

Addressing Ethnic and Cultural Diversity through Cultural Responsive Pedagogy: Pushing For Equity Pedagogy and Cultural Competence in the Nigerian Educational System

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Abstract: - The continuous search for better living standards and globalization has encouraged the movement of people from different parts of the world. This has posed a great strain on education in the 21st century. Diversity in the classroom is on the increase, adopting effective and efficient teaching practices that suits all the learning needs of multicultural and ethno linguistically diverse students is becoming imperative. There is a growing need for the educational system in Nigeria to move from the “one-size-fits-all” model of education to more culturally relevant pedagogy where education is built around the learner, rather than the learner being required to fit with the educational system. This article seeks to address ethnic and cultural diversity through cultural responsive pedagogy; it is aimed at having an all-inclusive classroom and pushing for pedagogies that promote equity and cultural competence in the Nigerian educational system. The article outlines the roles and need for infusing cultural responsive pedagogy into the educational system. It is also aimed to promote the creation of conducive classroom conditions, and support educational stakeholders in the creation of education systems that are responsive to ethnic and cultural diversity. Through the reviews of various literatures, the paper placed emphasis on the need to advance tolerance for diversity, developing respect, values of responsibility across all levels of education.

Keywords: Cultural Responsive Pedagogy, Cultural Diversity, Equity Pedagogy, Ethnic Diversity, Cultural Competence.

I. INTRODUCTION

In light of the changing ethnic, religious, and cultural demographics in the nation's schools and the increasing number of culturally diverse populations in this country, it is crucial that educators acquire the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to be culturally proficient and to create culturally proficient classrooms that meet the academic and social needs of all demographic groups (Lindsey, Graham, Westphal, & Jew, 2008). The mere acquisition of knowledge is not enough to make positive contributions to problem solving, knowledge should be transferable and applicable to real life situations from the local to the global. Ethnic or cultural diversity in the schools should not be viewed as a problem but as a means of exploring and harnessing the potentials of the diverse groups. Diversity in the schools could

potentially provide opportunities for children to broaden their perspectives and worldviews, as well as to learn about and share in different lifestyles, belief systems, and traditions (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999; Stern La Rosa & Bettman, 2000). Culturally responsive pedagogy is considered imperative for effective curriculum content selection and instructional classroom management. Scholars agree that teachers in today's classrooms need to teach from a multicultural perspective, a perspective that requires being culturally responsive (McIntosh & Green, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Howard (1999) stated that it is important for teachers to use curriculum that honors each student's culture and life experience.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world” (Banks, 1993, p. 23). A growing appreciation of cultural diversity is demonstrated by more than its acknowledgement and tolerance, but also by a desire to preserve that diversity as a valuable asset for addressing the many challenges faced by the global community now and in the future. Additionally, one can recognize a strong desire to preserve diversity in response to the threat of loss of cultural identity in the face of globalization and because of the benefits of community cohesiveness through unique cultural expression (Mason, 2007).

This paper is predicated on the belief that a curriculum that is culturally relevant to societal needs and interest may develop learners that would be able to use their education for the growth and development of the nation. Also, exposure to a variety of experiences enriches lives by broadening perspectives and validating each person's uniqueness and sense of belonging to a larger whole (Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson, & Tlusty, 2000). In light of the changing ethnic, religious, and cultural demographics in the nation's schools, an increasing number of scholars and practitioners have made the call for teaching practices that are informed by cultural knowledge possessed by students. In this entry, the author discusses culturally responsive pedagogy as a conceptual idea,

and a practical way of rethinking equity in the classroom, content and pedagogy in a more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse society. The author presented a general overview of Nigeria's philosophy of education, defines the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, discusses its roles in education and offers additional strategies for integrating it into the school curriculum.

II. CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Cultural Responsive Pedagogy

Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. She bases this definition on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated in the life experiences and situations that students are in, they are more meaningful and more easily learned. Research indicates that when ethnically diverse students are taught through their own experiential and cultural filters, academic achievement improves (Au & Kawakamai, 1994; Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hollins, 1996).

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence has been defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Lee, Cosby, & De Baca (2007) extend this definition, describing cultural competence as "The ability to work effectively across cultures; it is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system. Cultural competence means understanding one's own identify and values, and how these influence one's perceptions. Cultural competence requires knowledge, skills, experience and the ability to transform these into practices which result in improved services".

Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is an important complement to demographic diversity in that it reflects not just differences in personal characteristics, but also cultural factors specifically associated with those characteristics. "Cultural diversity reflects the unique sets of values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations, as well as language, symbols customs, and behaviors, that individuals possess by virtue of sharing some common characteristic(s) with others" (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999, p. 281). According to Doherty and Chelladurai (1999), culture as a set of shared understandings shapes the cognitive schemas people use in ascribing meaning, adopting values, and making choices about their behavior. Behavioral cultural expressions in turn reinforce that culture.

Culture is a complex concept that encompasses shared ways of achieving meaning in people's lives. According to Coakley (2007), "culture consists of the ways of life that people create as they participate in a group or society". Diversity is also a

complex notion that entails differences of many types, including physical attributes (e.g., race, sex, age, physical ability), social attributes (e.g., education, income level), and cultural attributes (e.g., beliefs, values, preferences). Thus, diversity is perhaps best defined as "the presence of differences among members of a social unit that lead to perceptions of such differences and that impact...outcomes" (Cunningham, 2007a). Diversity thus includes both demographic differences and cultural differences. According to Cunningham (2007a), these types of differences are likely to be interdependent, so managing diversity involves attending to both demographic and cultural diversity as interrelated phenomena.

Equity Pedagogy

According to Zirkel (2008), equity pedagogies are pedagogical innovations specifically designed to address issues of educational equity. One focus of equity pedagogies is to develop and use teaching techniques and methods that can address different learning styles and to develop pedagogical approaches that facilitate the educational achievements of lower performing students. Equity pedagogy is viewed as pedagogy of empowerment that is designed to help students become reflective, thoughtful citizens dedicated to social change and justice (Ball, 2000; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Equity pedagogy also assumes that the cultures of students are valid, teaching must reflect the lives and the interest of students, and that students must be provided opportunities to construct meaningful knowledge (Ladson Billings, 1990). Banks & Banks (1995) propose the need for instruction that reflects the cultural background and learning styles of students, actively involves students in knowledge construction, and develop skills of a just, multicultural, and democratic society.

Ethnic Diversity

People, James; Bailey, Garrick (2010) defined an ethnic group as a named social category of people based on perceptions of shared social experience or one's ancestors' experiences. Members of the ethnic group see themselves as sharing cultural traditions and history that distinguish them from other groups. Ethnic group identity has a strong psychological or emotional component that divides the people of the world into opposing categories of "us" and "them." ethnic identities divide and unify people along a series of vertical axes. Thus, ethnic groups, at least theoretically, cut across socioeconomic class differences, drawing members from all strata of the population. Operationally defined, ethnic diversity involves the relationship that exists between people who share common cultural, language and religious affiliations. It's the existence of multiple ethnic groups living within the same geographical location coexisting to pursue similar goals. The differences in ethnic, language, culture, values systems, religion, and local traditions that make up various groups in a society or community also accounts for the existence diversity

III. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Nigerian Educational System

Nigeria is a pluralist society comprising over two hundred and fifty different ethnic groups (Fadeyiye, 2005; Falola & Heaton, 2008; Williams, 2008). There are approximately two hundred and fifty different languages and over four hundred dialects (Akamere, 2001; Mbeke-Ekanem, 2000). Nigeria as a nation emerged from diverse socio-cultural entities (Akamere, 2001; Falola & Heaton, 2008; Mbeke-Ekanem, 2000; Williams, 2008) with an estimated population of about 170,000,000 (Nigeria - CIA - the world factbook.2012). These existing differences, calls for an education that will enable learners harness their full potentials and make useful contributions to the sustainable development of the nation. There are many theories that are used to underpin the educational system in Nigeria. These theories are generally regarded as 'eclectic' (Adenokun, 2006; Akinsanya, 2012; Osokoya, 2002; Osokoya, 2008). They are eclectic in the sense that they do not adhere to a particular philosophical outlook. The National Policy on Education (NPE) suggested four approaches to education in Nigeria: a pragmatic approach, an existential approach, an idealistic approach, and a realistic approach (National Policy on Education, 2004). According to the National Policy of Education, a 'realistic' approach to education underpins science, technical and vocational subjects. The teaching and learning of these subjects involves the carrying out of practical exercises and experiments that provide students with the ability to observe the natural world and understand cause and effect. Idealistic approaches to education expose students to subjects that allow them to enter discourses and evaluate evidence or meaning: such subjects include History, Political Science, Geography, Literature, the Creative Arts, and Music. An existential approach is used quite often in Religious Studies, where students apply principles and ideas to their own existence, taking biblical lessons and applying them to their own lives (O'Grady, 2003). Finally, the 'pragmatic' approach (attributed to John Dewey) and closely allied to the constructivist approach exposes students to subjects such as Social Studies which equip them with the understanding and skills to explore the world in which they live (Kivinen & Ristela, 2003).

