

Multicultural Education and Invitational Theory: A Symbiosis

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Great influxes of Hispanics and Asians to the United States during the past twenty years have helped to swell this country's already diverse ethnic population. Consequently, the resulting cultural pluralism has initiated changes in society and its institutions to meet the needs of many different people. A most likely place to meet these needs is found in educational settings, and, as a result, it is in the field of education, in our schools, colleges, and universities, where multicultural concerns have developed. In particular, an awareness and a growing commitment to the concept of multicultural education has developed to the point that it is incorporated into the standards used to judge the quality of teacher education programs (NCATE, 1979; 1986).

During much of this same period a less prominent but equally important development known as invitational theory has emerged as a tool for altering the patterns of social interaction, especially in today's schools (Purkey & Novak, 1984; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). Multicultural education and invitational theory are not mutually exclusive models for addressing similar needs in education and society. Rather, these two approaches share a common base, and they share common goals. A thorough analysis of these two developments reveals a likely symbiosis.

This article focuses on the natural and incidental relationship between the concepts of multicultural education and invitational theory: 1) both are inherently invitational in that they seek to promote positive perceptions and self-concepts in individuals and groups; 2) each exhibits respect, trust, and intentionality in dealing with self (individuals) and others (groups); 3) both attempt to alleviate racism, sexism, and the devaluing of others for any reason; and 4) both seek to create and perpetuate environments that are considerate and free of behaviors, physical signs, policies, and processes that diminish the value of oneself, the individual's group, and others.

First, an historic examination of each concept reveals the significance of each. Given the history of civil rights activities in the United States in the 1960'S and 1970'S, it is not surprising that multicultural education, with its explicit focus on

cultural pluralism, has become a major component of American education with endorsements from groups such as the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (Crouchette, 1974; Nelson, 1977; Weinberg, 1977; NCATE, 1984). Cultural pluralism is referred to as an idea that seeks to encourage cultural diversity and establishes a basis of unity so that America can become a cohesive society whose culture is enriched by sharing widely divergent ethnic experiences (Pai, 1990). In 1984, NCATE completely redesigned its structure and accreditation policies and procedures, deleting multicultural education as a separate category of standards. Instead, the term "culturally different" was included in various standards. Concepts like "global perspective" and "exceptionalities" were added to expand the meaning of multicultural education (Pai, 1990, p. 101).

Historical circumstances, social issues, and the global education concept (Pai, 1990; Banks & Banks, 1989) have all contributed to the vitality and momentum of multicultural education in the United States. Higher education, in the specific context of teacher education, has been given much of the responsibility to ensure that multicultural values and attitudes are promulgated in society through the mandated characteristics of teacher training curricula.

Invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1984) is a theory of practice designed to transform and energize people, places, programs, processes, and policies. Its mission is to create an institutional environment that intentionally invites people to work progressively to maximize their potential. The invitational model has been described essentially as a structure from which a variety of educational or other programs, policies, and processes may be hung (Purkey & Stanley, 1991). Fundamentally, invitational theory is based on two successive foundations: the perceptual tradition and self-concept theory (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). While the perceptual tradition (the power of human perception) may be the base, self-concept theory, resting upon this foundation, is the ultimate derivation of uniqueness based on one's general perception. The perceptual tradition maintains that human behavior is the product of how the individual views the world (Combs, 1962), while self-concept theory proposes that behavior is determined by an individual's view of self. Unlike the classical Freudian view that behavior is caused by unconscious forces and the traditional behaviorist view that behavior is caused by stimulus, response, reinforcement and reward, invitational practice encourages development and beneficial behavior by invitation, the process of extending positive messages to oneself and others (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1978; Purkey, 1978). Finally, invitational theory is an extension of both traditions as it centers around common assumptions: trust, respect, optimism, and intentionality (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987).

In order to understand the points of comparison as well as the dissimilarities of multicultural education and invitational theory, it is helpful to know the assumptions of both. A comparison of these beliefs allows us to see that the two sets are interdependent in generating mutually beneficial outcomes and in cultivating an attitude of respect for, and appreciation of, each person regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, age, or condition.

