

A Look at the Approaches to Multicultural and Anti-Racist Education Through the Lenses of Critical Race Theory: The Reported Benefits and Failures

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Abstract

Multicultural and anti-racist education are pedagogies developed to include all students, despite their cultural and lingual backgrounds. As educative pedagogies, they recognize the importance of ethnic and cultural diversity in affecting people's existence, social involvements, identities, and educational opportunities (Gay, 2004). This paper presents various approaches that encourage curriculum reform through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The paper highlights the efficacy of the different approaches in providing equal opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to succeed academically.

Keywords: multicultural education, Critical Race Theory, diversity, curriculum reform, anti-racist education

1. Introduction

In today's classrooms, race, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, languages, and religious beliefs are elements of diversity in education. Students and their families immigrate to Canada from other countries for myriad reasons including looking for a safe place to live, for better opportunities, for greater access to medical services, and to obtain an advanced education (Canadian Immigration Law Firm's report, 2016).

Researchers such as McAndrew (2009) and Shalabi (2012) argue that the traditional public-school system does not adequately recognize the difficulties minority students face while trying to cope with two cultures. This can

cause a crisis of identity stemming from the fact that children and their parents are physically distant from what they call their "homeland," while they are culturally and linguistically distant from their adopted country. McAndrew's (2009) study of the academic performance of youth immigrants showed fewer positive features in immigrant students' performance compared with other groups in terms (p. 15).

With increasing diversity in Canadian classrooms, different teaching pedagogies are required (Li et al., 2019; Paniagua et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2020), and the need to incorporate differences among students becomes challenging. Research has found that the dominant forms of knowledge and ways of thinking can be seen in many elements of

schools' systems, such as within curricula, language teaching, and epistemology (Baker, 2001; Dei, 1996; Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami & Hodson, 2002; Nieto, 2017). Accordingly, emphasis on group relations and understanding among culturally and linguistically diverse students becomes a priority (McLeod & Smolska, 1997, p. 2).

Banks and Banks (2001) and Gay (2004) assert that multicultural education can be defined as curricular framework emphasizing ethnic and cultural diversity. They stressed the importance of multicultural education in social involvements, identities, and educational opportunities. Multicultural education, according to Banks and Banks (2001), is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process geared toward changing the structure of schools to provide equal opportunities for males and females, exceptional students, and students from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to succeed academically in school.

Anti-racist education recognizes that students' outcomes are affected by racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism which are rooted in the social structure (James, 1995, p. 33). Dei (1996) asserted that anti-racist education is a way to criticize the use of power and privilege "to elicit social reward and mete out social punishment/penalty along the lines of race and social difference. It means an exploration of issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality as sources of socially constructed difference" (p. 254). Anti-racist education should provide all students with the necessary skills to challenge oppression and eliminate domination (James, 1995). Scholars (e.g., Banks 2004; Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio et al., 2002; Gibson, 1984; Sleeter & Grant, 2007) have discussed different approaches that support curriculum reform and multicultural and anti-racist education. Cultural and linguistic diversity are integral parts of multicultural and anti-racist educational approaches (Flores et al., 2009; Robinson, 2011). Different cultures around the world have been affected by racism and colonialism. Racism is a social phenomenon characterized by different behavioral practices and shaped by factors such as history, politics, economics, and context. Azzahrawi (2020) believes that many cultures face various types of discrimination because of their different views from the dominant culture. After the success of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, overt racism is no longer

socially acceptable in most places in the western world; however, covert racism has emerged, causing uncensored values and negative feelings (Dovidio et al., 2002).

This paper presents various approaches that encourage curriculum reform through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The paper examines the efficacy of the different approaches in providing equal opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to succeed academically. According to various researchers (Creswell, 2007; Jefft et al., 2011; Manji, 2021), CRT can aid in understanding how racism functions both individually and structurally within society. It also emphasizes the socially constructed and discursive nature of race while focusing on racial subordination and prejudice.

Furthermore, when CRT is used in research, the investigator puts race and racism front and center in all aspects of their study and challenges conventional research texts and worldviews. Therefore, CRT assists in examining multicultural approaches from a critical perspective. The paper will start with a brief overview of the CRT. It will then examine the multicultural and anti-racist approaches through the lens of CRT by highlighting the reported benefits and failures. The paper ends by emphasizing the critical aspect of multicultural and anti-racist education in developing global identities among students that can communicate, respect, and understand others.

