

***The Contribution of Multicultural and International Education to the Creation of Sustainable Learning Environments Which Support the South African Struggle***

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**Abstract**

This paper conceptualises how an expanded notion of multicultural education could support the achievement of a socially just, diverse and cohesive South African society. Rising ethnic tensions and renewed manifestations of xenophobia are a constant reminder that South Africa has to intensify its efforts to achieve a society which is united in its diversity. In the context of basic education, laudable efforts have been made to overcome challenges posed by cultural diversity in the classroom through multicultural education. In higher education, both in South Africa and globally, the notion of internationalisation of higher education has recognised the contribution of cultural and national diversity to the achievement of educational and specifically, intercultural outcomes. This paper demonstrates that elements of internationalisation may be infused in basic education to achieve multicultural and intercultural learning outcomes in the classroom. It, first, unpacks the principles of social justice, multicultural education and internationalisation. Thereafter, it develops a theoretical framework which allows for an expansion of the notion of multicultural education, which will be reconceptualised to encompass the deliberate creation of diversity in the classroom. Suitable teaching interventions which capitalise on diversity to create sustainable learning environments will be proposed, and opportunities for further research will be demonstrated.

Keywords: internationalisation, multicultural education, diversity, social justice, mobility

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## **Introduction**

Basic education bears a responsibility to prevent social tension in our society and to prepare learners for a brighter future. It is critical for the researchers to write a paper that speaks about multicultural education and internationalisation of education at a time where many would argue that the South African basic education system is in acute crisis. The researchers are convinced that the conceptualisation of novel ways to achieve multicultural and intercultural learning outcomes is of the utmost importance. The expanded notion of multicultural education proposed in this paper will provide a theoretical basis for the development of multicultural and intercultural competencies in learners. We will demonstrate that this can contribute to the advancement of social mobility, and the creation of a coherent and socially just society.

There are three elements to the paper. First, we shall unpack the meaning of and the essential components of social justice, multicultural education and internationalisation. Second, we shall develop a theoretical framework which allows for an expansion of the notion of multicultural education, which will be re-conceptualised to encompass the deliberate creation of diversity in the classroom. Third, we shall briefly consider teaching interventions which would utilise the proposed theoretical approach and lend themselves specifically to realisation of multicultural outcomes in a basic education context. We will conclude by demonstrating the necessity for and further opportunities of further topical research

## **Basic Concepts**

### ***Social justice in the context of South African basic education***

Social justice takes a central place amongst the ideals for which the South African society strives. The preamble of the Constitution explains that one of its aims is to 'heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights'. Yacoob (2012) remarks in the South African Constitutional Court's landmark *Grootboom* judgement that 'the people of South Africa are committed to the attainment of social justice and the improvement of the quality of life for everyone.'

Social cohesion and social justice have been scrutinised in a recent study by the South African Department of Arts and Culture which was commissioned by the social cluster of cabinet (The Presidency 2014). It observes that 'as a normative term, *social justice* refers to the extension of principles, enshrined in our Constitution, of human dignity, equity, and freedom to participate in all of the political, socio-economic and cultural spheres of society (The Presidency, 2014). The report reiterates the need to even out inequities in the education system and illustrates the inequalities inherent to the South African education sector. Inequalities in the quality and provision of education do not only exist in South Africa, but permeate the education sector, globally (United Nations 2006). The authors are convinced that the inequalities between privileged and underprivileged schools in South Africa constitute a threat to social justice and social cohesion and that the alleviation of this regrettable situation should enjoy the highest priority.

Rather than being a manifestation of social injustices, the education system should support the realisation of social justice. Consequently, the authors consider it

necessary not only to structure interventions which assist in attaining a higher degree of social justice within the basic education system, but also those which transform basic education to become a sword in the fight for realisation of social justice in the country. Should the South African basic education sector fail in this important task, it would fail to make its contribution to the South African peoples' endeavour for social justice.

### ***The Meaning of Multicultural Education***

Numerous definitions of multicultural education have been proposed or espoused by scholars, researchers and organisations over the years. Authors and researchers of multicultural education define it differently. The following paragraphs summarise the understanding of multicultural education according to different authors and researchers.

Grant (1977) defines multicultural education as a humanistic concept based on the strength of diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative lifestyles for all people. He went further to indicate that multicultural education is necessary for quality education for three reasons:

- All efforts to make full range of cultures available to students;
- It views a culturally pluralistic society as appositive force; and
- It welcomes differences as vehicles of better understanding of global society.

