

## Tolerance vs. Transformation

Lee, Enid, Menkart, Deborah, Okazawa-Rey, Margo (eds.), 1998. "Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development". Washington D.C.: [Network of Educators on the Americas](#), p. 4.

### A. Assumptions about the sources of racial problems and conflicts

#### The Tolerance Paradigm

- Racial problems and conflicts exist because of prejudice.
- Prejudice is an individual problem. Some individuals are more inclined to be strongly prejudiced because of their personality type or their particular growing up and life experiences.
- Prejudice appears when there is contact and interaction among people who are racially and culturally different from each other.
- Prejudice, which results from lack of knowledge about each other and from stereotypes that occur "naturally," is a way to make sense out of unfamiliar and complex situations when there is little knowledge.

#### Transformation Paradigm

- Racial problems and conflicts are rooted in racism, a systemic problem that functions at both institutional and interpersonal levels.
- Racism is created as a method for one society or group of people in a society to rule and control another society or groups of people within a society on the basis of racial differences or characteristics. As Asa Hilliard (1992) points out, its source is greed, and its consequences are economic, political and cultural benefits to the group that holds the power and exploitation and physical, emotional, and spiritual degradation of those who are the targets of the racism.
- All individuals born into a society that practices institutional racism get lessons, in how to participate in its many forms. Families, schools, and the media, play major roles in this socialization process, and teach all of us to participate - actively by being direct perpetrators and passively by quiet acceptance of benefits and acquiescence to racism directed against one's own group, or even another racial group.

### B. Assumptions about what needs to change

### **Tolerance paradigm**

- Changing individual attitudes and behaviors leads to the elimination of prejudice and discrimination.
- People learn to be non-prejudiced through gaining more facts and information about different cultures and through increased interaction with people different from themselves.

### **Transformation paradigm**

- Individual changes in attitudes and behavior are necessary, but not sufficient to eliminate racism. Knowledge, respect, and appreciation of different cultures are necessary, but also not sufficient.
- Eliminating racism requires restructuring power relationships in the economic, political, and cultural institutions of the society, and creating new conditions for interpersonal interactions. Examining the dynamics of oppression and power and how individuals participate in these dynamics are essential.
- Individuals can learn to be anti-racist activists, developing the skills to work with others to create systemic, institutional changes. Conversely, institutional change will result in greater opportunities to foster the development of more people who strongly support diversity and social, economic, and political justice.

## **C. Assumptions about who needs multicultural education**

### **Tolerance paradigm**

- Children from groups that are the targets of racial prejudice need multicultural education to build-up their "low self-esteem."
- Children in mixed/integrated settings need multicultural education to learn about each other.
- Children in all-White settings do not usually need multicultural education because problems of prejudice do not arise when children of color are not present.

### **Transformation paradigm**

- Everyone needs multicultural, anti-bias education in all educational settings.
- The issues and tasks will vary for children depending on their racial and cultural background as well as their family and life experiences.
- Teachers and parents, as well as children, need to engage in multicultural, anti-oppression education.

## **D. Working with parents**

### **Tolerance paradigm**

- Teachers occasionally ask parents to share special cultural activities, such as cook a holiday food, dress in traditional clothing, show pictures of their country of origin.
- Teachers may read about or ask for information about the most visible aspects of each family's cultures, such as foods, music, and favorite objects, but usually do not learn about the underlying aspects, like beliefs and rules about teacher-child interaction and preferred learning styles. Nor, even if known, are these incorporated into daily classroom life.

### **Transformation paradigm**

- Parents/family caregivers collaborate in curriculum development, implementation and evaluation.
- Teachers use a variety of strategies that actively and regularly involve parents, including provisions for languages other than English.
- Parents'/family caregivers' knowledge about their home culture is essential information for adapting curriculum to each child's needs.
- Parents regularly share their daily life experiences at home and work, as well as special holiday events. Parents who are activists in any aspect of social justice work also share these experiences.

## **E. Goals**

### **Tolerance paradigm**

- Teaching about "different" cultures, that is, cultures of racial and ethnic groups dissimilar to the dominant European American culture.
- Advocating for appreciation, enjoyment, and tolerance of other cultures.

### **Transformation paradigm**

- Fostering the development of people of all ages to be activists in the face of injustice directed at them or others.
- Constructing a knowledgeable and confident self-identity.
- Developing empathetic, comfortable and knowledgeable ways of interacting with people from a range of cultures and backgrounds.
- Learning to be critical thinkers about various forms of discrimination.
- Working with others to create concrete changes at the institutional and interpersonal levels.
- (instilling the idea that multicultural education is a process, rather than an end in itself, and it is a life-time journey.

## F Methods and content

### Tolerance paradigm

- Curriculum usually consists of activities for use with any and all children-a "one size fits all" approach - which is also "teacher proof."
- Content focuses on learning discrete pieces about the cultures of various racial and ethnic groups. The particular cultures selected for study are usually either those that is presented in a curriculum guide or ones a teacher knows about and likes.
- Multicultural activities tend to be add-ons to the curriculum-a special holiday activity, a multicultural bulletin board, a week-long unit, a multicultural education course in a teacher training program. In essence, students "visit" other cultures from time to time, then return to their existing Euro-American-based curriculum.
- Critics sometimes refer to this approach as "tourist" curriculum. Tourists do not get to see the daily life of the cultures they visit, nor do they delve into the societal practices that may be harmful and unjust: Moreover, tourists may not even like the people they are visiting, but only appreciate their crafts, or music, or food.

### Transformation paradigm

- All aspects of the curriculum integrate multicultural, critical thinking and justice concepts and practice. As Enid Lee points out, "It's a point of view that cuts across all subject areas and addresses the histories and experiences of people who have been left out of the curriculum. It's also a perspective that allows us to get at explanations for why things are the way they are in terms of power relationships, in terms of equality issues" (Lee, 1995).
- Teachers actively incorporate their children's life experiences and interests and tailor curriculum to meet the cultural, developmental and individual needs of their children.
- Content includes diversity and justice issues related to gender, class, family forms and disabilities, as well as ethnicity and culture.
- Teachers view children as active learners who learn from each other as well as from adults. They also consider cooperative learning and participation in the governance of their classroom as crucial components of educating for equality.

## G. Teacher Preparation

### Tolerance Paradigm

- Training content typically consists of information about various cultures and a compilation of multicultural activities to use with children. Training occurs in a separate module or course, rather than being integrated into the "regular" curriculum class.
- Methods tend to emphasize providing

### Transformation paradigm

- Teacher training challenges students to uncover, face, and change their own biases, discomforts, and misinformation and identify and alter educational practices that collude with racism and other institutionalized discrimination and prejudice.
- Training also enables students to

information through readings and "spokespeople" from various ethnic groups.

- Training does not require teachers to uncover or change their own biases and discomforts, or to learn about the dynamics and manifestations of institutional racism.

#### References:

Hilliard, A. January, 1992. "Racism: Its origins and how it works." Paper presented at the meeting of the Mid-West Association for the Education of Young Children, Madison WI.

Lee, E. 1995. "Taking multicultural, anti-racist education seriously." In *Rethinking Schools: An agenda for change*. New York: New Press.

understand their own cultural identity and behaviors, and develop culturally sensitive and relevant ways to interact with people.

- Diversity and equity issues are integrated into all aspects of the teacher-training curriculum.
- Training methods rely on experiential and cooperative peer learning, as well as on information giving and gathering.