tomer relations at the Department of Telematic Learning Systems. This benefit extends not only to the university's competitive advantage, but also increases the value received by the customer for his or her hard earned money (or that of the bursaror). As the telematic method of distance learning is a new venture for the PU for CHE and its clients, a scientific approach to customer service management is of the utmost importance to ensure a maximum value adding experience to all role players in the tertiary educational system. The research thus reported on here is but one such an attempt to base managerial decisions on scientific evidence to the benefit of all role-players.

Similar research continues on all the courses delivered by the Department of Telematic Learning Systems. As the TLS continues their search in service excellence, new service items are emerging. The PU for CHE attempts to act pro-actively and aims towards realising customer service as a competitive advantage in order to become the benchmark of service quality in telematic learning in the RSA and possibly the continent.

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Multicultural education and its politics

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This article is an account of how multicultural education is experienced within the US society and its national school curriculum. The author has had an opportunity to partly witness this situation, when he was selected as one of the South African Educators who participated in the June-July 1999 South African Transformation Institute (SETI) at the Indiana University in US. Multicultural education, as a transformative concept or movement as others view it, is very vital to prepare members of the society and learners in the schools to develop intercultural skills. On the other hand, it is also not an appreciated concept in the minds of those who do not identify with transformative concepts/movements like it. In this article the author, by reflecting on the US experience, attempted to communicate this message through the literature survey, and by reporting about the workshop activities that he took part in regarding the concept of multicultural education. In the end, implications of these accounts on US, South Africa and in general are pondered upon.

Introduction

Multicultural education is not a concept that lulls the mind, but rather one that prompts debates. It has significantly impacted schooling in the United States (US) for at least the last two or three decades (Banks cited by Milligan, 1999:2). Its proponents, it is asserted, have argued compellingly, that education that excludes the experiences and contributions of other diverse cultural groups and women is miseducative as well as robs its entire society of the treasure endowed in the multicultural nature of that society (Milligan, 1999:2).

The author refused to be silent on arrival in the home country about the experiences he had encountered in the US. He first shared them with his colleagues. This disquiet is relevant acknowledging the fact that our South African society is also a multicultural one, and it evolves from a history when its multiculturalism could not be celebrated due to the (Apartheid) hegemonic ruling. He therefore chose to share the views on multicultural education, from an informed position of the US experience. The basic reason is to engage especially the thinking of our educators regarding the impact of multicultural education that is also pertinent to a national transformation effort in education. Thus, the aim of the author is to generate an educational engagement geared towards the transformation of the exclusive mind-set that still bedevils some of our learning institutions and creating an atmosphere accommodative of the cultural diversity that makes our South African society, and advance the idea of a call to a unified force towards oneness in difference. The mind map that the author chose to follow in this article is, describing multicultural education and the concepts that are quite close to mind whenever the term multicultural education is mentioned, unravelling some of the debates regarding the developments and practices of multicultural education in the US, presenting the outcomes of the discussion exercises that the South African Educators took part in, and finally discussing the implications of these outcomes.

Definition of multicultural education and related concepts

Multicultural education is a highly challenging concept which can be viewed as an organising principle for systemic school reform (Ovando & Collier, 1998:147). In fact, Nieto (1996:9) advises that without thinking of multicultural education in a transformative socio-political approach, it just means a trip to "fairyland". Many authors in the likes

of Banks, who have by now stamped their authority in the field, hold this transformative view, which is well expounded in the manner they define multicultural education in a school context: it is a reform movement designed to make some major changes in the education of students, by affirming that all students, regardless of their gender and social class, and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in schools (Banks, 1993:3; 1997:3; 1999:1; Bennett, 1986a:52-53; Manning & Baruth, 1996:2-3).

Not only is multicultural education seen as an educationally reform movement, but rather a struggle in that sense. Duarte (1998:2) attests to this point by revealing a twofold mission of multicultural education: it represents a struggle first, against the education system's propensity to marginalize and misrecognise non-dominant populations, and second, to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to be educated in conditions where they are empowered to freely explore and develop the moral and political fabric of their lives. Thus, multicultural schooling is seen as the presence of children drawn from different racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds to learn together in the same classroom not just for the sake of it, but to expose them to different cultures, where their respective cultures are accepted as valuable educational resources. This description is also advanced in the goals of multicultural education (Banks, 1987:29; 1994a:16-18; 1994b:16-18; 1999:1-4):

- it liberates individuals who know and look at the world from their own cultural and ethnic perspectives and therefore are denied important parts of the human experience, from this cultural and ethnic encapsulation or blinders;
- it helps individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures, and so to respect them;
- it exposes students to cultural and ethnic alternatives;
- it provides all the students with the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, the mainstream culture and within and across other ethnic cultures;
- it reduces the pain and discrimination experienced by members of some ethnic and racial groups because of their unique racial, physical and cultural characteristics;
- it helps students to master essential reading, writing and computational skills, as multicultural readings and data can be highly motivating and meaningful because the content deals with significant human problems like race, ethnicity and social class within the larger society;
- it helps students, within a pluralistic society, to affirm and understand their home and community cultures, whilst at the same time being able to free themselves from their cultural boundaries, without losing recognition of them.

It cannot be emphasised like it appears hitherto, that the definition of multicultural education and its goals as outlined above suggest a transformative venture that leads to the equal treatment of learners and a recognition and appreciation of the cultural diversity that is there in the learners and the entire society. It suggests an interactive learning process that cuts across racial, gender, cultural, ethnic, etc. divides amongst learners.

Certain terms that have already been used here, like ethnicity, race, culture, and other implied terms, which are related to the concept of multicultural education come under spotlight, to be defined in order to create a framework that will inform the ensuing process of discussion in this article.