Parekh (1986) defines multicultural education as free from inherited biases, with freedom to explore other perspectives and cultures. There is belief that the goal of making children sensitive to plurality of ways of life motivated multicultural education. Multicultural education represents different modes of analysing experiences and ideas and different ways of looking at world history.

Hoopes, Hoopes and Pusch (1979) define multicultural education as a structured process designed to foster understanding, acceptance, and constructive relations among people of many different cultures. Ideally, multicultural education encourages people to see different cultures as a source of learning and to respect diversity in the local, national and international environments. It stresses cultural, ethnic and racial, in addition to linguistic differences. It is often broadened to include socio-economic differences. Multicultural education refers *first* to building an awareness of one's own cultural heritage, and understanding that no one culture is intrinsically superior to another; *secondly*, to acquiring those skills in analysis and communication that help one function effectively in multicultural environments. Multicultural education is also an effort to demonstrate the significance of similarities and differences among groups and individuals within groups.

Pai (1991) defines multicultural education as a life skill and a means by which each individual could learn to live in a progressively effective way by increasing students' repertoire and reconciling divergent patterns so that new and unique approaches to life might emerge. Multicultural education is pragmatic because it teaches students to act in an increasingly diverse society by educating them about other sub-structures and promoting cross-cultural competencies.

Nieto (1992) defines multicultural education as a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. Multicultural education challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society. Multicultural education accepts and affirms the pluralism which students, their communities and teachers represent. Multiculturalism furthers the democratic principles of social justice. In addition, Nieto catalogues seven basic characteristics that further define multicultural education: Anti-racist; basic; critical pedagogy; pervasive; education for social justice; process; and important for all students. When all these characteristics are applied, multicultural education represents a way of re-thinking school reform because it responds to many of the problematic factors leading to school under-achievement and failure.

Nobles (1993) defines multicultural education as an inter-disciplinary education process, and it is not a single programme, whereas Banks (1993) believes that multicultural education is a type of education that is concerned with various groups that were victims of discrimination because of their unique cultural characteristics in American society. These characteristics could be ethnic, racial, linguistic, or gender-based. According to Banks, multicultural education includes studying such key concepts as prejudice, identity, conflicts, and alienation, as well as modifying school practices and policies to reflect an appreciation of ethnic diversity in the US. Banks further states that multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions. The process incorporated the idea that all students, regardless of their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. Multicultural education is an on-going process that requires long-term investment of time and efforts as well as carefully planned and monitored actions.

Morey and Kitano (1997) define multicultural education in their own way. They say multicultural education is not anti-majority nor is it embedded solely in only one philosophical tradition. It is an effort to improve education for all students by providing a more inclusive and comprehensive view of reality.

Tiedt and Iris (1999) define multicultural education as an inclusive teaching/learning process that engages all students in developing a strong sense of self-esteem, discovering empathy of persons of diverse cultural backgrounds, and experiencing equitable opportunities to achieve their fullest potential.

Multicultural education is a democratic pluralism that should be used for creating administrative, instructional and curricular models, and it must recognize the existence of discrepancies between idealized and realized democratic values and should educate students towards a goal of social justice.

Bennet (1999) defines multicultural education in four dimensions:

- Centred on the movement toward achieving equality of educational opportunity and equity among all identifiable groups of children and youth, paying special attention to ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged;

- The development of knowledge and understanding about cultural differences and the history and contributions of contemporary and historical ethnic groups and nations;
- The process that allows one to develop competencies in multiple ways of perceiving, evaluating, believing and, and doing; and
- The commitment to fight racism, sexism, prejudice, and discrimination. This dimension includes the development of appropriate understanding, attitudes, and social action skills.

Bennet (1999) also defines multicultural education as an approach to teaching and learning based upon democratic values that foster cultural pluralism and added that in its most comprehensive form, multicultural education is a commitment to achieving educational equality, developing curricula that build understanding about ethnic group, and combating oppressive practices.

Gay (2001) found that many multiculturalists agree with Banks, and they argue that multicultural education is a concept, a framework, a way of thinking, a philosophical viewpoint, a value-orientation, and a set of criteria for making decisions that better serve the educational needs of culturally diverse student populations.

The National Association for Multicultural Education (2003) defines multicultural education as a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, constitutions of South Africa and the United States, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. It affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice.

Multicultural education is a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies and organization as a means to ensure the highest levels of academic achievement for all students. It helps students develop a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups. It prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups. Thus, school curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, albinism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenophobia (The National Association for Multicultural Education 2003).

