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Corina Lieu

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The Quest for Equity: Multicultural Education

Corina Lieu

California State University Monterey Bay

LS 400: Capstone

Patty Whang

Abstract

The focus issue addressed in this Capstone Project is multiculturalism in education. This is an important issue because students deserve an education that reflects their living experiences inside and outside of the classroom. An argument is made that the lack of multiculturalism in education could foster an environment in which students would not receive an education that is equitable. Considerations of the issue should include the perspectives of the principal of a public school, and three staff members. This group of participants provide deeper insights into multiculturalism within the classrooms. After interviewing an administrator and staff members, three different actions were thoroughly discussed to better enhance multicultural representation at their school.

The Quest for Equity: Multicultural Education

I want you to picture yourself as a young student today, in a classroom. Your teacher says that you are going to do a project using a book that represents you on a cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, or religious level. You walk to the school library and start to look for a book, but when you start to scan the options, you notice that there are little to no options for you. You see that most of your classmates have a similar problem and you all decide to ask the teacher if there are any other options available. Your teacher simply says that whatever is in the library is what you can use. You see your other classmates selecting books so easily and starting on their projects. You on the other hand, cannot participate in this project because there wasn't a book for you. How does this make you feel?

Growing up as a young child in public education, it was rare to see myself represented within the content I was learning in my classes. I did not see much of myself in a cultural sense, an ethnic sense, or sometimes even in a gender sense. I was learning what was required of me based on the state curriculum but it was difficult for me as a young student to make any connections to myself, and the community in which I was living in. For example, I was only being taught about important historical figures that were White males all throughout schooling up until college. I did not learn about any historical events or historical figures that were in the perspective of a woman, or a woman of color until I was in college. I did not learn about different cultures, different ways of living, or differing viewpoints until I was in college. I did not receive any form of multicultural education until I was in college. So, if I had chosen not to attend college, I would not have experienced any type of multiculturalism in an educational environment. This is something that many students are still struggling with today, and it is because they are feeling excluded, and being set up for failure in their academic and personal lives because schools are not giving their students an equitable education.

Students not receiving an equitable education is concerning because it means that some students are not given equitable educational opportunities due to their membership in diverse social groups such as their identifying racial, ethnic, social-class or cultural groups. At the core of multicultural education, there is equality, equity, and justice which should be the ideal in every classroom environment. It is important for teachers and educators to understand what multicultural education is and how to implement it in their classrooms. By incorporating

multiculturalism, educators can not only create a more positive relationship with their students, but their students can also create a deeper connection with their own culture as well as the cultures of their peers and communities. This means that teachers and educators must reflect on how they select and manage policies, curricula, and teaching styles to ensure that their students are thriving in an inclusive classroom environment.

Literature Synthesis & Integration: Multicultural Education and Equity

Due to the highly diverse population of the world, students have a higher need to gain the knowledge and skills to collaborate with others from various backgrounds. In the current school system, to teach and to have students learn efficiently can be challenging even if an educator has similar backgrounds to their students. Therefore, many difficulties arise when educators teach students who are from different backgrounds. There are many ways in which educators can ensure that their students have an equitable learning environment despite varying backgrounds, and multicultural education is one avenue for that.

What is the Problem?

Multicultural education is an idea stating that all students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, social class, religion, sexual orientation should experience educational equity in schools (Banks & McGee 2020). The need for multicultural education is in high demand through the diverse populations of students in schools but there is an insufficient amount of multiculturalism represented in school systems. These demands, needs, and aspirations stem from the lack of educational equity and educational justice that is not allocated towards students due to the perspective of educators who can not easily see how their content is related to cultural issues due to the relative content or due to the difficulty of efficiently implementing and sustaining multiculturalism (Banks & McGee, 2020). In the cases in which a school system has incorporated multiculturalism, there are still underlying problems in which educators and school administrators are not meaningfully

addressing students' academic and social developmental needs or are implementing deficit-oriented strategies that create more inequity (Gorski, 2019).

Why is it an Issue?

The lack of multiculturalism in the education system could foster an environment in which students would not receive an education that is equitable and this is shown by some students having a greater benefit from the currently structured school system because of their particular backgrounds, as compared to other students that identify from other groups (Banks & McGee, 2020). This is detrimental to students who identify from other groups because in their classes that have a deficit in multiculturalism, those students must learn how to navigate unfamiliar territory, and will not develop the necessary skills or knowledge to function effectively in their own cultures, the United States' societal culture, other cultures, and even global communities (Villegas, 2019).