Multiculturalism:
In Oliver's (1990:26) words, this is the affirmation that all people are members of their society, and that they are conditioned by their surroundings and cultures. It is opposed to any inherent bias against other cultures, but rather shows an apprehension to find interest in different world views, as well as examining them critically, absorbing what is found to be of worth and value. This is only possible if individuals are exposed to knowledge and skills from other societies.

Culture:
It means ideation, symbols, behaviours, values and beliefs that are shared by a human group, including institutions or other components of human societies that are created by human groups to meet their survival needs (Banks, 1999:115). An aggregation of beliefs, attitudes, habits, values and practices therefore form a culture of a human group as a view of reality (Shade & New, 1993:17). In this case Shade and New (1993:317) cite Nobles, who states that culture is a collective approach to the world that provides a group and individuals within that group a design for living. Culture also covers a modal personality of a unique group of people that provides rules and guidelines for appraising and interpreting interactions with the events, people or ideas encountered in daily living (Shade & New, 1993:317). Culture is further perceived as that human-made part of the environment that satisfies all basic needs for survival and adaptation to the environment (Bennett, 1986b:7). These definitions of culture are blended into the anthropologic and universally recognised characteristics of culture (Bennett, 1986b:8) that are unique to a human group, which are:

- language and communication, including signs, symbols, verbal and non-verbal messages;
- a social structure that includes family or kinship systems, age sets and the accompanying rites of a passage, territorial grouping and systems of rank and stratification;
- an economic system that provides for the distribution of goods and services to meet biological and social needs;
- a political system or some form of government for implementing public policies, assigning power and responsibility, keeping order, and settling disputes;
- a religious system that includes explanations of the supernatural, values and world view;
- aesthetic expression, including art, music, architecture, and costuming;
- scientific knowledge and technology;
- protection against invasion;
- enculturation or systemic ways of teaching people the accepted standards for perceiving, behaving and doing.

Ethnicity:
It denotes a common history, a sense of peoplehood and identity, values, behavioural characteristics, and communication, all of which are shared by a human group called an ethnic group (Banks, 1999:115). Banks (1999:115) adds what is important to an ethnic group — its members usually view their group as distinct and separate from other cultural groups within a society. In this case an ethnic group exists within a larger society, but is socially distinguishable or can be set apart by others and/or by itself, primarily on the basis of racial and/or cultural characteristics (Bennett, 1986b:32; 1990:39).

Diversity:
This is a term that relates to a multifaceted perspective on culture. According to Arvizu (1994:76), it means recognition of variation among people related to their cultural heritages, racial and ethnic identities, and gender and class experiences. It arouses a need to understand universals and differences in the human species, behaviour respectful of people and their many forms of intercultural relations. It aims at cultural pluralism. It is observed (Boyle-Baise, 1999:17-18), that commonly, cultural diversity and cultural pluralism are intertwined in multicultural education discourse. In a project of recognition and redress, the affirmation of cultural diversity and the promotion of cultural pluralism are therefore viewed as twin aspects of empowerment (Boyle-Baise, 1999:17-18).

Racism:
Although the term race refers to biological differences among people, it has long had the use of differentiating between groups of people (Manning & Baruth, 1996:40). The way this differentiation has been handled in legal and social circles has bred a highly destructive connotation in the history of humankind (Manning & Baruth, 1996:40). In this light, Bennett (1990:43) defines race as an erroneous concept used to divide humankind into broad categories on the basis of physical or biological characteristics, such as the size and shape of head, eyes, ears, lips, nose, and the colour of skin and eyes.

Cultural assimilation:
This is a process in which persons of diverse ethnic and/or racial backgrounds come to interact, free of constraints, in the life of the larger community (Bennett, 1986b:36). It is a one way process through which members of an ethnic group give up their original culture and are absorbed into the core culture, which predominates in the host society (Bennett, 1986b:36). This can be viewed as a natural assimilation that happens through intercultural processes. However, this is another concept that has also experienced an abuse in the history of humankind; the experiences of which are thorny to groups that were (are) assimilated in oppressive terms. In this case the assimilating group may not necessarily and naturally be a core culture but one that imposes its cultural ideology on the oppressed through legally and/or educationally enforced practices. The driving force behind assimilation of such nature is the political, economical, ideological, etc. orientation of the oppressive group. In this case the dominant or assimilative group is either the mainstream or the so-called "advantaged" minority. It can thus be adduced that cultural assimilation can be positive or negative.

Cultural pluralism:
This is about a process of compromise characterised by a reciprocal or mutual appreciation and respect between two or more cultural groups (Bennett, 1986b:37). Members of a pluralistic cultural society are permitted to retain many of their cultural ways, as long as they conform to those practices deemed necessary for the survival of the society as a whole (Bennett, 1986b:37). According to Goodey (1988:15), cultural pluralism involves mutual exchange of cultural contents and respect for different views of reality and conceptions of man, with the belief that the cultures of different groups enrich a nation and provide it with alternative ways to view the world and solve complex human problems. Thus, cultural pluralism advances the principles of cultural preservation (retain one's core cultural ways) and cultural integration (being adaptive of other cultures to enrich one's own). This is a powerful tool to exfoliate one's cultural peels and be appreciative of as well as adaptive to others' cultures.

Acculturation:
It is the term whose meaning is close to cultural pluralism. It is a process by which one cultural group takes on and incorporates one or more cultural traits of another group, resulting in new or blended cultural patterns (Ovando & Collier, 1998:144). One important difference is that acculturation can be extended to a point of a loss of the acculturated's core cultural ways, thus resulting in one being a total culturally "born-again" especially by coercion, whereas it may not be easy in the case of cultural pluralism due to the mutual compromise of those engaged in the process.