Multicultural education advocates the belief that students and their life histories and experiences should be placed at the centre of the teaching and learning process and that pedagogy should occur in a context that is familiar to students and should address multiple ways of thinking. In addition, teachers and students must critically analyse oppression and power relations in their communities, societies and the world.

To accomplish these goals, multicultural education demands a school staff that is culturally competent and to the greatest extent possible, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Staff must be multi-culturally literate and capable of including and embracing families and communities to create an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences, and democracy. Multi-cultural education requires comprehensive school reform as multicultural education must pervade all aspects of the school community and organization (The National Association for Multicultural Education 2003).

The National Association for Multicultural Education (2003) states that equality and equity are not the same thing, multicultural education attempts to offer all students an equitable educational opportunity, while at the same time, encouraging students to critique society in the interest of social justice.

Gause (2011) defines multicultural education as an educational framework addressing cultural diversity and equity in schools by incorporating different cultural group membership emphasizing the interactions of race/ethnicity, gender, social class, and ability in students' lives.

In our understanding, multicultural education is the way in which tolerance and appreciation of diversity, as a positive force, is imparted to learners who hail from different backgrounds.

### ***Internationalisation***

In the higher education context, internationalisation is commonly understood in terms of the definition developed by Jane Knight as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight 2012). Albeit the context of basic education is fundamentally different, this definition has been frequently quoted in the academic discourse relating to internationalisation in schools (Yemini 2013). While the relevant processes of integrating international, intercultural and global elements may differ in basic education in that, for example, the opportunities for mobility are far more limited, the fundamental insight of the definition is equally valid in this context. Internationalisation encompasses not only international, but also intercultural skills development. It is an on-going process which bears an evolutionary character. While this generally accepted definition is suitable to encompass the entire realm of education, one should consider omitting the reference to 'post-secondary education'. In an increasingly globalised world, the process of internationalisation should not be limited the last segment of education, which is not even reached by all participants in the education system. International and intercultural skills are essential assets for any rounded individual wanting to succeed in the modern world, and internationalisation has a rightful place not only in higher, but also in basic education. In the context of South African basic education, it will be important to focus on the intercultural component and to structure interventions which are suitable to develop the competencies which will support the individuals' integration in an extremely diverse and culturally heterogeneous society.

### ***Goals of Multicultural Education***

Multicultural education has its own goals as stated by many authors and researchers. Lynch (1986) opines that the task of multicultural education in a democratic society is

to assist the individual by means of emancipating curricular and educational pedagogies which appeal to and extend rational judgment, to reach out to and achieve a higher stage of ethnic and cultural existence than is the case initially. The rationale for such an achievement is so that there may be sufficient cultural and social overlap for society to function and for discourse across areas of crisis and conflict to take place. In addition to what Lynch elaborates, Banks (1999) argues that individuals who know the world only from their own cultural and ethnic perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated. These individuals are unable to know their own cultures fully because of their ethnic blinders.

Banks (1999) and Gollnick and Chinn (2002) state the following as key goals of multicultural education:

- To help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures. Multicultural education assumes that with acquaintances and understanding, respect may follow;
- To provide students with cultural and ethnic alternatives;
- To provide all students with skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, the mainstream culture and within and across other ethnic cultures;
- To reduce the pain and discrimination that members of some ethnic and racial groups experience because of their unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics;
- To help students to master essential reading, writing, and computation skills; and
- To help students affirm cultural differences while realizing that individuals across cultures have many similarities.

Banks (2006) as quoted by Wills and De Nicolo (2007) further stated three broad goals of multicultural education:

- To uncover the epistemological assumptions of mainstream academic knowledge and to make them public;
- To reveal how the lives, cultures, and positionality of researchers influence their work; and
- To construct paradigms that will enhance the academic and social achievement of students from diverse cultural, ethnic, low-income, and language minority groups.

In addition, Davidman and Davidman (1997) state the following goals of multicultural education:

- Educational equity;
- Empowerment of students and their parents and caretakers;
- The development of a society that values cultural pluralism;
- Inter-cultural/inter-ethnic/inter-group understanding in the classroom, school, and community;
- Freedom for individuals and groups;

- An expanded knowledge of various cultural and ethnic groups; and
- The development of students, parents, and practitioners (teachers, nurses, journalists, counsellors, principals, custodians, documentary producers, bus drivers, curriculum coordinators, etc.) whose thoughts and actions are guided by an informed and inquisitive multicultural perspective.