2. An Overview of the Critical Race Theory

The CRT movement was created by a collection of scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams, who were examining the correlation between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT examines the assumptions behind the call for equal rights and attempts to re-examine equality and power relations among groups. It goes beyond traditional civil rights and ethnic discourses to place these relationships in economic, historic, and social settings (Coello et al., 2003).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) have established basic tenets for CRT as follows: (1) racism is ordinary, not aberrational, and it permeates our society at all levels, not just loud, blatant happenings; (2) there is an interest convergence

in our society, where racism advances the interests of most White people irrespective of their socioeconomic status which creates a lacking of incentive to change things; (3) race and racism are products of social thought and construction; (4) differential racism exists, in which the dominant society will often racialize different minority groups in accordance with economic and political currents.

3. Approaches to Multicultural and Anti-racist Education Through the Lenses of CRT

In this section, I have used CRT as a conceptual framework to examine multicultural and anti-racist education approaches, and their role in student empowerment in education. This section will cover: (1) the multicultural approach, (2) the contribution approach, (3) the additive approach, (4) the transformation approach, (5) and teaching the exceptional and culturally different student.

3.1 The Multicultural Approach

The multicultural approach recognizes the many influences on a person's life. This approach acknowledges that an individual's existence is characterized by one's values, beliefs, thoughts, language, customs, and actions (Garcia et al., 1991). Advocates of this approach (Banks, 2019; Gibson, 1984; Sleeter & Grant, 2007) use the phrase "multicultural education" to clarify methods that support human rights, social justice, equal opportunities, cultural diversity, and the distribution of power equally among oppressed groups. Research carried out by Grant and Sleeter (2007, 2011) and Grand and Chapman (2021) claims that this approach requires inclusive education that transforms mainstream society into a culturally diverse society, where all people have equal opportunity for success. Curriculum content is reorganized to incorporate diverse racial and ethnic groups, genders, and social classes in this approach.

Inviting others to participate in multicultural dialogue has its challenges, especially the problematic imperialist assumption that often underlies it. According to Gibson (1984), this approach tends to overemphasize ethnic identity. Jones (1999) questioned, "What if "togetherness" and dialogue-across-difference fail to hold a compellingly positive meaning for subordinate ethnic groups? What if the "other" fails to find interesting the idea of their empathetic understanding of the powerful, which is theoretically demanded by dialogic

encounters?" (p. 299). The challenge is not the complete silence of 'Others', but the refusal of the dominant to hear the voice of 'Others' (Jones, 1999).

When using CRT, the multicultural approach is seen to develop the cultural knowledge of diverse cultures and less as an action plan to defeat social injustice among minorities. Therefore, Gibson (1984) argues, there is no reason to assume that classes directed toward studying ethnicity and cultural perspectives will stop prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, educational institutions may see multicultural education as ensuring "color blindness" to confirm equality and inclusiveness for all students. However, education scholars (Howard, 2010; Rios et al., 2014; Urrieta, 2009) have argued that educational practices that appropriate "color blindness" ideologies are not color blindness at all. Rios et al. (2014) claimed that these strategies of erasure are simultaneous practices of whiteness (pp. 87-88). These "colorblind" ideologies "reproduce racial and cultural hegemony in school practices" (Howard, 2010, p. 53).

Despite its challenges, the multicultural approach plays a critical role in students' empowerment. This approach seeks to change school culture and organizations, and to represent and empower diverse groups of students. According to Gibson (1984), the multicultural approach aims to produce learners who can work successfully in different societies. It develops a fuller understanding of one's heritage and traditions, strengthens one's identity, and increases motivation and academic success. Moreover, the multicultural approach reduces prejudice and discrimination, increases educational opportunities and social justice, and develops language competence (Gibson, 1984). It also strengthens the validation and authentication of students' identities. Carr and Klaussen (1997) purport that one of the purposes of multicultural education is to "validate the lived experiences of an increasingly diverse student body" (p. 67).

3.2 The Contribution Approach

The contribution approach focuses on heroes, holidays, and separate cultural events. In this approach, the curriculum remains unchanged in its fundamental structure, goals, and main ideas (Banks & Banks, 2010; McCreary, 2009). Ethnic content may be limited to particular days or

events such as Martin Luther King Day, Black History Month, Women's History Month, or Asian Heritage Month, decorating the walls with displays of ethnic art and inviting cultural performers into school assemblies, events which are celebrated in schools. Also, in this approach, teachers have the opportunity to highlight people's contributions to society. According to Lintner (2004), in the contribution approach, teachers can educate students about African American contributions to liberate society from the existing historical subjectivity of stereotypes, prejudices, and biases towards African Americans and other minority groups.