IV. CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

The term culturally responsive pedagogy has often been used interchangeably with other pedagogical terms such as multicultural, culturally congruent, culturally diverse, and culturally appropriate. There are many variations of terminology, but all focused on curriculum and pedagogy. According to Ladson Billings (1994), culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures. It offers full equitable access to education for students from all cultures. Culturally responsive

pedagogy bridges and explains the mainstream culture, while valuing and recognizing the student so own cultures. Culturally responsive pedagogy is essential because it treats the cultural practices students develop in their home and peer communities as crucial learning resources rather than barriers to success in school. Those resources are central to youths' cultural identities, cultural competence in their communities of origin, as well as their academic success (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive pedagogy strategies can affect the way students achieve and close the achievement gap. This link between culture and student learning classroom instruction is derived from evidence that cultural practices shape thinking processes, which in turn serve as tools for learning within and outside of school (Nieto, 1996).

Although many propositions have emerged from the culturally responsive pedagogy research, there are two main points. First, culturally responsive pedagogy draws on students' home cultures as a mechanism for helping them achieve success in school. Secondly, through culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers enable their student to think critically about the injustices inherent in schools and the broader society (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995). In other words, culturally responsive pedagogy is a vehicle for examining social injustices on both a micro and macro level. As stated by Howard (2003), this type of pedagogy has been described by a number of researchers as an effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students. Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogy practices can have positive effects on culturally and ethnically diverse students, both academically and socially (Esposito, 2009).

The framework of culturally responsive teaching provides a useful lens through which to view practices (Charner Laird, 2006). Part of helping students develop positive social and cultural identities is giving credence to the culture students bring to the classroom. Culturally responsive pedagogy also fights inequities and helps to challenge the status quo. Ladson Billings (1994) emphasizes the importance of utilizing students' culture as a vehicle for learning to develop or maintain cultural competence. Schools can become affirming places for students of all races and ethnicities, rather than a setting that merely affirms the dominant, Eurocentric social paradigm.

Culturally responsive pedagogy plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. It is a pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures, and offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures. Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including student so cultural references in all aspects of learning. According to Banks & Banks (1993), teachers can make a connection between the school culture and home culture in order to make academic content more relevant. Students come to school with preferred learning styles, different life experiences, and different abilities. Banks &

Bank (1993) further suggest that teachers who use culturally responsive materials help build their students' self-esteem. Student should feel that their culture, language, and lifestyle are valued and are just as important as those of other students who maybe culturally different. When a higher status is placed on one culture and one language, students may think that their culture, language, and lifestyle are inferior.

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The Role of Cultural Responsive Pedagogy In Addressing Ethnic/ Cultural Diversity

The notion of culturally responsive education is premised on the idea that culture is central to student learning. According to Ladson-Billings, "It is an approach that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes." The use of cultural referents in teaching bridges and explains the mainstream culture, while valuing and recognizing the students' own cultures. This link between culture and classroom instruction is derived from evidence that cultural practices shape thinking processes, which serve as tools for learning within and outside of school (Hollins, 1996). Thus, culturally responsive education recognizes, respects, and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments (Nieto, 2000).

Culturally responsive educational systems instill ethics of care, respect, and responsibility in the professionals who serve culturally and linguistically diverse students. These systems have a transformative goal in all their activities and nurture the creation of school cultures that are concerned with deliberative and participatory discourse practices (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive educational systems create spaces for teacher reflection, inquiry, and mutual support around issues of cultural differences (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas, 1991). Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the beliefs that all culturally and linguistically diverse students can excel in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development, and they are provided access to high quality teachers, programs, and resources (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999).