Enculturation:
Important to every culture is the process of enculturation. It is a cultural generation-to-generation educative process. It is therefore the actual process of learning norms, beliefs, language, etc. as it takes place in a specific culture (Ovando & Collier, 1998:138). It is based on the belief that culture is not automatically a cultural baggage carried in the genes, but is more articulated in the manner, consciously and unconsciously, in which a particular group transmits cultural patterns to succeeding generations (Ovando & Collier, 1998:138).

Cultural equity in education:
It means equal opportunities for all students to develop their fullest potential (Bennett, 1986a:52). According to the requirements of equity in education, the curriculum policy and practice that give fair treatment to learners is one that is culturally sensitive and responsive to all learners' needs in an equal and fair manner.

Having gone through this definitional exercise, and thus bearing in mind the meanings of the concepts given, let us ponder upon the development and practices of multicultural education as they unfold in the education system of the US. The reader is drawn to the fact that the extent to which multicultural education is a "hot potato" in the US set-up differs from one state to another, even from one district/region to another within the individual states.

The developments and practices of multicultural education in the United States
The areas that are looked at under this section are the cultural composition of the US society and its strains realised in language education and constitutional manipulations, and the existing bipolar perceptions about multicultural education.

The cultural composition of the US society and its strains
Talking multicultural education as it unfolds in the US schools and the society is no fantasy. The movement on multicultural education assumes to be the answer that can tumble the walls of the cultural and racial tensions in the schools and the larger society, after the failures of the "melting pot" strategy (Manning & Baruth, 1996:25) in trying to provide an ideal environment for the cultural complexity of the US. On realising that the subtle ideal was to "melt" the other so-called minority cultures in order to Americanise them, groups of these cultures chose to resist the "melting pot" process. They chose to remain solid by cultural terms in the Americanising furnace. Amongst these are the Asians and Hispanics who continue to cherish and stick to their culture, African Americans, who fought to overcome the cultural dominance and discrimination, and through Civil Rights Movement have sought to understand and maintain their cultural roots (Manning & Baruth, 1996:25). This Civil Rights Movement is understood in terms of how African Americans were ripped off their cultural identity and pride through oppressive slavery.

One cannot go a thought further than Richards' description of the situation cited by Ladson-Billings (1992:378): "Throughout their sojourn in America, Africans have been taught the separateness of themselves from Africa and Africans. The teaching has been so ingrained that even in those communities which are "most African" there is the greatest scandal of "being African". Manning and Baruth (1996: 25) take the argument forth, citing McCormick's words that although some cultural assimilation undoubtedly occurred as culturally diverse people adopted European-American customs and standards, generally speaking, the melting pot began to adjust to a perspective of the US society being a "salad bowl." This became an alternative metaphor to refer to each cultural group as reflecting its unique identity and culture in the "bowl." Thus, the "salad bowl" perspective in which all people live together, yet holding onto their cultural way of life is viewed as a more realistic and humane expression of the US society (Manning & Baruth, 1996:25). Common cultural values should vitally be sought after for the harmonious coexistence where different cultures are able to adapt and appreciate each other's differences. Some degree of positive assimilation might be necessary for economic survival and for coping with everyday life, as long as a people's culture is not threa-

tened (Manning & Baruth, 1996:25). Multicultural education advances in part the contemporary perspectives, which view differences as personal characteristics that can enrich the US society and "melt away" cultural blinkers and social injustices. It therefore seems to advance the belief of the "salad bowl" metaphor.

It follows, then, that elementary and secondary educators face a daunting task of having to understand and accommodate the differing values, customs and traditions of their learners. This need increases correspondingly with the escalating cultural diversity of the US (Manning & Baruth, 1996:24). The cultural make-up of these learners can be conceptualised in terms of the cultural groups existent in the US, categorised as: Native Americans; African Americans; Asian Americans; Hispanic Americans and other European Americans; various tribes, Aleuts, and Eskimos; Africans, West Indies, and Haiti's; Pacific Islanders; Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Other Hispanics. These cultural groups also show ever-increasing numbers of persons which have an important impetus on the US schools. It is projected, for instance, that if the current population trends continue, somewhere between the years 2030 and 2050, schools-age children now labelled as "minorities" by the federal government will be the majority in all regions of the country (Ovando & Collier, 1998:28).

The main groups can further be divided according to sub-groups, for example, Polynesians, Micronesians and Melanesians are regarded as divisions of the Pacific Islanders (Smith, 1998:11). This microcosm of the US society has also raised challenges that face the US Census Bureau. Amongst the findings about the flaws of the method employed in the census survey (Smith, 1998:17-19), is the US Census Bureau's categorisation of the society on the basis of race — Whites, Blacks, American Indians, Eskimos, Aleuts, Asians and Pacific Islanders, Others, Multiracials, remainder of other race, and the tradition of applying independently derived population estimates as controls to sample survey data, that underscores the true count of the population.

It is not the aim, within the scope of this article to provide a detailed account of how education is administered in the US, but rather to give an overview of the findings of Ovando and Collier. These overviews were personally resounded by Ovando during the multicultural education class discussions as one of the facilitators. Designing and implementing policy for the educational provision and practice in the US is no easy job. In fact, research by Ovando and Collier (1998:27-61) bears evidence to an ongoing amendment of laws; especially those pertaining to language. This amendment is directly linked to the picture presented above on the demographics of the US society. On the other hand, the increasing momentum of the transformation of schools is viewed as a response to the educational practices of the past several decades that failed to promote the academic achievement of all students alike (Ovando & Collier, 1998: 28). These practices underserved students with close connection to their cultural heritages (Ovando & Collier, 1998:28). It must further be noticed that the history of the US is labelled with numerous instances of language-based discrimination and coercive assimilation. This scenario can be represented by the English language promotional equation of "America First = English First".