In a historical perspective, there has been constant reform within teacher education and the importance of multicultural education. This began in the last five decades, with state and national policy initiatives targeting multicultural education through civil rights policies, federal education policies. (Davidman & Davidman, 1997). Today, policies are being made through the assumption that teachers lack the multicultural awareness to educate students from various cultural backgrounds, and they are present in not only the United States but also in Canada (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Joshee & Johnson, 2005). This is seen by the emergence of diverse courses, programs, and practices that educational institutions devised to respond to the demands, needs, and aspirations of various groups (Banks & McGee, 2020).

Certain groups in the United States, specifically indigenous people, Black Americans, Chicanos, multiracial and multiethnic groups, have the perspective of multicultural education as an equity detour to avoid racial inequity. Equity detours are initiatives and strategies that may pass for "racial equity," such as multicultural education and cultural competence (Gorski, 2020). This is referring to problems of multiculturalism as being an approach to talk about "cultural differences" without having to name or confront racism. This notion stunts the possibility of real progress towards educational justice, due to the too tight focus on "culture." In contrast, White groups and White students uniquely benefit from multiculturalism as compared to their

non-White peers in that when White students participate in a curriculum that focuses on race and ethnicity, they experience the beneficial effects of interacting with people from different backgrounds (Martin, 2014).

What Should Be Done?

In order to transform a school to bring about educational equity and to successfully implement multicultural education, all major components of the school must be substantially changed. However, this is not easily feasible and for some school systems it may be nearly impossible, but there are still things that can be done to address this. To transform schools, educational leaders must examine their policies, curricula, and discipline practices, and they must be knowledgeable about the influence of particular groups on student behaviors (Banks & McGee, 2020; Gorski, 2019).

Multicultural education professional development training could bring awareness to what needs to be assessed within a school district and to provide educators and administrators the knowledge and skills to implement multiculturalism sufficiently and effectively. However, professional development opportunities related to equity should emphasize ideological work and equity pedagogy must be included. Therefore, there should be a greater commitment on equity, rather than just only culture when trying to achieve educational justice (Gorski, 2016). This means that educators and educational leaders must implement strategies to their curriculum where their students will be able to make connections between their own consciousness and the development of their new knowledge, attitudes, and skills about change, empowerment, and justice (Villegas, 2019). Multicultural education professional development should be used to close the achievement gap and the equity gap that is present within the students at the school site. These professional development training could lead some educators to finding new strategies like reevaluating their biases or implementing different learning styles in which to increase their student achievements and to reflect on their own personal biases which is an achievable goal (Boyd, 2010).

Conclusion

Multicultural education is a reform movement that is designed to bring about a transformation of schools for students from diverse cultural, language, ethnic groups and different genders to have an equitable chance to experience academic achievement. This is important because students deserve an equitable education that reflects their living experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Strategies that educational leaders can implement in their schools and classrooms that make connections with multiculturalism is essential to a student's success not only academically but also interpersonally.

Method

For this Capstone Project the researcher investigated how Hilltop Vista Middle School's¹ principal and staff viewed multicultural education and what they thought could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what they have learned to formulate an action that responded to the focus issue in a way that inspired, informed, or involved a particular audience. This is important because multicultural education values different student backgrounds which can prepare students to thrive in a diverse world.

Context

Hilltop Vista Middle School is located on the central coast of California in a city called Peninsula. The city of Peninsula is a middle-class city that has a high average household income of \$108,176 with a poverty rate of 10.87%. The median age in Peninsula is about 37 years old, and has a high population of 78.63% White citizens. It is a popular tourist area with many leisure activities available such as beaches, parks, camping, hiking, and many historical sites to visit.

Hilltop Vista Middle is an International Baccalaureate school in the Peninsula School District and has many special programs including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), instrumental music, art, drama and leadership. Many of the students who attend Hilltop Vista live in the nearby city Duneview, in which is lower-middle income level in comparison to Peninsula. The student demographic of Hilltop Vista Middle School consists of

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for people, places, and organizations.

only students in grade 7 and grade 8 due to the restructuring of the elementary schools within the district, and there is a total of approximately 325 students. From the 325 students, 64.2% are Hispanic or Latino, 23.6% are White, 21.6% are English Learners, and 66.2% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Last year in 2021, the city of Peninsula and its school district's Superintendent announced that Hilltop Vista Middle School along with two elementary schools will be closing. Hilltop Vista Middle School will close for the 2023-2024 school year and the students will be allocated to K-8 schools.

Participants and Participant Selection

I invited the school principal, two staff members, and one school counselor to participate in this study. This group of participants was invited to participate because of their relevant experiences and influences as educational leaders.