Esposito and Swain (2009) were of the opinion that culturally relevant pedagogy should serve two main purposes; it should utilize students' cultural experiences to increase their academic engagement and it should help students think critically about the inequities and injustices that exist in their

schools, communities, and society in general. However, the means through which to practice culturally relevant pedagogy are far less concrete than the basic ideals it should promote.

Culturally responsive teaching, according to Gay (2010) is, "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them. Essentially, utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy should help students see the social and cultural inequities that exist in society, while also presenting them with the tools to fight those inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ladson-Billings (1995a) argues that teachers have historically attempted "to insert culture into the education, instead of inserting education into the culture" (p. 159). Culturally relevant pedagogy is committed to preparing students for eventual citizenship by asking them to think critically about the society in which they live (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Lee et al (2007) describe the outcome of cultural competence in education as "equity in access and opportunity for all students" (p.3). Some might argue that this is surely the desired outcome for all students in education settings. By contrast, Gay (2000) believes the goal of culturally responsive teaching is to improve the academic achievement of students while cultivating their cultural identity. Culturally responsive pedagogy facilitates and supports the achievement of all students, not just those from culturally diverse backgrounds (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Proponents of culturally responsive pedagogy argue that recognition of cultural diversity, although necessary for all students, is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 1995) and to situate the intended learning in meaningful and relevant tasks. This recognition includes understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive pedagogy infused into the school curriculum is aimed at fostering respect and appreciation for cultural and ethnic diversity. This view is supported by Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Waxman & Tellez, 2002; Collins, 1993; as they propose that a climate of caring, respect, and the valuing of students' cultures is fostered in the school and classroom. Bridges are built between academic learning and students' prior understanding, knowledge, native language, and values.

The infusion of culturally responsive pedagogy into all levels of the educational system constitutes a vital tool for addressing diversity in a multicultural classroom. Adopting the right type of education is a great asset to transform the society. According to National Policy on Education (2004:8) Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument for change: any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an education revolution. Educators all learn from and about their students' culture, language, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their

students' lives (Apthorp et al, 2003; Lee, 2003; Lipka, 2002). Local knowledge, language, and culture are fully integrated into the curriculum, not added on to it (Demmert, 2001; Hollins, 1996).

Why We Need To Integrate Cultural Responsive Pedagogy In Our Educational System

Nigeria recognizes education as an asset for national development. In order to fully attain these set national objectives and effectively maximize the potentials of the citizenry, there is need to critically align the school curriculum to recognize diversity and multicultural nature. The quality of instruction at all levels needs to be oriented towards adopting culturally relevant pedagogies.

The five main national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the second National Development Plan and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education included:

- I. A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- II. A great and dynamic economy
- III. A just and egalitarian society
- IV. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens and
- V. A free and democratic society. (National Policy on Education, 2004).

Banks (2001:6) asserts that: citizens in this century need the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to function in their ethnic and cultural communities and beyond their cultural borders and to participate in the construction of a national civic culture that is a moral and just community that embodies democratic ideals and values, such as those embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Students also need to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become effective citizens in the global community. This further maintains the need for adopting culturally relevant pedagogies aimed at creating a link between acquiring knowledge and skills needed to make positive contributions to national development and the global community at large.

Cultural and social diversity is certainly not a new issue facing us humans. It has always existed, and we remain challenged by it, however, the burgeoning complexity of our times calls upon us as educators to face this challenge more directly to value diversity, honor it with integrity, and to preserve the cultural dignity of our students (Lindsey, Roberts & Campbell Jones, 2005, (p. xv).

In order to be truly transformative, cultural diversity in curricular materials needs to "be chosen and delivered in ways that are directly meaningful to the students for whom it is intended" (Gay, 2000, p. 112). Curricular changes must be accompanied by instructional changes (Gay, p. 182). Curricular and instructional reforms are important, but they will only be effective to the extent that the teacher is similarly committed to developing cultural competence in the

classroom. Banks et al. (2001, p.6) suggests, "If teachers are to increase learning opportunities for all students, they must become knowledgeable about the cultural background of their students". Novick (1996) in Phuntsog (1998) argues that at the heart of the issue concerning the purpose of schooling is the question: "What kind of society do we want?"(p.62). The majority of educators would respond in ways that promote and include values and qualities of equity and social justice, so that everyone – no matter what background – has equal opportunities. Schools and teachers unquestionably have a significant role in these outcomes being achieved. Phuntsog (1998) found that educators and researchers writing about culturally responsive teaching, generally agreed that what was needed was a transformative curriculum in schools; one that provides opportunities for students to develop their higherorder, critical thinking skills and hence enables them to analyze their situations and transform them by becoming agents for social change.