The English language in the US has a track record, in part, from the time when English was meant to bulldoze languages of the non-English speakers. It is evidenced that by the 19th century, many public and private schools used non-English languages (German, Swedish, Dutch, Polish, Czech and Spanish) as mediums of instruction (Ovando & Collier, 1998:35). Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, English was already taught to immigrants, largely for purposes of "Americanization" rather than professionalising it as second language (Ovando & Collier, 1998:37). The first formal step was by the US Department of State and the Rockefeller Foundation to support the founding of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan. The institute pushed for the teaching of English as a Fo-

reign language (EFL) even in other countries (Ovando & Collier, 1998:37). By the 1960s the expansion of English was huge through teaching international students attending the US universities, availing the English Language textbooks, and teachers who had received training, deployed to teach the language abroad (Ovando & Collier, 1998:37).

Constitutionally, the 10th Amendment places education as a duty of individual states and their local authorities, and not the federal government. Thus, the responsibility for educational policy decision-making resides at the state and local levels (Ovando & Collier, 1998: 39). It is the opinion of the author, that this structural arrangement is responsible for lobbing for further unequal distribution of the educational resources in a culturally biased way. Some degree of central control for equal opportunities, more than what is witnessed in the US, is necessary even in a federal system of ruling. Cases behind this cause for questioning relate to the unsuccessfulness of Title VII, which is about the funding policy for language minority education, challenged by the Stanford Working Group, and California's come-and-go state laws that go with the politics of the bilingual or English Second Language education (Ovando & Collier, 1998:43, 50-51).

One fact cannot go unnoticed, however, that the US schools are currently undergoing a gradual process of transformation in terms of administrative structures, instructional methods, curriculum materials, and assessment practices, which are all being analysed, modified and in some cases, radically changed (Ovando & Collier, 1998:28). As like it was mentioned earlier, the major cause for these changes lies in the reality of the pressure by the rapidly changing demographics, expressed through increasing heterogeneity of learners, both in urban and rural areas of all the regions of the country (Ovando & Collier, 1998: 28). Paradoxical to this growing heterogeneity is the growing politics of bilingual and multicultural education where there is a divided perception. The bilingual education for the US education assumes a continued development of the student's primary language; acquisition of the second language, which for many language minority students is English; and instruction in the content areas utilising both the primary and second languages (Ovando & Collier, 1998:4). The advocacy of the bilingual education is in line with multicultural education and opposed to a "sink-or-swim" ("perish-or-learn English") or English-Only Movement, the metaphor that enjoys promotion by its proponents in California, Florida, Arizona and Colorado by way of constitutional voter initiative (Ovando & Collier, 1998:30). Ovando and Collier (1998:34) hold an ideal view, that as the world becomes more interdependent through systems such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, government should actively cultivate skills in languages other than English, through programmes like the developmental bilingual education. Educationally, when language is lost, much of the knowledge that such language represents is also lost (Ovando & Collier, 1998:37). It becomes sensible enough then, from this idea, that the challenge for the US society, schools, and everyone else should be to close shops on perpetuating the "melting pot" and "sink-or-swim" metaphorical attitudes and start to pride themselves in the metaphor of "salad-bowl" expressive of the goodness of diversity and live up to the idea in every possible way.

Bipolar perceptions of multicultural education

Like it has been elaborated, multicultural education is currently a "hot potato" among the US society. As a result, it has generally divided the society into two groups that hold opposing views about it. A dichotomy of perception is realised between the opponents (mainstreamers), who feel threatened by the goals of multicultural education, and the proponents (minorities), who want to see the situation change in the schools to accommodate cultural diversity. The proponents perceive multicultural education as an education for freedom that is essential in today's ethnically polarised and troubled world (Banks, 1999:4). In

addition, the proponents feel that the opposing views of multicultural education are but misconceptions. Not only do they feel this way, but they have also gone a step further to speak and write in defence of multicultural education.

The polarised debate is exacerbated by divergent views that the citizens hold about what exactly constitutes an American identity, and about the roots and nature of American civilisation (Banks, 1999:4). Banks (1999:4) takes this claim further when he purports that the debate has sparked a power struggle over who should participate in formulating the canon used to shape the curriculum in the nation's schools, colleges and universities. The author has at least seen the truth behind this claim during discussions with some schools' mana-gerial personnel and superintendents on visiting their sites. What the canon debate has resulted in, as expressed in popular press and in lite-rature surveyed by the author, is the overshadowing of the progress of multicultural education that has been made during the last two decades (Banks, 1999:4-5). This has also perpetuated harmful misperceptions about theory and practice in multicultural education and has consequently raised racial and ethnic tension, as well as trivialised the field's remarkable accomplishments in theory, research and curriculum development (Banks, 1999:5). The bipolar perceptions referred to are subsequently looked at closely (Manning & Baruth, 1996:7-8), in terms of the opponents and proponents of multicultural education.

• *The perception that multicultural education is or is not for others*
Opponents' view: multicultural education is an entitlement programme and curriculum movement for African Americans, Hispanics, the poor, women and other victimised groups.
Proponents' view: multicultural education calls for a restructuring of educational institutions so that all learners will acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to function effectively in a culturally diverse nation. Rather than focusing only on specific gender and ethnic movements, multicultural education tries to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring and active citizens.

• *The perception that multicultural education is an anti-western tradition or is not*
Opponents' view: multicultural education is anti-western.
Proponents' view: multicultural education is anti-biased to culture and thus not anti-western. In fact, it is argued, many culturally diverse writers in the field, such as Rudolf Anaya, Paula Gunn Allen, Mexine Hong Kingston, Maya Angelou and Tony Morrison are western writers. Thus, multicultural education is a thoroughly western movement that grew out of the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement was grounded in such democratic ideals as freedom, justice and equality.

