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## Multicultural Education: More than the Acknowledgement of Black History Month

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I remember clearly as a child, in the early nineteen sixties, the only African American mentioned in my school was Crispus Attucks. For a long time I thought there was only one black man that fought in the entire revolutionary war. From the big old musty textbooks we were given to study it was obvious very few black people had accomplished anything worth writing about. I hated history. I thought its only concern were old dead white men. Understandably, I did not do well in history. Since 2005, enrollment in public schools has increased, but "Black males continue spiraling down the achievement ladder" (Whiting 2006). All children need to see themselves in the context of what they are learning (Stiler & Allen, 2006). They need to know that many of the things that affect current day thinking and living have emerged from an amalgamation of peoples. It is important for the students' self-esteem and often can mean the difference between ritual compliance and full engagement (Baker, 2005).

Besides the content integration, and knowledge construction, I spoke about above, there are other important aspects to teaching a multicultural classroom. Prejudice reduction is important. Often students have a prejudice or bias toward a people or certain things simply because they do not know about them or it. When students are learning about one another in terms of different customs and different traditions, teachers have the power to mold generations of people whose respect and sensitivity for all humanity will promote a social justice that others will want to emulate (Stables, 2005).

Equitability in pedagogical philosophy is also important. Different races and ethnicities may have a propensity to learn differently (Dunn & Honigsfeld, 2006). In a multicultural classroom, besides just using a verbal/linguistic or mathematical approach toward learning, teachers can and should incorporate learning schemes that use rhythmic, kinesthetic or spatial designs. This may be more work for the teacher, but it provides more avenues of success for the students. Different cultures learn differently. Empowering students in their school culture may be one of the most important keys in multicultural education.

My high school was located in the impoverished ghetto of Cleveland Ohio. The student population was entirely African American. Most families were lower working class. I sang in the school choir and I enjoyed it. My first undergraduate school was more than ninety-nine percent white. One day I peeked in on a choir rehearsal. I watched for 10 minutes. The songs were strange, the music was strange, and I did not see any other blacks. That is all it took (or so I thought). I felt that was not the place for me. I was intimidated by the stark contrast between this environment and that, to which I was accustomed. In fact, most of the school's activities were dominated by white students. I never participated in any of the prevalent activities and eventually I flunked out. I am not saying that I failed because there were no activities that made me feel a part of the school, but there was then a feeling of disconnect that remains today. There were activities that blacks did participate in. As I remember we were segregated by choice.

Though we were allowed to use school facilities and were connected to each other there never seemed to be a connection with the school. We were a school in a school.

Multicultural education is one of the greatest challenges for educators today (Boyd, 2004). The difficulty lies in the teachers' enthusiasm to become multicultural themselves. Teachers will need to learn about different cultures if a multicultural classroom is to function in a fashion that makes all students feel welcomed and eventually obtain a feeling of belonging which for some children could be the difference between passing and failing.

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