

# Teaching and learning in multi-cultural settings\*

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The United States is confronted today with a dramatic increase in the number of school age children from various culturally diverse groups. Recent trends suggest that by the year 2000, our educational system will be serving children who will be poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, and who will have more learning handicaps. (Hodgekinson, 1985). By the year 2000, one out of three US students will be a member of an ethnic minority group (Banks and Banks, 1989). Morrison (1990) wrote that 'racial and ethnic diversification will expand the number of cities in which no racial or ethnic group constitutes the majority' (p.11). As a result, an increasing proportion of the population will live in metropolitan areas where pluralities replace majorities.

Many factors have contributed to these changing demographic. For example, the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 resulted in an influx of immigrants to the United States, a trend which is reflected in a rapid rise in the percentage of ethnic, cultural, language, and religious minorities in the nation's schools. There is an increased awareness of cultural diversity within our schools. Educators are giving increased attention to serving all the people who move through the educational system. To do so requires development of effective programs for the maximum educational gains of all students.

In recent years, family issues, employment options, racial and ethnic diversification, and human resource imbalances have attracted wide public attention. These concerns will play a key role as decision makers in both the public and private sectors grapple with the problems of providing appropriate educational opportunities to prepare all Americans for the technological future.

Many changes will take place in our educational system. Most teachers have students from various ethnic, cultural, religious, language, and social-class groups in their classes. The pervasive influence of a child's culture affects all aspects of their learning. Thus, teachers must be mindful of the issue of cultural diversity among the students they serve.

## ☐ Multiple group membership

We live in pluralistic society. Within the larger society, each individual is a member of a number of groups. At the very least, each person has gender, is a member of a social class, and shares an ethnic heritage with family members and others.

Individuals also have common bonds with others who hold similar values. Such groups may be informal 'gangs' or formal religious groups or political parties.

Groups pursue their individual goals within the framework of the larger society. At times, each group operates relatively independently. Usually, however, groups operate in some interactive way. The actions of each group are influenced directly and indirectly by other groups. As groups pursue their goals in interactions, their mutual influences may be either positive or negative. The complexity of the interaction among groups in a culture is illustrated in Figure 1.



## □ Multicultural education

Multicultural education affects us all as we strive to gain understanding of ourselves, develop feelings of self-esteem, and understand and appreciate the other people who make up our classrooms, states, countries, and the world (Baptiste, 1979). Multicultural education is education which values cultural pluralism and recognises cultural diversity as a fact of life in America. It reaches beyond awareness and understanding of cultural differences, but recognises the right of these cultures to exist (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1973).

Many conceptualisations of multicultural education guide efforts to promote cultural diversity in education:

Multicultural education is a broad, encompassing term. It affects instruction of all students and implies changes in instructional methodology and program development in all subjects. Multicultural education deals with morality, attitudes and values — the underlying philosophy of teaching that guides the behaviour of each individual teacher. It is spelled out in goals and objectives that deal with factual information, controversy inherent in stereotypes and prejudice, and a basic need for self esteem. (Tiedt and Tiedt, 1986, p.2)

Multicultural education is interdisciplinary and cannot be taught in isolation from other instruction. It is a process that must be modelled by teachers and students as we move towards short-term and long-term goals.

Multicultural education helps all students develop their potential for academic, social and vocational success (Gollnick and Chinn, 1986). In addition, a strong multicultural program builds on the best learning theory and educational methodology.

## □ Indicators of attitudes toward other groups

Teacher behaviour in the classroom is a key factor in helping all students reach their potential. To implement multicultural education in the classroom, reform must occur with the interaction between teachers and students, the curriculum and attitudes toward the culturally different (Banks and Banks, 1989). Although the concept of attitude is rather broad, it may be divided into three components: affect, cognition and behaviour (Zimbardo and Ebbesen, 1970). The behavioural components of attitudes consist of a predisposition toward a particular action in regard to a subject. It is then reasonable to expect that multicultural materials will be ineffective in the hands of teachers who have negative attitudes toward different cultural groups. Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1986) and Brophy and Good (1970) indicate that in addition to teachers' attitudes affecting their own behaviour

toward particular cultural groups, these attitudes regarding culture actually influence the students' performance.

Awareness of cultural diversity is the first step in the multicultural reform process.