However, these activities do not help teachers and students question systems of racial power. Many of the heroes in their communities are invisible in dominant societies' textbooks and teaching materials (Banks & Banks, 2010). Besides, teaching about heroes and holidays does not ensure any discussion of oppression, social inequity, human rights, justice, and struggles with racism and poverty. The Contributions Approach does not study an ethnic cultures' uniqueness and different characteristics. It strengthens stereotypes and misconceptions. Therefore, students are not helped to understand them as complete and dynamic wholes (Banks & Banks, 2010). Even though teachers might engage students in lessons or experiences related to the dominant culture and history, little attention is given to the history and culture of ethnic groups.

In the contribution approach, the curriculum remains unchanged concerning its principles, goals, and characteristics. It gives the impression that diversity is celebrated; however, people's knowledge of other cultures and ethnicities is minimal (Banks & Banks, 2010). While multiculturalism encourages us to look at societies as a mixture of different but equal pieces, societies still privilege white people with unequal political, social, and economic power.

Multicultural education seeks to celebrate differences rather than recognize the colonial and economic relations that marginalize racialized peoples. McCreary (2009) believes that this approach fails to provide learners with the critical tools necessary to build a truly transformative education. Furthermore, Banks and Banks (2010) argue that selecting ethnic heroes for the school curriculum originates from the viewpoint of the dominant society, not from the perspectives of ethnic communities, limiting

the heroes' contributions to society. Also, it is a one-time experience with an ethnic hero that does not reflect the hero's role in the total context of society.

Furthermore, the stories of people of color, women, and anyone who challenges the dominant society are neglected, and included in ways that misinterpret their real meaning and contributions to history (King, 1992). Rosa Parks is an example of a muting of cultural heroes; she became the "tired seamstress" rather than a lifelong community activist (Dyson, 2000). Martin Luther King, Jr. became a sanitized folk hero who enjoyed the support of all good Americans rather than being the FBI's public enemy who challenged an unjust war and economic injustice. Cumming-McCann (2003) argued that the heroes represented in this approach tend to emphasize the myth: "If you work hard enough, you can make it." (p. 10). The implications are that if you do not "make it" you must not be trying hard enough. Heroes are taken out of a cultural context and viewed from a dominant perspective, which can reinforce stereotypes by presenting a limited understanding of ethnic cultures (Cumming-McCann, 2003).

3.3 The Additive Approach

In the additive approach, concepts, themes, and ethnic content are added to the curriculum without changes to its basic structure (Banks & Banks, 2010). It is "the first phase in a transformative curriculum reform effort designed to restructure the total curriculum and integrate it with ethnic content, perspectives, and frames of reference" (Banks & Banks, 2010, p. 241). This approach can help students draw connections to real-world examples and support teachers' and students' efforts to be creative, authentic, and original. It also utilizes collaborative and cooperative learning when ethnic content is added. Gorski (2017) argues that creating and sustaining bias-free and discrimination-free communities requires everyone to understand that this represents a basic responsibility.

When using a multicultural curriculum, educators should be able to (a) recognize subtle forms of bias, inequality, and discrimination; (b) be thoughtful and equitable when responding to bias and inequity; and (c) correct discrimination and inequity, not only by addressing individual bias, but also by studying the process by which

social change occurs in larger groups. Gorski (2006) asserted that the additive approach reflects a minor shift to inequitable conditions because the content is disconnected from a larger transformational process, and it cannot be considered multicultural education. Educational materials, events, concepts, ideas, and issues are presented in this approach from a dominant perspective and mainstream historians (Stearns, 2003). CRT's advocates challenge both the White privilege and the claims that educational institutions make towards objectivity, color-blindness, race, neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2005). At the same time, concepts, themes, and ethnic content about marginalized groups are added to the curriculum; yet inequities, oppression, and Eurocentric perspectives are not challenged.

Banks and Banks (2010) believe that the additive approach fails to help students understand how the dominant and ethnic cultures are interrelated and fail to assist students in viewing society from diverse cultural and ethnic perspectives. Furthermore, they suggest that it limits the students' understanding of how the histories and cultures of the diverse groups are organized and the effect of the dominant culture on their oppression. Content, materials, and issues are added to curricula as additions instead of being an essential part of the curriculum. For this reason, teachers and students may face a variety of problems since students lack both the content background and the attitude sophistication to participate effectively (Banks & Banks, 2010). Furthermore, Stearns (2003) believes that the additive approach can reflect the impression that there is one central culture and everyone else is fortunate to be included, which is not a healthy multicultural perspective. Furthermore, the additive approach does not fundamentally change the power structures embedded in the school or educational system.