In today's schools, a need exists for teachers who know the students they are teaching; know what to teach, and know the methodologies to effectively teach students (Kea & Utley, 1998). Teachers need to be able to use quality research-based pedagogy that meets students' needs and facilitates their learning so that they attain their fullest potentials. Culturally relevant pedagogy is responsive to the academic, emotional, and social needs of all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse ones (Kea, Campbell-Whately, & Richards, 2006). It is important for educators to "critically examine their own sociocultural identities and the inequalities between schools and society that support institutionalized discrimination to maintain a privileged society based on social class and skin color" (Kea, et al., 2006, p. 3). Subsequent to this examination, they need to use their commitment and skills to confront obstacles to change, becoming agents of change to establish socially just and equitable conditions in schools (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

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Strategies For Implementing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

This article recommends some strategies to implement culturally responsive framework. These strategies are adapted from the work of Kugler and West-Burns (2010):

- Expand upon what is considered as the "curriculum" – recognizing both the informal and the subtle ways in which the curriculum defines what is and what is not valued in our schools and society.
- Use inquiry-based approaches to student learning to develop engaged and self-directed learners. Support students in making decisions about their learning that integrate who they are and what they already know with their home and community experiences.
- Use a variety of resources, including community partners, to ensure the learning environment and pedagogical materials used are accessible to all learners and that the lives of students and the

community are reflected in the daily workings of the classroom.

- Resources, materials and books should present both local and global perspectives. See the curriculum as flexible and adaptive to the lived experiences of students so they see themselves and their lives reflected in daily learning opportunities.
- Know and build upon students' prior knowledge, interests, strengths and learning styles and ensure they are foundational to the learning experiences in the classroom and the school.
- Ensure that learning engages a broad range of learners so that varied perspectives, learning styles and sources of knowledge are explored.
- Differentiate instruction and provide a wide range of methods and opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning, ensuring both academic rigor and a variety of resources that are accessible to all learners.
- Work to ensure that the socio-cultural consciousness of students is developed through curricular approaches, emphasizing inclusive and accepting education, to inform critical examination and action regarding social justice issues.
- They should use equity pedagogy, that is, in their teaching procedures, strategies and styles teachers should aim at improving the academic achievement of learners from diverse background; and should create an empowering school culture and social structure, concentrating on assisting learners from culturally diverse setting to be treated fairly (Agirdag, Merry, and Van Houtte 2014:5-6).

V. CONCLUSIONS

At the core of this article is the view that given the diverse backgrounds of the learners in schools, culturally responsive teaching methods need to be adopted to ensure that the full potential of each learner is tapped and developed and to close the achievement gap between learners of diverse backgrounds and their mainstream peers (Au, 2009:179). Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching and can be infused across all subject curriculums. Its infusion can adopt a transformational approach to teaching and learning, in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured and the structure of the curriculum is changed to enable learners view critical issues, contents of learning from a more global perspective.

The academic achievement gap among different racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic status groups of students is exacerbated by inequitable educational opportunities and resources, access to highly qualified teachers, and access to proper pedagogy and pedagogical resources (Lalas, 2007). Such a demographic imperative (Banks, 1995; Dilworth, 1992) and demographic divide (Gay, 2000) calls for more equitable education—that is, infusing

the curriculum with culturally relevant materials that prepares learners to be productive members of their society and the global community at large.

The curriculum used in the Nigerian educational system, also need to include teaching approaches that are culturally relevant to our various demographic regions. These might include integrating students' diverse cultures into curriculum, creating learning environments to reduce prejudice and oppression, developing equitable pedagogy for all students, incorporating multiple knowledge construction processes, and getting involved in empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2008). The call for culturally responsive pedagogy remains a potential solution to making education more relevant in the face of growing multicultural diversity evident in the school environment. There is a need to advocate for a shift toward a pedagogy that emphasizes inclusion for all and promotes an enriching environment for diversity to thrive within respectful and understanding limits.

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