Assumptions of Multicultural Education

1. It is essential to cultivate an attitude of respect for and appreciation of worth of cultural diversity, to promote belief in worth of the individual, to develop competencies, and to facilitate educational equity (Pai, 1990);

2. A beneficial life involves continuous processes by which one can learn to live progressively, effectively, and in an enriching way by expanding one's cultural repertoire and reconciling divergent patterns so that a new and unique approach to life may emerge. Such a view assumes one's ability to think critically and reflectively about his or her own ways and the ways of others in selecting and developing means of thinking, feeling, and acting;

3. Occasional conflict between interest and values is certain to arise; people eventually have to interact with individuals with conflicting norms and beliefs; no one can depend on his or her own cultural ways for a true perspective of how others will act and how he or she will react effectively (Pai, 1990; Mezirow, 1984);

4. Teacher education must develop competencies for perceiving, valuing, evaluating, and behaving appropriately in a culturally pluralistic setting (NCATE, 1986);

5. Learners at the elementary and secondary levels and beyond should also be prepared to live and function effectively in a pluralistic world;

6. Education must provide a component in its curriculum for young people and its program of study for teachers and prospective teachers to help them appreciate social, political, and economic realities of a culturally complex and diverse society;

7. No segment of society can exist separated from and ignorant of cultures different from its own;

8. Knowledge and understanding, combined with attitudes and behaviors that reflect values of diverse cultures—especially those to which one has high

exposure—can make all people better partners and neighbors at home and abroad;

9. It is beneficial to individuals and society to explore the richness of diversity that exists within and among ethnic, racial, and other subcultures.

Assumptions of Invitational Theory

1. Perception refers to a way of "seeing" oneself and to "meaning" gained as a result of sensory experience; one's perceptions include beliefs, values, feelings, hopes, desires, and ways of regarding self and others (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1978);

2. Self-concept is a product of one's perceptions and behaviors and is determined by the individual's view of self in various life arenas (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1978; Walz, 1992);

3. Any biological, social, economic, or psychological barriers can be transcended if one is suitably invited or challenged to do so (Jourard, 1968);

4. Invitations to learning result primarily from the perceptions teachers have of students, and the invitations students receive play a significant role in influencing their perceptions of self, school, human relationships at school, and school achievement;

5. Excellent teachers who have genuine, positive perceptions of their students send the most effective invitations to students;

6. Maintaining positive perceptions means consistently viewing students as capable, valuable, and responsible;

7. An inviting practitioner assumes a consistent stance—a "dispositional quality" characterized by four elements: optimism, respect, trust, and intentionality (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987);

8. The inviting stance is necessary to create and maintain inviting actions, programs, policies, processes and places;

9. The hallmark of success is to be intentionally inviting with oneself as well as with others;

10. Inviting persons have high positive self-concepts and approach tasks and persons with expectations that they will be well received and successful;

11. Individuals function typically at one of four levels of intentional and invitational functioning (Purkey & Novak, 1984; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987), although everyone functions over the spectrum of levels at various times and in different situations.

Relating Invitational Theory to Multicultural Education

The Ends or Expectations of Multicultural Education

1. To cultivate an attitude of respect and an appreciation of the value of cultural diversity.
2. To promote the belief of the intrinsic worth of each individual and the well-being of the larger society.
3. To develop multicultural competencies for perceiving, valuing, and evaluating divergent cultural patterns and to function effectively in culturally varied settings.
4. To facilitate educational equality for all regardless of ethnicity race, sex, age, or condition.

Significant Features

1. Overtly structured out of necessity due to accrediting processes and agencies.
2. Mandated as a matter of policy and process.
3. Imposed on teacher education.
4. Impacts public education via teacher education.
5. Implied intervention is group centered.

The Ends or Expectations of Invitational Theory

1. To foster in each individual perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that lead to accepting and valuing self on the basis of intrinsic self worth.
2. To foster in the individual perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that lead to accepting and valuing others on the basis of their intrinsic self worth.
3. To foster optimism, respect, trust, and a sense of beneficial purpose (intentionality) in dealing with self and others.
4. To practice viewing oneself and others as capable, valuable, and responsible to promote achievement, growth, and development.

Significant Features

1. Not highly structured.
2. A voluntary process.
3. Not imposed on teacher education.
4. Impacts public education via teachers being intentionally inviting.
5. Implied intervention is both person centered and group-centered.

The two educational concepts can be combined for reasons that are mutually beneficial. Metaphorically, one might view multicultural education as the specific cargo and invitational theory as its vehicle or carrier. The cargo is

important in and of itself while at the same time the model, invitational theory, is important and valued to the extent that it delivers the cargo successfully. Therefore, the value of invitational theory is enhanced by its ability to deliver appropriate services and instruction.

An Application of the Invitational Approach to Multicultural Living

At this point I direct your attention to the true value of the suppositions presented thus far. This value is measured in part by determining whether the theory espoused can actually be put into practice. As a matter of fact, this discourse on invitational theory and multicultural education was stimulated by actual experiences at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. An exit interview with a Taiwanese graduate student about her experiences at the university compared her perceptions and the author's understanding of an invitational approach to multicultural living.