Banks (2006) added goals of multicultural education and states them as follows:

- To help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of their cultures;
- To provide students with cultural, ethnic, and language alternatives;
- To provide all students with skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to function within their community cultures, within the mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures; and
- To reduce the pain and discrimination that members of some ethnic and racial groups experience because of their unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics.

This paper considers it to be the core purpose of multicultural education to facilitate students' development of cultural humility, appreciation of fellow learners' cultures and guiding them to embrace their unity in diversity. It enhances multicultural and intercultural competencies, contributes to achieving social cohesion in the learners' communities and counteracts prejudice, including bias on the basis of race, culture, nationality, socioeconomic status.

### ***The goals of internationalisation***

In the context of higher education, the core rationales quoted for internationalisation include the following: a) acquisition of international and intercultural skills by students to prepare them for global citizenship, competing in the international knowledge society and success in the international network society; b) the advancement of transformation through fostering diverse institutional cultures; c) the enhancement of the process of knowledge production through interaction with the international scientific community and d) institution-building. Recently, the International Association of Universities was amongst those reminding the academic community that solidarity and equity of access and success have an important place amongst the purposes and goals of internationalisation (IAU 2012). The first two objectives, together with the two additional aspects emphasised by the IAU, are highly relevant to the South African basic education environment.

Acquisition of international and intercultural skills is an essential part of the preparation for later careers or tertiary education. All workplaces, including those in less skilled work environments, are becoming increasingly globalised. For example, fitters often have to work as part of international teams or travel to international sites for their employers.

Learners need to be sufficiently prepared for higher education, where students are often already exposed to international opportunities in their first semester and have to stand their ground in the midst of an increasingly growing and frequently academically strong international student contingent. Tomorrow's generation of academic leaders has to be capable of producing relevant knowledge of universal



validity to fulfil vital needs of the interconnected knowledge society and to find answers to the pertinent global challenges including social justice, food security and climate change. The researchers agree with Deardorff's understanding of intercultural competency as the competency to reflect 'effective and appropriate behaviour and communication in intercultural situations'. Specifically, they serve the following purposes:

First, they promote intercultural understanding in the classroom, which, in turn, results in the creation of a stable learning environment. Often, South African classrooms are composed of children who do not only differ in their skin colour, but more distinctively, in their home culture, their mother tongue and their social background. Only if they learn to appreciate their cultural diversity, view it not as a reason to socially exclude "weaker" groups but as an asset which enriches their experience of the world, can successful acquisition of skills and knowledge take place in a multicultural environment.

Second, intercultural competencies create the basis for social mobility. The stark reality of present-day South Africa is that the social class from which a scholar hails can limit her or his opportunity to realise the person's inherent intellectual potential. Amongst the most limiting factors experienced by young people growing up in South Africa may be the layer of identity created by belonging to a social class. While this appears not yet to be the predominant layer of identity, it clearly limits a person's ability to advance in life, especially in that it has the potential to create insecurity when interacting in a different class context, as is often required when aspiring to compete for advanced vocational or educational opportunities. The researchers argue that it includes the competency to securely act in a social context different to the one from which a person hails and contributes to social mobility in that it allows students hailing from poor backgrounds to overcome the limitation of their social origin.

The intercultural aspect of internationalisation is probably the core of internationalisation of basic education. It is a core contributor to the attainment of international competencies, and at the same time, an essential element to the creation of sustainable learning environments in multicultural societies.

### **Theoretical Framework for Multicultural Education Infused by International Interventions**

From the above analysis, it is evident that multicultural education has a strong conceptual overlap with internationalisation of education. Both concepts include a focus on the acquisition of intercultural competencies. Both aim to promote core values relevant such as equity and social justice, albeit admittedly, counter-forces are present in the realm of internationalisation.

However, the conventional understanding of multicultural education focuses on utilising existing classroom diversity as the basis for the achievement of intercultural outcomes. Sometimes, teacher diversity and plurality are added, but little attention is devoted to consciously enhancing student diversity to achieve the desired outcomes of multicultural education. Furthermore, the present approach to multicultural education does not yet embrace the notion of preparing learners for global citizenship as well as the ability to compete in a globalised employment market, which in the researchers'

view should be recognised as important additional outcomes of multicultural education.

The researchers argue that select elements of the process of internationalisation should be infused to the traditional understanding of multicultural education. Intentional interventions should enhance classroom diversity, and international dimensions should be infused into curriculum design and teaching practice. Engagement with international partners may provide additional leverage for improving quality of teaching and learning in basic education and achieving intercultural learning outcomes.