Mila Lopez. Hilltop Vista Middle School Principal. Principal Lopez has been the principal for 4 years at Hilltop Vista. She has 20 years of previous administration experience including being an academic coach and assistant principal and also has teaching experience in various grade levels of schooling.

Emilia Flores. Supervisor for an outreach program that provides different resources in preparation for post-secondary education at Hilltop Vista Middle School. Ms. Flores has experience in education and working with students from the elementary level to the high school level. Ms. Flores works with other staff members to plan classroom lessons weekly that support students' well-being and academic standing. She has been the site supervisor at Hilltop Vista for one school year virtually, and in-person for this year.

Maite Gomez. Advisor for an outreach program that provides different resources in preparation for post-secondary education at Hilltop Vista Middle School. Ms. Gomez works with other staff members to plan classroom lessons weekly that support students' well-being and academic standing. She has experience with the holistic well-being and academic well-being of youth and high school students.

Gianna Lange. Hilltop Vista Middle School Counselor. Ms. Lange has been at Hilltop Vista Middle School for one year, and was previously an English teacher at another district for 8 years. She provides one-on-one academic counseling, group counseling, and classroom lessons for students.

Researcher. I grew up in a very diverse community that was represented with the demographics of students I went to school with. However, the diversity or culture of my environment was not represented in what I was learning. I wanted to bring awareness to the inequities that occur when multiculturalism is lacking in a school community, and how the staff or administration could fix that. There were many ideas and thoughts that came about with these interviews, but I kept an open mind to what the participants had to say during the duration of this project. I was mindful of every idea and every statement, in which they were taken into consideration when exploring potential actions.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. How is multiculturalism addressed at Hilltop Vista Middle School?
2. What are you concerned about when it comes to incorporating multiculturalism at Hilltop Vista Middle School?
3. What is currently being done to improve multicultural education and - by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
4. How can you adapt your current teaching methods to meet the different culture and learning styles of your students?
5. What do you think should be done about multiculturalism in the classroom?
6. What ideas do you have for educating students about multiculturalism or to further your development of multicultural education at Hilltop Vista?
7. What do you see as the most challenging aspects of improving multicultural education at Hilltop Vista?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to say about multicultural education and/or the improvement of multiculturalism?

Procedure

Participants were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a Zoom interview. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, and were audio-recorded (with participant consent) or were recorded via Zoom or via Google Meets, and took place at Hilltop Middle School in a quiet classroom/office. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face

interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, the principal and staff were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve multiculturalism and multicultural education at Hilltop Vista Middle School. This is important because all students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, social class, religion, or sexual orientation should experience educational equity in schools. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time required; reach; and effectiveness. Time is already a necessary factor for administration and staff due to the closure of the school approaching, as a result, it is important to evaluate how time effective the action options are. Reach is an important factor in choosing an action option to prevent any student from being overlooked. Lastly, effectiveness is necessary to evaluate because it analyzes the possibility and the extent of success. Success can be seen through the improved equity in the education of these students. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Time Required	Reach	Effectiveness
Sense of Community: School wide events	High	Low	Medium

celebrating marginalized groups			
Teamwork Training: Multicultural professional development	Medium	Medium	Medium
Student Voices: Student-centered lessons	Medium	Medium	High

Sense of Community

In every school, students deserve an equitable education that reflects their lived experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Creating a community that fulfills this need is one of the key components to effectively providing multicultural education to students. This helps students who identify with multiple identities and marginalized groups to navigate unfamiliar territory, and to familiarize themselves with their own cultures, and the cultures of others (Villegas, 2019). This can be seen by having school-wide events that represent the student population and their interests. The administration and staff can have monthly or weekly events for the implementation of multiculturalism by inviting guest speakers from the community to visit the school, by celebrating those from marginalized groups. For example, the school may choose to celebrate LGBTQ+ students with Pride in the month of June and include the entire school to participate.

However at Hilltop Vista, community seems to be lacking as said by some of the participants in the interviews. There is a disconnect between the students and the staff because of the closure of the school, and many of the staff already seem to have one foot out the door (personal communication , April 22, 2022). This may be a challenge when evaluating the reach of this action option. If there is a disconnect between the educational leaders and students, not every student might be willing to participate nor be involved in these school events. The time required for this action will also be high. Planning accordingly with a school calendar and inviting guest speakers require a good amount of time to do so. If these events are planned

effectively, there is a moderate chance that over time, the community within the school will become more inclusive and equitable to all.