Perhaps one of the first multicultural issues that confronts many international students is that of retaining one's given name or adopting an Americanization of that name. This Taiwanese student, like many internationals, chose to adopt an Americanization of her Chinese name. To reduce the distance and barriers that existed or were perceived between cultures, she opted to sacrifice an important aspect of her identity, i.e. her name, to adjust to her adopted culture. From this relatively simple transaction, a valuable multicultural lesson is learned: that a proper, necessary, and natural environment recognizes the importance of one's given name to society at-large; hearing the name and seeing the name causes others to become aware of another's culture. Awareness of a culture often invites exploration of that culture. Proponents of invitational living would certainly invite such a person to retain her name because of its value (beauty or uniqueness) as a part of a positive perception of self.

Practitioners of invitational theory and proponents of multicultural education would view this student's invitation to become a graduate assistant and her acceptance of the position as mutually favorable. Invitational theorists would interpret this offer as one of acceptance and respect. At the same time, the unsolicited offer would be viewed by multicultural education standards as an act of justice and equality. Further, this position afforded both her and her associates invitational and multicultural opportunities that they otherwise would not have experienced.

For this student, such opportunities for sharing often arose in class and in casual conversation when American students and professors asked her about

education in Taiwan. She pointed out a major difference in the philosophical roles of teacher and

student in Taiwan. For example, it is the students who stand and greet the teacher when the teacher enters the classroom, and it is the students who thank the teacher for the knowledge shared, whereas in the United States there is a reverse role for students and the teacher: the teacher greets the learners and thanks them for attending class.

Another educational issue addressed by this student was that of discipline. When corporal punishment was discussed, her American counterparts stressed that discipline in American schools is a major problem and that corporal punishment is becoming less acceptable. She explained that discipline is a less severe problem in Taiwan probably because educators, parents, and other members of society work together to censure improper student behavior. In addition, American students have a right to due process regarding disciplinary action affecting them whereas Taiwanese students do not enjoy such a democratic process.

During her stay the student continued to respond to inquiries about specific educational and other matters in her country. She served as a catalyst for multicultural learning by helping others to gain insight into a different way of life and by enabling them to view their own customs and traditions from a different perspective. From the standpoint of invitational theory this interest in another's culture is indicative of respect and value.

On Thanksgiving Day the I invited this Taiwanese student and one of her female friends to have dinner with my family. From the onset they were told to feel free to select only the items from the menu that appealed to them. Table conversation proved interesting. Each student expressed gratitude for the invitation and commented on how delicious the food was. They reported that this was their first opportunity to visit in an American home. Further, they pointed out previously distorted impressions they had of American life as a result of their viewing movies and television. They were pleased that this real experience proved those impressions wrong. Conversation later turned to Chinese dining traditions: eating at a round table, which symbolizes reunion for the family; providing a variety of foods for each meal; and using chopsticks. The Taiwanese father, the family authority figure, sits first for meals; no one dares to sit and begin eating until he does.

This dinner invitation provided an occasion for the visitors to react with acceptance, experience a sense of comfort, and share fond thoughts of the homes

they had left in Taiwan. Invitational observers might explain that the women were treated genuinely and respectfully and as a result left with feelings of self worth that will lead them to act in a similar manner when they have an opportunity to host people of different cultures. From the viewpoint of multicultural education the occasion was both social and educational in that the Taiwanese women experienced an event

whereby they were able to share, test, and confirm in a safe setting their impressions of American family life. At the same time, the American host family became familiar with life in Taiwan. Everyone came to understand and appreciate the other's culture, and everyone gained insight into how to communicate and relate effectively in future, similar circumstances.

This dining experience illustrates linkage between multicultural tenets and the beliefs of invitational theory and practice—how they complement each other by encouraging respect of individuals and groups. The concepts of multiculturalism merge with invitational practices when people value, trust, and view cultural diversity as beneficial to both individuals and groups.

Summary

Here I have attempted to exemplify characteristics of an invitational disposition, which accommodates and correlates with multicultural intentions and principles. These principles and practices merge to encourage the development of well-rounded individuals with effective egos who interact spontaneously in ways that tell others they are responsible, able, and valuable. I propose the use of the invitational model as a vehicle for advancing multicultural sensitivity and learning. A symbiosis, where the goals of invitational theory as related to development of the individual merge with the objectives of multicultural education to encourage change in the values and attitudes of all people and cultures, offers mutual benefit to both perspectives. These two educational movements can enhance each other and together become a force for building effective schools, stronger communities, and a peaceful world.

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