• *The perception that multicultural education will or will not divide and undercut unity*
Opponents' view: multicultural education propagates a divided US society.
Proponents' view: the view of the opponents of multicultural education is based partly on a mistaken understanding of the offering. It follows that the claim that multicultural education will divide the nation assumes an already disunited nation of the US. Without doubt, therefore, the US is one nation politically. However, sociologically the nation is deeply divided along lines of race, gender and class. Multicultural education seeks to unify a deeply divided nation rather than divide a highly cohesive one. Traditionally, the US society and the schools tried to create unity by assimilating students from diverse racial and ethnic groups into a mythical Anglo American culture that required a process of self-alienation. However, even when culturally diverse students became assimilated, they continued to experience exclusion from the mainstream society.

It is inferred from the above scenario about the dichotomised perceptions that multicultural education, coupled with what it seeks to promote, is not just an easy-to-implement ideal, but rather an issue that calls for "thought surgery" first in the society. Having said this, it is important to give credit to the wonderful developments regarding multicultural education in the US despite the educational struggles as presented above, acknowledging scholarly integrity and accuracy (Banks, 1999:5).

Having presented the above experiences as backed up by theory the author deemed it important to give a practical picture by including part of the class activities on multicultural education that took place during the SETI.

Class activities with the South African Educators
SETI is organised and sponsored by USIS (United States Information Service). It is an educational institute that takes place annually. A selection of a cross spectrum of educationally involved educators from South Africa is run through the American Embassy in Pretoria. The author was selected as one of the 1999 group. The period that included departure, training and return was 18 June 1999 to 31 July 1999. The training covered modules including OBE, multicultural education, designing and planning workshops for teachers, leadership, and workshops on incorporating technology into the instructional environment. The participants attended discussion classes and executed the set activities. Multicultural education was the core module as it was assigned a greater share of the training than the other modules. The South African Educators (including the author) were opportuned to meet different facilitators for this module, some of whom are the authors acknowledged in this article. This article presents the class activities that were facilitated by Bennett (acknowledged in this article) regarding the concept of multicultural education. These activi-ties appealed to the author to regard them as worth reporting with a theoretical background. A description of the South African Educators group, methodology and an activity that directed the course of discussions follow:

• *The composition of the South African Educators group*
This was a heterogeneous group in terms of culture, age, professional involvement, and representation of the provinces of South Africa. The cultures included Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa, Shangaan, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Indian, English, Afrikaans and Coloureds. The age profile was fairly distributed between younger, middle and older groups. Professionally, universities, colleges of education, provincial departments of education and educational support institutions were represented. The educators were selected from all the nine provinces of South Africa. The group comprised 28 members.

• *Methodology*
The group was divided into seven sub-groups of four each to work on two activities. No specific pattern was used in dividing the group. Each sub-group had to go through the given task in the time allocated and present their answers thereafter.

Activity One
The activity was grounded on the proposed dimensions of multicultural education, which required the participants to compare and contrast approaches to multicultural education in South Africa and the US. The activity is as follows:

Dimensions of multicultural education: A decision-making activity to compare and contrast approaches to multicultural education in South Africa and the US
Multicultural education in the United States is an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs, and

affirms cultural pluralism within a culturally diverse society and an interdependent world. It is based on the assumption that the primary goal of public education is to foster the intellectual, social, and personal development of virtually all students to their highest potential. Multicultural education is comprised of the distinct interactive dimensions listed below.

1. Movement towards equity

    This is a movement towards achieving equality of educational opportunity and equity among all identifiable groups of children and youth, particularly ethnic minorities and the poor. It aims to transform the total environment, especially the hidden curriculum (e.g. teacher attitudes and expectations, ability grouping and tracking, school discipline, classroom climate, school and community relations), to encourage the intellectual, social, and personal development of all students to their highest potential.

2. Curriculum reform

    The curriculum approach develops knowledge and understanding about cultural differences and the history and contribution of contemporary ethnic groups and nations, as well as various civilisations in the past. It strives to integrate multiethnic and global perspectives into the traditional curriculum that is primarily monoethnic and Anglo-European.

3. Becoming multicultural

    This is the process whereby a person develops some level of competence in multiple ways of perceiving, evaluating, believing and doing. The multicultural person has been described as "one who has achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural and whose cognitive, affective, and behavioural characteristics are not limited but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of any one culture. The intercultural person possesses an intellectual and emotional commitment to the fundamental unity of all humans and at the same time, accepts and appreciates the differences that lie between people of different cultures."

4. Combating prejudice

    This means lessening negative attitudes and behaviours based upon misconceptions about the inferiority of races and cultures different from one's own. Emphasis is on clearing myths and stereotypes associated with different races and ethnic groups. Basic human similarities are stressed. The goal is to develop antiracist behaviour based upon awareness of historical and contemporary evidence of individual, institutional and cultural racism in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Group discussion and report

"Think about public education in South Africa. To what extent are these dimensions present, possible, and appropriate for the South African context? What modifications might be desirable? Mark each dimension with a plus (+), question mark (?), or zero (0) to indicate your strongly positive, uncertain, or strongly negative feelings about each dimension. Briefly explain the possibilities and problems of each dimension within the context of South African society and education. How might you modify each dimension to fit the goals of public education in South Africa? Which dimension do you feel is most applicable? Which is least applicable?"

