathway toward this goal incorporates three strands of transformation:

1. the transformation of self;
2. the transformation of schools and schooling; and
3. the transformation of society.

For deeper considerations of these strands, visit the Multicultural Supersite.

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Assumptions

Following Banks' (Banks, 1988, p.43) notion of multiple identities...

Every child comes to school with an ethnic identity whether these identifications are conscious or unconscious. This identification must be recognized and respected by the teacher. It must be the basis for the learning activities in the classroom. The point here is to acknowledge differences rather than ignore them. It is equally critical that the children recognize and appreciate their own ethnicity and learn to appreciate those of the other children in the class. This recognition of individual ethnic identities is the beginning point, it is a connector of both the teacher to the student and the students to each other. It is the basic building block in the learning process which requires knowing where the child is relative to him/herself and the content to be addressed. This ethnic identification is a continual point of focus throughout the education process and is the basis for developing the next level of identification which is a national identification.

The national identity of the individual requires his/her understanding and commitment to the democratic ideals such as human dignity, justice and equality. Here the focus is on becoming effective members of a democratic society. An individual's strong national identification is essential to his/her development of a global identity.

As our society becomes more and more dependent on other societies, it is critical that the schools address the problems of the world as a whole. The development of the global identification provides the students with the opportunity to see how as a nation we fit into the world society. It allows students to better understand that the actions of a nation must not only be viewed in terms of the implications for that nation but what are the effects on the whole world. Children who have developed both a strong ethnic and national identity should have the perspective to also develop a global identification which should in turn make them better citizens of the world community.

At this point in time it is important to realize that the identifications discussed above are hierarchial. In other words the curriculum and the learning needs to proceed by first recognizing the ethnic identity, then the national and finally the global. The development of the latter are dependent upon the development of the former. It is also important that the individual identities are not static but continually evolving and so it is important for the curriculum to emphasize all three types of identities as learning progresses.

The metaphor of the melting pot is no longer functional. We have to switch to either the toss salad or the stew. It allows us to focus both on the differences in the ingredients while at the same time the beauty of the whole. a good salad does not have a bunch of components that look, taste or have the same texture. The success of the salad depends not only on its looks but also on a lot of other factors including the taste, the freshness of the ingredients, the smells, the textures and the mixture itself.

Assumptions


Disclaimer: The research materials are collated from web based resources.
1. It is increasingly important for political, social, educational and economic reasons to recognize the US is a culturally diverse society.

2. Multicultural education is for all students.

3. Multicultural education is synonymous with effective teaching.

4. Teaching is a cross cultural encounter.

5. The educational system has not served all students equally well.

6. Multicultural education is (should) be synonymous with educational innovation and reform.

7. Next to parents (primary caregivers) teachers are the single most important factor in the lives of children.

8. Classroom interaction between teachers and students constitutes the major part of the educational process for most students.

Goals

1. To have every student achieve to his or her potential.

2. To learn how to learn and to think critically.

3. To encourage students to take an active role in their own education by bringing their stories and experiences into the learning scope.

4. To address diverse learning styles.

5. To appreciate the contributions of different groups who have contributed to our knowledge base.

6. To develop positive attitudes about groups of people who are different from ourselves.

7. To become good citizens of the school, the community, the country and the world community.

8. To learn how to evaluate knowledge from different perspectives.

9. To develop an ethnic, national and global identity.

10. To provide decision making skills and critical analysis skills so the students can make better choices in their everyday lives.

Principles

from Gordon and Roberts, Report of social studies syllabus review and development committee, 1991

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1. The selection of subject matter content should be culturally inclusive, based on up-to-date scholarship. This inclusivity should incorporate opposing opinions and divergent interpretations.

2. The subject matter content selected for inclusion should represent diversity and unity within and across groups.

3. The subject matter selected for inclusion should be set within the context of its time and place.

4. The subject matter selected for inclusion should give priority to depth over breadth.

5. Multicultural perspectives should infuse the entire curriculum, pre K-12.

6. The subject matter content should be treated as socially constructed and therefore tentative -- as is all knowledge.

7. The teaching of all subjects should draw and build on the experience and knowledge that the students bring to the classroom.

8. Pedagogy should incorporate a range of interactive modes of teaching and learning in order to foster understanding (rather than rote learning), examination of controversy, and mutual learning.

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