

SEVEN STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S MULTICULTURALISM

In her analysis of the **theoretical foundations for preparing teachers to be multicultural educators**, Kendall (1996) draws upon the work of Wurzel (1988), who describes seven stages in the development of an individual's multiculturalism. A very complex process is entailed in becoming an authentically multicultural teacher, a process that involves self-transformation as much as acquisition of professional proficiency.

- i. **Mono-culturalism:** According to Wurzel, initially, persons who have lived without any contact with persons racially, culturally, or otherwise different from themselves are in the stage of mono-culturalism. At this point of departure, people have no awareness that value and belief systems, traditions and life practices, and even the common material elements of people's day-to-day lives can validly differ from one another. Kendall points out that the underlying assumption here is that there is only one correct perspective and that variation is fundamentally deviant. It can be surmised that teachers in this stage do not implement a multicultural curriculum in any form, as they do not recognize its validity or importance in promoting development and learning in children.
- ii. **Cross-cultural contact:** The second stage Wurzel describes is that of cross-cultural contact. At this point, teachers may have had some limited exposure to people whose cultures are different from their own and may regard those experiences positively. We can imagine their relating their experiences to the kinds of exposure that they consider good for the children in their classrooms and consequently using the contributions approach-highlighting the achievements of a famous person from a specific cultural group or introducing cultural elements such as particular foods or music from that group. Thus, curricular resources that emphasize such contributions may have a particular appeal at this stage of a teacher's work.
- iii. **Cultural conflict :** Teachers may be propelled into Wurzel's third stage, cultural conflict, by the realization of challenges to their own beliefs and values in the contacts they have had. Teachers may feel confused about what content is worth pursuing (a "standard" curriculum or one with multicultural additions).
- iv. **Multiculturalism-educational interventions:** The fourth stage is a movement toward multiculturalism-educational interventions. In this stage, teachers seek new

information to extend what they have previously known. They are aware that culturally specific knowledge exists (or even that knowledge may be constructed differently in different cultures), and they seek to expand their knowledge base.

- v. **Disequilibrium:** The fifth stage is disequilibrium. One may learn that what one has always held to be true (a cherished image of the fair and equal treatment of all cultural groups in the United States, for example) is not in fact the case. Such revelations are likely to propel teachers into disequilibrium. Teachers discover new realities and the ways that these have affected both their own lives and those of the children whom they teach. As they struggle with these, one can suppose that they may become interested in curricular resources supplying multiple perspectives on issues, in a continued effort to expand their knowledge and transform their thinking about the dynamics of cultures both in their society and in their educational and care practices.
- vi. **Awareness:** The sixth stage is **awareness**. As teachers work through their disequilibrium, they understand that it is not enough to add cultural elements to an existing curriculum, but that the curriculum must be redesigned from the bottom up, with full attention to the inclusion of multiple perspectives and experiences, varying constructions of knowledge, and a range of strategies that supports the development and learning of the children in their classrooms.
- vii. **Achievement of multiculturalism:** At this stage, thought and action are united beyond the acts of teaching and learning in classrooms to connect directly to activism within the local, national, or global community in service of social justice.

Ramsey & Williams show in their book *Multi-Cultural Education: A Source Book* that –

“The foundation for multicultural practice is generally seen to be teachers' examination of their own belief systems around issues of race, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and other diversities and their consequent expectations for children (Bennett, 1999; De Gaetano, Williams, & Volk, 1998; Derman-Sparks, et al., 1989; Garcia, 1999; Kendall, 1996; Miller-Lachman & Taylor, 1995; Nieto, 2000; Ramsey, 1998; SaponShevin, 1999). The expectation here is that teachers will confront a lack of specific kinds of knowledge and skills, as well as bias, within themselves. They would then work vigorously to overcome both those insufficiencies and their negative feelings, with full awareness of ways these might otherwise influence their practice.”

The formation of a community of effort in partnership with parents and with other teachers, as well as with the children in the class, is identified as a factor vital to the success of the approach (De Gaetano, Williams, & Volk, 1998; Hernandez, 1989; Miller)

The intention is to build a fund of cultural knowledge that goes beyond the experience of any one person to ground both curriculum content and teaching strategies.

A third process commonly cited is that of re-envisioning the classroom environment to reflect the daily life experiences and cultural knowledge that the children, parents, and teachers bring with them into the classroom (Davidman & Davidman, 1997).

A careful study of the content of the texts used by children in each field of study-literature, social studies, science, mathematics, art, music, and others-is important to see that they are accurate (have not left out part of or distorted the story told, in order to represent a dominant interest) and, whenever possible, represent multiple perspectives on issues under consideration (Banks, 1996; Bennett, 1999).

Building on preparation of the classroom environment and curriculum content, the processes of curriculum planning, implementation, and assessment of student learning must be given rigorous attention in classrooms that use multicultural approaches (Bennett, 1999; Davidman & Davidman, 1997). Cultural histories, particular elements of culture, and the day-to-day lived experience that children bring with them into the classroom must be given importance. Teachers should be careful in using the culture-specific materials and resources, but in a way so as not to over-generalize and stereotype in an effort to be culturally responsive.