

Chapter 29

Addressing Critical Multiculturalism in Online Education Using a Poly-Framework Approach

Srikanta Banerjee

Walden University, USA

Jill A. Firtell

University of Liverpool, UK

ABSTRACT

Given the increasing number of available e-learning platforms, individuals are now able to pursue degrees and courses through an online modality. As a result, education has proliferated to include individuals from varying cultural groups, age distributions, and occupational qualifications. With the inclusion of a wide variety of groups, multicultural considerations are critical. However, from a multiculturalist and poststructuralist perspective, conventional models of multiculturalism are considered essentialist and often fastened by tradition rather than dynamic and continuously evolving practices. In this paper, the authors will apply multiculturalism to online education; present a critical perspective; and finally demonstrate a novel, dynamic and adaptable model that uses a poststructuralist viewpoint in order to meet the multicultural needs of the online student of today and possibly tomorrow. This model is derived from the key strengths of the Social Ecological Model, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, and Kolb's learning styles.

INTRODUCTION

The global e-learning market is burgeoning at an extremely rapid rate (Schneider, 2016), and is expected to generate \$325 billion in revenue by the year 2025 (Research and Markets, 2016). One of the reasons for such unbridled growth is that regardless of physical location, e-learning has simultaneously allowed

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students from resource-limited countries to access quality education in a more flexible environment. While the objective of online education in High Income Countries (HICs) is transferring knowledge, building economy and continuing education, in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) the objective is to increase educational opportunities for students who may not otherwise have access (Atkins et al., 2016); however, this assumes a level of human readiness and infrastructural support systems which may not be available in LMICs. Depending on the discipline, e-learning requires different levels of understanding, social dynamics on a community or group level, and a systematic online community level of engagement (Panzarasa, Kujawski, Hammond, & Roberts, 2016). Multicultural practices are not only critical to effective online education, but also critical to fostering sustainable student success.

Multiculturalism has traditionally taken a secondary priority over the pedagogical requirements of instructional design and online learning. The purpose of the poststructuralist criticism is to provide a framework for deconstructing the primacy of logocentrism in online education, and instead focus more so on the ontological formations. Ontological formations were first introduced by Paul James in order to demonstrate how social relations are imperative in defining reality (James, 2006); this holds true in online education as well. Campbell (2008) states that the emphasis needs to shift from the cultural masses to addressing the struggle between phenomenological and structuralist observations. This approach can effectively underscore the individual's experience and perception, and hence challenge the structural and normative assumptions. More importantly, the structure of knowledge needs to be realized. This will be adjusted by introducing a novel concept.

In this chapter, we will discuss and propose a novel poly-framework approach that can be applied to the online learning environment and address the poststructuralist criticism of multiculturalism. Furthermore, multiculturalism will take on a broad definition to include generational considerations, as well as racial, ethnic, and occupational differences. By creating mutual dialogue around power dynamics (i.e., the complexities of power sources; both positional and personal) within the scope of online discussions, online education has the potential to create a transformed educational environment and change agents who are true champions of social justice. Additionally, we will discuss Kolb's Learning Style, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, and the Social Ecological Model, out of which a novel framework will emerge. We will use examples from the health sciences discipline in order to illustrate the complexities of the model. Not only is this framework appropriate for the field of health and humanities, but it can also help extricate the nuances of online learning, particularly in a multicultural world. The framework can be adapted to other disciplines as well.

BACKGROUND

E-Learning: Bridging Educational Disparities

E-learning addresses the educational gap in some disciplines by providing high quality instruction through synchronous and asynchronous capacities in a multicultural environment. Technology allows the focus to shift from a teacher-centric to a student-centric approach by creating a culturally accessible classroom. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds can simultaneously interact and share personal experiences, practices, and challenges. For instance, in the health sciences, while there is a noted shortage of medical providers, there is a greater shortage in primary care providers and public health practitioners mainly

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