After a brief moment of reflecting on the dimensions given, the participants overwhelmingly felt no need for discussion as they thought to a great extent they were all applicable to the South African context. In other words, their response indicated a plus (+), (no sheets were completed for the questions asked). Unfortunately, the facilitator only agreed without asking any further deliberations. Even though the described dimensions of multicultural education generally made the group to identify with them, an evoked follow-up on the "Briefly explain ...", "How might ...?" "Which dimensions ...?" "Which is ...?"

could have most probably yielded insightful picture about South Africa and the US. However, this does not render the activity useless. In the author's opinion, this leaves a reasonable suspense to engage the reader into thoughtful reaction in the light of the aim of the article.

Activity Two

The second activity was a decision-making activity on genres of research and practice in multicultural education. It was as follows:

Genres of research and practice in Multicultural Education: An introductory decision-making activity

"**Instructions:** Listed below are examples of research and/or practice conducted in the US over the past several decades. Work with members of your group to identify examples that appear to be consistent with the core values and central goals of multicultural education. Please circle all the examples you believe are consistent and be prepared to explain your group's decision to the rest of the class."

1. This classic study of Black children's self-concept found young African American children preferred dolls with light skin. The researchers concluded that many Black children have low self-esteem and would prefer to be White.

2. In a study of African American undergraduates at Stanford University, academically talented students scored higher on standardized achievement tests when they were told they were being tested on work styles and lower when they were told their intelligence was being tested. No difference was noted among White student peers. The researcher attributed this finding to status vulnerability, or the fact that Black students felt pressure to disprove social stereotypes about their intellectual inferiority, a phenomenon he used to explain generally lower IQ test among many Black students and other students of colour.

3. A new US history text includes extensive research about indigenous cultures and societies, as well as south to north and north to south exploration and settlement patterns. It also includes perspectives based on gender, class, race and culture.

4. Contributions of African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Indians, and women are injected into an existing history text that celebrates the expansion and progress of the US society.

5. The conclusion of one widely quoted study that compared IQ scores between Blacks and Whites stated, "Negro scores averaging about fifteen points below the White average on IQ tests must be taken seriously as evidence of generic differences between the two races in learning patterns. Research suggests that such a difference would tend to work against the 'disadvantaged' generally when it comes to 'cognitive' learning — abstract reasoning — which forms the basis for intelligence measurement and for the higher mental skills."

6. Through collaborative research, teachers and researchers learn about the households and neighbourhoods in impoverished Latino communities. The teachers enliven literacy instruction with the cultural knowledge they gain.

7. Studies of desegregated schools where policies and practices are guided by theories of positive intergroup contact show equitable student achievement and strong patterns of interracial friendship. These guidelines stress the importance of an equal status environment, public affirmations of racial and cultural diversity by teachers and administrators, common goals, and opportunities for students to become well acquainted with each other.

8. Several communities in California instituted interracial summer camps for high school students. Although the goal was to reduce prejudice among adolescents, many students felt more racially prejudiced after their camp experience.

9. In a study of mother and infant interactions in doctors' offices, researchers concluded that low income Black mothers interact less frequently with their babies than do White middle-income mothers. The researchers concluded that "restricted language patterns" led to poor school performance among children from these "culturally disadvantaged" communities.

10. In a study of children on the Warm Spring Reservation, Phillips discovered that Native American children learned best in classroom contexts that emphasised cooperation over competition and minimised the obligation of individual students to perform in public contexts. She attributed this to compatibility between home and school expectations.

11. The Moynihan Report (1965) described the "tangle of pathology" and disorganisation of the African American family as seen in high rates of illegitimate births, high divorce rates, females, heads of households, and welfare dependency. This "deficit" background became an explanation for the poor school performance among many Black children and youth.

12. An ethnographic study of ten Mexican-origin immigrant families in the Southwest revealed that parents and teachers held differing worldviews that shaped their expectations about schooling and their respective roles in the educative process. Misunderstandings and misconceptions held by teachers and parents were found to negatively influence young immigrant children's experiences in school.

13. In numerous schools across the country language minority children and youth are punished for speaking their first language. Academic courses are often taught in English only, whether or not students can understand the language.

14. Recent studies of second language acquisition show that language minority students benefit when they are taught academic subjects in their first language as they are learning English. Often these students are encouraged to use and value both languages.

15. World geography textbooks perpetuate myths and stereotypes through omissions and inaccuracies in photos and narratives. Common examples are misidentification of Japanese traditions as Chinese, an over-emphasis on Mbuti and Khoi peoples on the African continent, and Western Europeans as the primary agents of progress and civilisation.

16. ET Hall's research supports the argument that all humans are to some degree "captives of culture." His findings concerning differing cultural expectations about time and space can be used to avoid cross-cultural misunderstanding and conflict in multicultural classroom contexts.

17. Historians such as Arthur Schleshinger argue that US is a "melting pot where differences of race, wealth, religion, and nationality are submerged in the pursuit and exercise of democracy." He argues that the "cult of ethnicity" has gone far and, if pressed, will lead to "the fragmentation, re-segregation, and tribalisation of American Life."

18. According to James A. Banks, internationally admired scholar in multicultural education, "An important goal of multicultural education is to help students understand how knowledge is constructed. Students should be given opportunities to investigate and determine how cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and the biases within a discipline influence the ways that knowledge is constructed."

19. A recent textbook reform effort focused primarily on changing the skin colour of people included in the book's pictures and illustrations. In early editions all persons were depicted as White and in the revision many shades of skin tone were included.

20. The Council on Interracial Books for Children has published guidelines for detecting bias in texts and trade books. The focus is on 1) the historical perspective presented, 2) the characterisation of Third World peoples, 3) how customs and traditions are depicted, 4) the terminology used to describe the peoples and their culture and the type of language ascribed to them, and 5) the nature of the illustrations.

21. As part of their sociology class, undergraduate students were required to complete a minimum of 20 hours of community service. Each student developed a proposal for action and then looked for a location that needed the help.