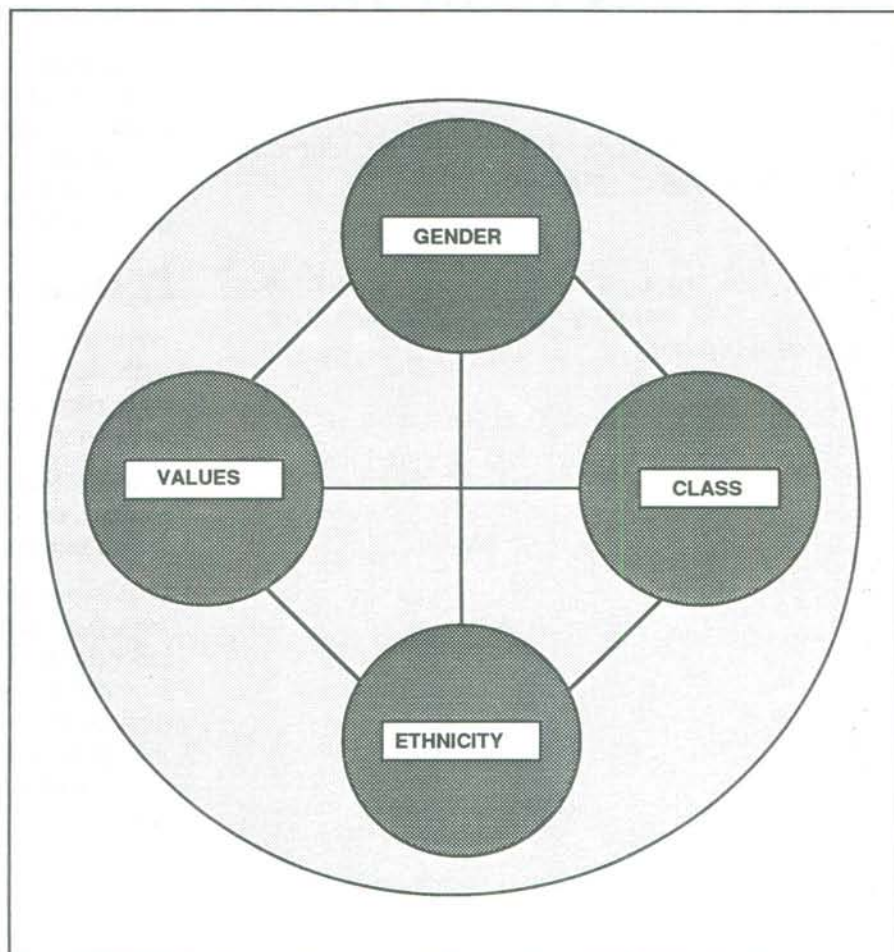
Cultural sensitivity may be assessed by answering such questions as these from Henry (1986) and Gay (1981): Do you invite persons from various cultures to speak to your classes? Like to greet people in the language of their choice? Enjoy participating in activities of ethnically diverse organisations? Celebrate holidays which originated in a religious or ethnic group other than your own? Enjoy being with students, teachers and parents from other ethnic groups outside the school day? Enjoy foods which are typical of many ethnic groups?

Or do you prefer to be with people whose values are similar to yours? Prefer to work with students whose cultures are similar to yours? Avoid contact with other cultures.

## □ The role of technology education

Technology educators are in a unique position to provide meaningful learning experiences to students from diverse groups. 'Change' and 'challenges' are familiar tunes which have echoed within this profession for more than three quarters of a century. Technology education has expanded the educational options for many students who traditionally had not been served (ie. as females, gifted, disadvantaged and handicapped).

Figure 1 Multiple Group Memberships





Technology education teachers need an unusual degree of knowledge, insight, and understanding to work effectively with students from diverse groups. In the technology education setting, students from diverse backgrounds have an opportunity to interact with the subject matter and with the learning activities in ways which are readily influenced by their cultural backgrounds. The selection of problems, topics, and activities are related to student interest; these, in turn, grow out of the cultures in which they live. As technology educators serve students in the laboratory setting, there is a unique opportunity for the interaction of the cultures represented in the community served by the school.