### ***Possible Multicultural education / Internationalisation interventions***

In higher education, the traditional canon of internationalisation interventions focused on inter-university partnerships, mobility through student and staff exchanges and, later on, the presence of international students and staff. Rightly, one will argue that those interventions are generally not suitable to the basic education environment, bar for some elite schools. However, the focus of internationalisation has shifted in recent years, and the interventions which, nowadays, are perceived as core to the process include those which are perfectly suitable for the basic education environment, and have limited resource implications, as discussed below:

#### *Internationalisation of the Curriculum*

At the core of the possible interventions in basic education are curricular interventions. Internationalisation of the curriculum has been defined as “A curriculum with an international orientation in content and/or form, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an institutional and multicultural context and designed for domestic and/or foreign students”

In the basic education context, internationalising the curriculum could take various forms. First, a focus should be on generating awareness for cultural diversity and instilling a culture in learners to appreciate culture. Relevant content on local cultures, religions and traditions can generate a sense of appreciation for different cultures, and prevent notions of cultural superiority. Equally important is a focus on learners’ own culture. Ethnic and cultural groups such as Sotho, Indian, Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans and Coloured share settlement and school catchment areas, and teaching for cultural diversity can pull on the different contexts of the learners in the classroom.

Second, in disciplinary teaching, it is important to include international and intercultural perspectives. For example, in history, the focus should not only be on South African history, but should also include a focus on, say, Chinese, Indian and European developments. In the same vein, it would be important to sensitise learners that depending on one’s perspective, the same issue can be viewed in different ways. Source materials from various national contexts can be used. It would also be appropriate to include indigenous South African perspectives, such as a focus on indigenous knowledge systems where relevant.

Third, exposure to modern foreign languages in basic education can lay a sound formation for later development of the relevant skills. It would be important to overcome a Eurocentric language training focus and include significant modern

languages such as Chinese or Swahili which are relevant to the trade relations of South Africa in the programme.

#### *Short-term mobility and activities cross-cutting sections of South African society*

South Africa is privileged in that it boasts an almost unique cultural diversity in its society. Joint activities, such as sporting activities, and short-term exchanges between schools in different contexts can assist in developing intercultural skills. This can be underlined with school partnerships; in fact, partnerships between schools with socially different catchment areas could be valuable.

#### *Virtual mobility*

Modern technology such as videoconferencing or Skype-conferencing can facilitate the development of novel pedagogic concepts such as 'global classroom' approaches. Technology has made it possible to conduct classes with participants hailing from different continents. South African schools could look at, for example, conducting discussion groups with schools in other parts of the world.

#### *International development projects*

Leverage can be drawn on international stakeholders who take a particular interest in South Africa. For example, various South African universities partner with the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom to deliver 'Warwick in Africa' in South African high schools across the country. Young Mathematics and English teachers and senior students from the University of Warwick volunteer to provide tuition in disadvantaged schools using novel teaching methods. At least in one of the participating universities, the University of Venda, the programme has been expanded to include South African student team teachers, which generates a more sustainable engagement with the international teaching practises. Furthermore, 'Master Classes' are provided by experienced educators from the United Kingdom for teachers in the participating high schools, and selected teachers visit the United Kingdom. The involvement of the rural-based University of Venda follows an initiative of the DHET, and an initiative of the said university has resulted in the involvement of local students. The case demonstrates the importance of including strong local stakeholder, e.g. universities, to act as a catalyst for the development initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

The researchers argue that multicultural education is laudable, but that select elements of the process of internationalisation should be infused to the traditional understanding of multicultural education at the basic education level. This has potential to make a meaningful contribution to the struggle for social justice and realisation of the human right to education in South Africa.

### **Recommendations**

Multicultural education and internationalisation have the potential to promote social justice, racial and class integration and social mobility. South African schools, particularly those including disadvantaged catchment areas, have to compensate for the students' lack of external exposure. This intensifies the urgency to foster international and, specifically, intercultural skills. It is imperative for the employability of matriculants, their success in tertiary education and their empowerment for intellectual and global citizenship that by the time they leave schools, they have acquired basic intercultural competencies. The process of infusing

international and intercultural elements into education assists and fosters an appreciation of diversity of thought and a deeper understanding of the complexity of matters. Moreover, intercultural competencies in learners can make a core contribution to creating a learning environment which, as Dr. Nkoane has put it, 'aims at enabling all learners to explore and exploit their potential to the fullest'. This, in turn, is a core element to realising the constitutionally guaranteed human right to education and making the constitutionally entrenched notion of social justice a reality.

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