22. As a result of years of research in various cultural contexts, anthropologists George and Louise Spindler have developed an approach to school reform identified as "cultural therapy." For students (especially ethnic minority students) cultural therapy is a means of consciousness raising and making them aware of unequal power relationships in the classroom, the school, and the larger society. The goal is to enable students to become change agents and to give students of colour the "cultural capital" necessary to compete equally with the cultural majority for resources, knowledge, and experiences.

23. Cooperative team learning is used in many desegregated schools to create an equal status environment and enhance learning among virtually all students. Numerous studies confirm positive race relations and equitable academic achievements when the strategy is implemented appropriately.

24. In many desegregated schools students of colour are over represented in special education and lower academic tracks. Further, a large study of secondary schools in two Indiana communities found that disproportionately high numbers of students of colour are suspended and expelled due to "teacher discretion."

The participants' reports are tabulated as follows:

Table 1 Participants' responses on the US based research and/or practice over the past several decades

Responses	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7
Yes	**3,6,7,** **12,14,** **15,16,** **18,19,** **20,**22, **23**	**3,4,6,7,** **14,16,** **18,19,** **20,**21, **23**	**3,6,7,** 10, 12, **14,**15, **16,18,** **19,20,** **23**	**3,4,6,7** **14,16,** **18,19,** **20,21,** **23**	**3,4,6,7,** 13,**14,** **16**	**3,4,6,7,** 10,**14,** **16,18,** 21,22, **23**	1,**3,6,7** **14,16,** **18,19,** **20,22,** **23**
No	**1,2,**4,**5,** **9,**10,**11,** **13,17,** 19,21	**1,5,9,** **11,**12, **13,15,** **17,**24	**1,2,5,9,** **11,**12, 17	**1,2,5,9,** **11,**12, **13,15,** **17,**22, 24	**1,2,5,**8, **9,11,**12	**1,2,5,**8, **9,11,** 12,13, **15**	**1,2,5,9,** **11,15**
Uncertain	**8,24**	2,**8,**10, 22	4,**8,**14, 21,22, **24**	**8,**10	10,15	17,19, 20,**24**	4,**8,**12, 13,17, 21,**24**

Results presented by groups and the merging of ideas

When one looks at the perceptions of the participants a certain degree of commonality exists regarding their choices in the categories of "*Yes*", "*No*" and "*Uncertain*". For the "yes" category, all groups chose 3,6,7 and 16, when six groups chose 14,18 and 23, and five groups 19 and 20. For the "*No*" category, all the groups chose 1,5,9 and 11, when six groups chose 2, and four groups 13 and 17. For the "*Uncertain*" category, five groups chose 8, and three groups 24.

In the participants' view, the values of multicultural education are well represented by the commonly chosen items by many groups, for the "*Yes*" category (Table 1). Though some more clarity was necessary regarding the researches conducted, it was felt that they indicated good and acceptable undertakings by the researchers and educators to enliven an interracial environment, both in the school settings and by extending their efforts in the communities. Multicultural classroom contexts proclaim a critical evaluation of how knowledge is constructed and dealt with in the curriculum. The participants felt that the good undertakings by the researchers and educators leave room to be desired in the South African school settings, e.g. team teaching by educators, culturally responsive approach in teaching, etc. They desired to see a time when the educational policy on non-discriminatory approaches in schools practically come into effect, especially in the historically white dominant schools. Their response in this regard was from an informed position of the realities in South Africa.

The groups questioned the researches represented in the "*No*" category. The participants called for more clarity on these researches as they felt that they conveyed a biased message about African American children and other learners of colour. In no way did they represent values of multicultural education, according to the group (Table 1). For instance, participants would have liked a critical view of the research in the list that accounted for the findings presented. The researches portrayed African American children as people with low self-esteem in the educational performance. For instance, concluding that because African Americans preferred dolls with light skin indicates that they have low self-esteem and would thus prefer to be white is unscientific and untrue. Let alone the natural probability that bright colour is always found appealing. Nothing was being said about the curriculum that is alien to them (its development, knowledge and practice), which is very crucial in this case.

Like clarity was sought in the preceding category, that was a need even for the "*Uncertain*" category. The participants could not easily take a stand in this case (Table 1).

Finally, what are the implications of the discussions regarding multicultural education?

The United States

US is a very large country (50 states) and it houses many cultures of the world by now. In addition, as the situation of cultural inter-mingling continues in education, work, social, etc. sectors, it becomes more imperative that multicultural education is inevitable. However, the system of ruling in the US appears to complicate the matter even further, i.e. national federal control 6 states control 6 local/district/regional control. It would be desirable, that the national control mini-mises what seems to be an unbridled autonomy left to the individual states and local/district/regional level. The educational system is de-centralised, leaving the greater part of the educational planning and administration in the hands of states and/or local/district/regional con-trol. Even at state level, some states pursue curriculum development and implementation at the state level, when others just give broad guidelines, with the actual curriculum work being done by the local school districts, the act that produces great variety (Williams, 1996: 269). Though it is difficult to generalise due to this variety in the US's educational system, it is reasonably sound to claim that this is con-tributory in great part towards the difficulty of any educational ini-tiative by the minority groups, to be embraced by the powers that be in different states. There is an incredible resistance by the mainstream culture, to accommodate change that is suggestive of justice owed to the minority cultures. Thus, the battle of multicultural education seems fought only by researchers and educators alone. The set-up in few selected schools that the group visited, confirmed the atrocities that were viewed in the films and other media coverage that bedevil some of the multicultural schools. Perhaps, even more, children may not necessarily see colour in their interacting in the schools, rather the adults in the families and communities do, and these overspill into the schools, as they get implanted in the children's minds at home.