Teamwork Training

Professional development training could potentially bring the educational leaders together and also provide the knowledge and skills to implement multiculturalism sufficiently. The training should specifically be related to multiculturalism, and should emphasize ideological work and equity pedagogy must be included (Gorski, 2019). This would be shown through the evaluation and reflections of biases from the staff and administrators. These trainings would be a safe space for educational leaders to speak freely of their thoughts to create an intimate connection between what they may know about themselves and what they might not know about others. These trainings should be used to close the achievement gap that may be present within the students at the school site, and help educators who find difficulty in seeing how their relative content is related to cultural issues or have difficulty in sustaining multiculturalism.

The time for these professional development trainings and workshops would not be as high because the faculty of Hilltop Vista already have set days for meetings about every two weeks. This is beneficial because the time can be allocated for finding specific workshops and organizations to work with for these training sessions. The reach for these trainings would not be difficult either due to the staff having to attend these trainings. The effectiveness however, may not be as high due to perhaps the lack of participation from staff. In one interview, the school counselor stated that one of the challenges during these types of training is that some staff members may be afraid of saying “the wrong thing” so instead, they avoid the conversation of multiculturalism and inequities overall (personal communication, April 28, 2022). A similar concern was brought up by the principal of the school when she said that some staff members feel “attacked” or feel offended during more explicit conversations of inequities and cultural responsiveness (personal communication, April 5, 2022). This in turn, changes the effectiveness of this action option depending on the environment and overall tone of the group.

Student Voices

The third theme that emerged from my interviews and literature research is the importance of students' voices. A student's voice should be incorporated into a lesson by having student-centered lessons. This is shown by giving students choices in how they will study and learn by creating lessons that reflect their cultures, values, and their identity groups. Students must be given equal opportunities to share their thoughts and experiences in the classroom. Many students have different experiences and may benefit more than others from multicultural education and this should be considered when giving student choices (Martin, 2014). At Hilltop Vista, every student has an Advisory class which happens at the end of the day, giving a great opportunity for these types of lessons to take the stage. In one of my interviews, the participant explained that it is important that the students should be guided and educated on different

aspects of multiculturalism like intersectionality and how that might affect their identities (M. Gomez, advisor, April 28, 2022).

The time for this action option is moderate, considering that many of the lessons during Advisory are planned ahead of time and in order to create these student-centered lessons, there must be time for the teachers to collect data on what the students want to learn. The reach would be moderate due to the fact that every student has an Advisory class and will be exposed to these lessons, but not every student will want to participate. If the student-centered lessons are successful, the effectiveness of the action option will be high because students will feel heard, and represented in their learning.

Conclusion

Through the interviews and the literature research, it was found that there are multiple ways in which students are able to be successful with multicultural education. Educational leaders are responsible for the equitable opportunities and student achievement in their schools, and with the high demand of multiculturalism through the diverse student population, there needs to be a sufficient amount of representation and educational equity in the school system.

Recommendation. Of all three action options that were explored, I recommend that the staff incorporate student-centered lessons, giving students their choices in how they would like to study and learn about the groups they identify with, and others that may differ from. I am confident that this would be the best method for teachers and staff to be more open and support students from different backgrounds from their own. This section will discuss the concessions, limitations, and possible negative outcomes that this action option may entail.

Concessions. While students' voices was chosen as the best action option moving forward, the other two action options have considerable strengths as well. For example, the action option that indicates the teamwork training for multicultural education professional development. The literature points to the significance of evaluating biases and closing the achievement gap of marginalized students, along with the emphasis of equity pedagogy (Gorski, 2019). These trainings would give staff and teachers the knowledge and skills to effectively implement multiculturalism within their classrooms and school site. As for the sense of community action option, there were also substantial strengths worth noting. Unlike the other options, this action would involve the entire school community at once, benefitting from interpersonal relationships between all the students and the staff. Additionally, this action option would improve drastically over time with every student event that occurs with improved

planning over time. Undoubtedly, both of these action options have noteworthy strengths to better implement multiculturalism at Hilltop Vista.

Limitations. While choosing student's voices as my recommended action option seems to be the best choice, there are still limitations to recognize as well. For example, time is still a moderate challenge. Although there is a set class in which students are able engage in student-centered lessons, the time to prepare and collect data may take some time. The data collection may be in the form of a survey, and this would happen in every Advisory class. Therefore, each class may have a different choice in what they choose to learn, which creates more tasks for those who create Advisory lessons for the teachers.

Potential negative outcomes. There are possible negative outcomes to consider in this action option. For instance, there might be a lack of participation from the students. Although every student will be given a choice in their learning and representation, there might be more students who are more outspoken than others, thus hindering the voice and choice of that marginalized student or groups of students.

