

Chapter 10

Reimagining Multicultural Education: Needed Transformations at the Epistemological Level

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education has actively endeavored to undermine inequalities and imbalances by offering pedagogical frameworks for accounting for and managing cultural diversity. However, foundational literature on multicultural education seems to be dominated by Western scholars, mainly American. This assumption is not in alignment with the objectives of critical education which seeks to stymie power imbalances and grant visibility to less popular individuals along with their cultures, understandings, and perspectives. That is why it is important to ask questions about whether multicultural education has exhibited any signs of seeking to stymie the hegemony of Western episteme in terms of its theory and praxis. This chapter argues that it is necessary to include other epistemologies in multicultural education theory and praxis in order to realize global cognitive justice. The main aim is to make a case for the possibility of further developing multicultural education by integrating other knowledges and ways of knowing.

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INTRODUCTION

The changes brought about by globalization have not only considerably increased immigration, neoliberal attitudes and economic exploitation but also exerted a significant impact on education in various contexts (Spring, 2014; Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). The theory of multicultural education has sought to establish lacerations in the long-continued power imbalances (Banks, 2004; Sleeter, 2010; Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014). However, these attempts to undermine colonial-like relations among cultures and, thus, individuals might not have been multicultural themselves. In other words, it seems, at this point, defensible to argue that the prominent conceptions and theorizations in multicultural education do not reflect multiculturalism in terms of knowledge production which is dominated by US scholars' research, e.g., James A. Banks, Meira Levinson, Shirley Steinberg, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay among others. If we come to realize that multicultural education has been theorized and informed primarily by Northern-Western ways of knowing (Garcia & Baca, 2019), we can make a case for the idea that theory of multicultural education may not be as multicultural as it is supposed to be, at least in terms of knowledge representation that drives the wide range of studies, knowledge and practical application of multicultural education.

Western thought continues to dominate most scientific domains rendering epistemologies of the south (Sousa Santos, 2018) marginalized and situated within border thinking (Mignolo, 2018). Going beyond the normative understandings of the western narrative of modernity necessitates considering other epistemologies that have been unrecognized (R'boul, 2020). In particular, Asian, African and Caribbean philosophical and epistemological traditions may contribute other insights to multicultural education that may not have received substantial attention. This alternative perspective can ameliorate the scope of analysis by providing a different way of knowing and introducing other cosmologies into the global discourse of knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) about multiculturalism and multicultural education (Talbani, 2003). A field that seeks to promote social justice has to reflect these principles in terms of its theory first. As long as the main theorizations are coming from western sources and the theory itself remains western-centric, the extent to which multiculturalists can be confident in the possibility of undermining power imbalances should be questioned..

The usual ethics underlying any engagement with multicultural education are liberal and influenced by western thought (Miled, 2019). Western hegemony in multicultural education scholarship can be relatively broken by dissemination of, for instance, Islamic knowledge and ethics, which encourage activism, social justice, tolerance and intercultural exchange. Focusing on other non-popular perspectives from the global south (Sousa Santos, 2014) can draw attention to other understudied dimensions of multicultural education including the religious and the cultural knowledge that students bring to the classrooms. Managing cultural diversity may also entail managing religious diversity that is often the main basis of discrimination in non-western contexts; that is why other non-popular perspectives are highly pertinent to such discussions especially with regards to the discrimination and 'Othering' towards religions and non-Western worldviews (Poulter et al., 2016)

With the unprecedented cultural and religious diversity, there is a need to better understand the educational thought other than Euro/American-centred history of intellectual thought and spirituality (Sabki & Hardaker, 2013). This chapter is informed by the necessity to ensure epistemic justice (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007) in multicultural education in terms of not only its theory but also its objectives. It aims to (a) evaluate the prominent theories in multicultural education and the extent to which they are either informed by western or non-western epistemologies, (b) draw upon postcoloniality and geopolitics

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