Examining the additive approach using CRT "shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69).

3.4 The Transformation Approach

In the transformation approach, the curriculum's fundamental goals, structure, and perspectives are changed. Students are encouraged to view concepts, issues, and themes from several ethical perspectives. According to Banks and Banks (2010), this approach permits students to criticize and analyze groups' social positioning through how knowledge is presented. The transformation approach advances the fundamental right of all students to engage in core academics and arts, and it addresses the urgent need for students to develop social and intellectual skills to expand understanding in a diverse society. It also develops students' criticality of their cultural, linguistic, familial, academic, artistic, and other forms of knowledge.

Banks and Banks (2010) state that teachers should assist students in becoming acquainted with how these arts were shaped in society and how ethnic groups have contributed greatly to literary traditions. Furthermore, when students study the nature of English and proper language use, educators should support them in understanding the linguistic richness and language diversity in society and how a wide range of multicultural groups have influenced the development of several societies (Banks & Banks, 2010).

However, to apply this approach, a complete transformation of the curriculum is required. Teachers must be willing to deconstruct and challenge their existing knowledge, critically search for alternative perspectives, and include voices and ideas other than those traditionally presented to them from the mainstream cultural perspective. Nieto and Bode (2008) stated that multicultural curriculums must be antiracist to be inclusive and balanced. They also believed that it is essential to teach students the beauty and the ugliness of our history "rather than viewing the world through rose-colored glasses. Antiracist and multicultural education forces teachers and students to take a closer look at everything as it was and is, instead of just how we wish it were" (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 45).

3.5 Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different Student

Teaching the exceptional and culturally different approach is concerned with helping students from different cultural backgrounds, including students with disabilities, adapt to the school's

and society's mainstream demands. The ultimate goal of this approach is "building bridges to the curriculum that enable students to succeed and adapt to the requirements of the traditional classroom" (Grant & Sleeter, 2007, p. 11). This approach assumes that education is an investment that allows individuals to gain skills for successful employment that certain groups have not achieved because their home and cultural environments are different from mainstream environments.

Grant and Sleeter (2007) believe that most teachers using this approach typically maintain high expectations for their students. They believe that the traditional curriculum is useful for all students but must be adapted to various students' needs. Teachers using this approach "[take] responsibility for making sure that learning happens. They find out what works for their students and what does not. They figure out how to fill in gaps in learning or supports for learning" (Grant & Sleeter, 2007, p. 11).

Further research conducted by Grant and Sleeter (2007) identified several significant weaknesses in this approach. They believed that there was minimal research on how to teach students of color, and that the methodology itself was too restricted because it placed the weight of eliminating racial discrimination on individuals of color and their teachers, instead of sharing responsibility with the general population, particularly Whites (Grant and Sleeter, 2007).

Banks and Banks (1995) argued that achieving equity in teaching means changing strategies and the classroom environment. It also means respecting and including students with diverse racial backgrounds, skills, and attitudes and helping create a democratic society. Furthermore, multicultural education, "must deal with the total culture of the school. It must be aware of the differential treatment of students who have very dissimilar experiences because of certain differences based on race, gender, culture, or class" (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014, p. 4).

4. Conclusion

CRT investigates the assumptions behind equal rights and seeks to reexamine what constitutes equality and power relations between groups. Race and racism are products of social thought and construction. Racism exists, in which the dominant society often racialize different minority groups in accordance with economic and political currents. Multicultural and

anti-racist education are curricular frameworks developed to include all students, despite their cultural and lingual backgrounds. Treating each student with dignity, appreciation, and respect is essential for effective and inclusive teaching. However, to have anti-racist and multicultural education, educators need to recognize the essential role of race and ethnicity in shaping students' identities, behaviors, and beliefs. Acknowledging students' race and ethnicity will allow educators to understand students' attitudes and behaviors.

I firmly believe that education in multicultural and anti-racist settings and environments is a driving force behind global coexistence, collaboration, productivity, and strong leadership. Brownlee (2022) and de Guzman et al. (2016) agree that incorporating students with diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and contributions, and supporting them to communicate with other groups in school and society, will ultimately assist in developing more cohesive and productive communities. The global population consists of many different cultures and identities. Various studies (Gerrard, 1994; James, 2013; Shaeffer, 2019;) have confirmed that opening societies' minds to different languages, cultures, identities, principles, justice, and inclusiveness can occur through education. It might be a struggle for some students to find the motivation to stay in school when the cultural aspects that are important to them have no value in school. This feeling of security will affect how people understand their relationship to the world and their future possibilities.

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