Conclusion. Despite all limitations or potential negative outcomes, I still recommend students' voices as the best action option to implement multicultural education and to increase educational equity. This action has the strongest effectiveness of all the actions. In order to successfully implement multiculturalism, there needs to be a substantial amount of effectiveness. It is a priority for students to understand their own cultures, the cultures of their communities, and the cultures of others. If there is no proper effectiveness, then staff and administrators are not meaningfully addressing students' social developmental or academic needs, and may be implementing deficit-oriented strategies that create more educational inequities. Therefore, the focus on effectiveness and students' voices makes this action option rise above the others as the best solution moving forward.

Action Documentation

There is an insufficient amount of multiculturalism that is represented in school systems. This due to the underlying problems in which educators and school administrators are not meaningfully incorporating multicultural education. This becomes an issue of concern as the literature shows that the lack of multiculturalism has led to educational inequity and is inhibiting students from receiving students' academic and social developmental needs. After researching the literature and conducting several interviews with the principal and staff, three action options

emerged. The first action option is to improve the sense of community at Hilltop Vista by having school-wide events that celebrate marginalized groups. The second action option is having multicultural professional development that would give the staff training that emphasizes multiculturalism. The third action option is the implementation of student-centered lessons, in which students are given choices and opportunities to reflect on their cultures, values, and their identity groups. Student-centered lessons are recommended for this course of action because it is the option with the highest effectiveness giving every student the opportunity to be included. Moving forward with this recommendation, an email was sent to the principal and the staff. The email explained that after analyzing the data from the interviews and the literature synthesis, an action option emerged that would best fit their students. Additionally, the email entailed some examples of student-centered lessons, and the recommendation of incorporating them during Advisory or Flex classes at Hilltop Vista. As of yet, there has been no response from the principal or the staff.



Image 1. Screenshot of the email sent to each participant in the interview process explaining the recommended suggestion in the implementation of multicultural education.

Critical Reflection

At the beginning of the semester, I was nervous about the LS 400: *Senior Capstone* course. I did not have a lot of knowledge about how to conduct a Capstone project or where to begin. When the day came to choose a topic, it took what seemed to be forever, to choose a topic. I knew that it needed to be an issue that I was passionate about, and after some self reflecting I was set on multiculturalism. Multiculturalism was a topic that followed me in my everyday life because of my background and my experiences in school. After I chose the topic, I was eager and ready to begin looking for participants for this project. When I was looking for participants, I originally had the thought to choose a different school site. However, when I tried to make contact with the administrators and staff, I did not receive any responses. Having spoken with my professor, I learned that sometimes there are people who may be busy or just simply do not want to participate. I felt discouraged that my first initial school was unresponsive, so I then looked for other partners for this project. After I found Hilltop Vista, I contacted the educational leaders that would have the best insight, and in the end, there were many people interested in participating!

The area that was most surprising to me was how honest and open many of the interviewees were. Nearly all the participants in the interview process felt very comfortable expressing their concerns and were fully open to helping their students receive an equitable education with multiculturalism. This made me realize that the administration and staff at the school site held an importance to the inclusivity of students and the representation of their identities. The area that was the most challenging was a factor that I did not have control over, which was the closure of the school. Moving forward, I plan to keep an open line of communication with some of the staff in the hopes of their implementation of student-centered lessons in the future. As a future educator, I am very grateful for the connections I have made with the staff at Hilltop Vista. I learned how much time and work it takes to create an equitable classroom environment, and what it looks like to actively work towards this goal. This is something that I will take with me as I begin my future career in education.

Synthesis and Integration

Attending California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) as an undergraduate student felt self-fulfilling to me in several ways. The required coursework, Liberal Studies (LS)

MLOs, and this Action Research Project has positively impacted and provided me with essential professional development skills. Beginning with MLO 1: Developing Educator, I am confident in my ability and skills to think, write, and speak critically about the various works of a California public educator. Previous to these courses, I had little to no knowledge about the inner workings of an educator, but as I was conducting research and interviews for this Action Research Project, many of the skills were put into the forefront. Secondly, with MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar, I learned how to evaluate my own experiences and the experiences of others, to critically examine the value of diversity and multiculturalism. These skills were demonstrated explicitly within my Action Research Project and the courses with MLO 2 had inspired me to address the issue of multicultural education in schools. Thirdly, with MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator, I confidently have the skills to identify and pursue paths for social change. Collaborating in this Action Research Project with the staff, helped me to make connections to those striving to advocate access, equity, and justice in public schools. In order to become the educator in which I envision myself being, I believe it is necessary to actively be an advocate, and to speak for those who do not have a voice.

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