It is advisable that the mainstream culture changes its perception of resistance against multicultural education and bilingual programmes in the schools. An accommodative atmosphere needs to be cultivated jointly by the authorities and the communities, where children can develop a sense of "we" and not of "I" only, in the spirit of cultural coexistence in the schools. Indeed the schools are the institutions of learning. Thus, learners should be afforded the opportunity to learn from each other's culture. US is rich in its cultural composition and that offers a potential for learning about the abundance of knowledge in a collaborative manner. The struggle on language and resisting atti-tude of the mainstreamers on bilingual programmes calls for authori-tative intervention and the uncompromising of legal acts on justice.

South Africa

South Africa is a small country compared to USA, with only nine provinces. However, it is also a multicultural country, with Africans in the majority. Emanating from the past history of minority White ruling and dominance over the other cultures, it finds itself in a dis-pensation of democratic transformation where democratic principles must be enacted. The national constitution and educational policies, which disseminate to the provinces, suggest a way of doing things that is based on democratic principles. Our educational policy documents are guided by the principles of a non-discriminatory access and provi-sion of education. The constitutional laws of equality, non-racism, etc. in turn guide this non-discriminatory access and provision.

The democratic transformation has seen the previously disadvan-taged black/African learners gain access in the historically whites-only institutions. This was however marred by racial strife when access in the historically whites-only schools was denied to black learners. Even now, incidents of racial clashes are witnessed here and there in and outside the school. The government and the ministry of education are trying their efforts to eradicate any racial behaviour in institutions of learning. Where incidences of this nature are heard of the responsible ministers, advantaged by law, are expected to intervene.

Outside the law, one can briefly account on how blacks cope with the situation in South Africa. They know many languages, including English and Afrikaans, which they were forced to learn in the schools in the time of Apartheid ruling. They are thus able to adapt by way of communication, even though to some extent this has turned into a recipe to promote the *status quo* of the dominance of Afrikaans espe-cially. One realises in the social and job set-ups that the Afrikaners take advantage of this and are therefore not prepared to compromise their language. There is a general attitude that when you are black you therefore should be able to communicate in Afrikaans. Further on, Africans are characterised by a drive for communal social activities. Typical examples are weddings and funerals, which they will not only attend but physically will help from preparation to the end, feeling that they are part and parcel of them. This practice in a way lures other cultures towards unity that they exemplify. The country's democratic laws that should be observed by all alike are also pushing for unity in part. One just thinks that learning institutions are very much implied for initiating multicultural programmes. Multicultural education is only offered as just a module within other education courses and not as full course on its own in many training institutions. As a result teachers are not fully trained to teach in multicultural contexts. Their attitudes towards learners of different cultures need to be shaped through fully recognised multicultural programmes. At school level, schoolmasters and communities should be workshopped towards a mind shift, from looking at schools as their own cultural institutions, to viewing them as learning communities, for harmonious intercul-turation and learning.

General

Multicultural education is a sensitive and emotionally charged theme, but an important offering. It advocates an ideal of liberating those that are imprisoned in their own cultural cocoons and who do not want to hatch out to perceive God's wonderful creativity in the microcosm of cultures. It strives to advance equal access of learners to education. It is thus opposed to a biased curriculum and practice on the basis of cultural, racial, gender, ethnic, etc. differences.

Cultures are equally important and true education is one that develops learners to perceive the world from their cultural point of view. But this may make them see only the island if they are not also developed to try and perceive the world as other cultures perceive it. Learners should learn how other learners interact with their environ-ment from their own cultural background. Education should therefore take into account the way society operates (McLean & Young, 1988: 11) and should aim at:

- educating the child about difference, for where diversity exists, it must be acknowledged. Culture must be shown for what it is and the child must be taught to appreciate the unity and diversity of mankind. Unity acknowledges diversity. The child must be developed to become a complete human being, who will be able to control his emotions, be sensitive and desire beauty, the good and the truth;
- educating the child about similarity. Despite differences in langu-age, culture and religion, as human beings we still need one an-other because we share needs, values and experiences;
- educating the child about the nature of society. Children must be taught how to cope with life in a multicultural society (and in a multicultural employment sector) in a fair and just manner, and must be enabled to realise their responsibilities to bring about changes for a better future.

Finally, it becomes vital; therefore, in the light of the above aims, that education in a multicultural society should be a matter of carefully programmed induction into the complexity of society (Mathunyane,

1996:24). It should articulate the important principles of learning and teaching in that regard, which are:

- Differentiation: teaching children to recognise differences and variety in life, including differential education of the child and differentiated unfolding of reality (Mathunyane, 1996:24).
- Integration: teaching children to recognise unity in diversity in the total education system to enable them to acquire knowledge of their culture and of other cultures (Abbey, Brindis & Cases, 1990:9). One culture adapts in order "to fit" the lifestyles of other cultures, without completely disregarding its own culture. Cultural integration therefore ensures equal opportunity in the context of cultural diversity, through tolerance and maintenance of positive intergroup relations.
- Continuity: teaching the children to recognise the past in order to understand the present. This means emphasising the continuing significance tradition has, for a sense of cultural identity, while on the other hand allowing for reflection, adaptation and changes to meet present needs (Mathunyane, 1996:25). It encourages critical thinking about making informed decisions about the present, based on past tradition.
- Assimilation: teaching the children to become aware that ethnic minorities may be absorbed over a period of time, into the mainstream of the dominant group in society, by adopting language, cultural modes and values of the host society (Mathunyane, 1996:25). The role of education is crucial here. Children should not be coercively assimilated into the dominant mainstream (compare with the description of the term assimilation given earlier). When it is a coercive assimilation it is no more the goal of multicultural education.

Acknowledgements

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