### □ Strategies

We can no longer afford to teach all students the same knowledge and skills in the same way. Teachers must make an effort to know all of their students and to build on their strengths and help them overcome their weaknesses. However, teachers must be sure that they are not treating students differently based solely on the students' membership in certain microcultures. Teachers and others involved in providing services to students must be aware of, and prepared to, identify and influence educational strategies and techniques to meet the needs of all students (Jones, 1976). Gollnick and Chinn (1986) suggested that educators need to be concerned with two strategies for making curriculum and instruction multicultural: teaching from a multicultural perspective and teaching a culturally diverse student population. Multicultural education attempts to respond to these needs.

### □ Icebreakers

How diverse are the students in your classes in terms of their life-styles, habits, and values? One obvious way to assess the diversity within a group is to ask questions — and to listen carefully to the response! Generally, it is best to ask such penetrating questions of individual students in informal situations. What kinds of transportation did you use to get to school today? Who are your heroes? Who do you talk to when you need to talk to someone? What was the last thing you read, other than school assignments? What kinds of music do you enjoy? What states have you visited? What other cities have you lived in? What other schools have you attended?

Most communities have a richness of cultural backgrounds which may be used to enliven classroom instruction. In order to exploit cultural diversity and use it to enrich the technology education program, teachers need to expand their repertoire of methodologies beyond the usual approaches. This article presents a number of ideas which may assist teachers as they seek to capitalise on the divergence represented among their students.

There are many new approaches and concepts which may enhance technology education for all students in culturally diverse classrooms. The remainder of this article will focus on some of those concepts and strategies which we feel will make a difference in our educational system in the year 2000.

### □ Specific strategies

1. Use community resources — workshops, classes, seminars, library/university mini-courses. Communicate directly in one-on-one conversations with people of cultures different from your own. Investigate in order to gather factual information about different cultures.
2. Base your knowledge of different cultures on information from several sources; this will prevent stereotyping. Initiate conversations with people from other cultures. Invite them to talk with your students.
3. Seek to understand the educational views of members of each culture and family represented in your classes.
4. Improve two-way communication by using every opportunity to talk with parents. Invite parents of prospective students to visit the program before their children enrol.
5. Find community support to help you in your efforts. To foster parent involvement — talk with parents about school volunteering. Team up with community professionals and agencies that can become resources and invite them to schools.
6. Be accepting of family structures that are different from your own. Use illustrations of a variety of families (eg. single parent, extended families and nuclear families) in your instruction and in classroom displays.
7. Use a family's preferred or native language to state simple and frequently used phrases such as 'good morning,' 'please,' 'thank you,' and 'yes or 'no.'
8. During discussion, use examples that involve aspects of other cultures. For example, include Fiesta, Hanukkah and Mardi Gras when discussing celebrations.
9. Use positive examples when correcting oral language. Use phrases such as 'Let's say...' or 'say it this way ...' instead of 'we don't talk like that!'
10. Avoid imitating the speech patterns of culturally diverse children. Such as response may be viewed as mockery.
11. Ask the child or parents what term they prefer for you to use when referring to their ethnic group.
12. Minimise the use of evaluative comments such as 'very good,' 'that's not right,' 'you can do better.' Encourage self-evaluation — 'How do you like your work?'
13. Modify displays, materials and activities to include a variety of cultures as a part of the regular instructional program.
14. Check illustrations for stereotypes and tokenism (lack of balanced representation of ethnic groups). Be especially alert to problems in older publications.



15. Present different ethnic groups in professional roles without regard to gender (eg. pictures of Indian female doctors or Spanish male nurses).
16. Organise concepts around experiences and perspectives of several different American groups.
17. Teach social action and empowerment skills.
18. Involve students actively in democratic decision-making.
19. Adapt to students' skill levels.
20. Use co-operative learning.
21. Decorate the classroom to reflect social action themes, cultural diversity and student interest.
22. Avoid testing and grouping procedures that designate some students as failures.
23. Use library materials that portray diverse groups in diverse roles.
24. Make sure that extracurricular activities include all student groups and do not reinforce stereotypes.
25. Use discipline procedures that are equitable for all groups without penalising any one group.
26. Provide for co-operative learning by fostering peer tutoring.

## □ Summary

Teachers of technology education have unique opportunities to serve students of diverse cultures in their classes. Teachers provide a positive influence by demonstrating sensitivity to the needs and interests of their students. Thoughtful analysis, careful planning, and sincere dedication to the preservation of cultural diversity strengthen the educational experience for all involved.

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