

THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY TRAINING OF STUDENTS OF EDUCATION IN ISRAEL: A HOLISTIC MODEL

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Abstract

This paper presents a model for the multicultural education and the cultural diversity training of students of education that is being implemented at Gordon College of Education in Israel. The model emphasizes a holistic approach in which the culture of diversity permeates the whole institution and the training is not only through courses and workshops. All levels of the institution become partners and are co-opted into the mission of furthering values and behaviors which reflect multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

Keywords: *Multicultural Education, Cultural Diversity Training, Teacher-Trainin,*

Theoretical background

The promotion of cultural diversity – the "common humanity heritage" according to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) has become one of the most pressing contemporary issues which confront nations. Laying the foundation which nurtures and develops values and tools for fostering not only understanding between different groups but moreover, reinforces human rights of all groups is one of the greatest challenges facing culturally diverse countries today.

This foundation needs to be laid at a young age and is one of the major goals of multicultural education and the cultural diversity training of teachers and students of education. It is vital to provide teachers with the tools that can develop emotional and social intelligence, the ability for critical thinking and skills to communicate among children, thus contributing towards socializing the next generation of leaders and citizens towards values of inclusion, human rights and equality.

Since the 1970's and early 1980's, there has been various studies researching different aspects of multicultural education and education in a global world. Some studies characterize multicultural education and institutions which are multicultural in their structure and principles (Banks 1981, 1989, 1991, Paramesswaran 2007, and Rosado 1997). Other studies have researched stereotypes that teachers or students of education may have towards minorities (Calabrese, Case and Hemmings 2005, Carli, Olafson and Olfason 2008, Larke 1990, Lewis 2001, Niemann 1999, Trentin, Monaci, De Lumè, and Zanon, 2006).

Other studies have focused specifically on impacting attitudes of teachers or students and have developed models and programs aimed to change prejudices and stereotypes. One of the first major researches that aimed to present a model for changing stereotypes was Allport (1954). In Allport's seminal theory of interracial and inter-ethnic contact he proposed that contact between different racial and ethnic groups can reduce prejudice and moreover can promote positive relationships between members of different cultural groups under certain conditions. In the field of education, researchers began to apply and modify Allport's model in developing programs aimed to reduce prejudices and stereotypes among teachers and pre-service teachers (Aldridge, Calhoun and Aman 2000, Bennet 1995, Aviam 1987, Brophy 1983, Burstein 1989, Davidman and Davidman

1997, Davis 1985, Gayles 2004, Pate 1981, Smith 2006 and Valerio 2001.). Many of these studies have shown that teaching programs in and of themselves, whether they are labeled “multicultural programs” or “say no to prejudice and discrimination programs” are unlikely to have a positive impact on attitudes if these programs are based solely on teaching. These studies have shown that courses, programs or workshops that were designed to increase the student’s knowledge of other cultures through facts and basic information usually had little or no effect on attitudes and behavior (Cotton 2004). Numerous models and approaches have been suggested which aim to strengthen cultural diversity sensitivity among students and teachers and have been reviewed by Cotton in 2004 and are present in numerous sites on the internet. Below, a holistic model for the cultural diversity training of students of education which integrates several principles and processes above is described.

Background on College

Gordon, the Academic College of Education, established in 1953, is located in the multicultural city of Haifa where Jews and Arabs live together. Since its establishment, Gordon College of Education has certified and accredited thousands of Israeli teachers from various ethnic and religious denominations. Gordon College is accredited to bestow both the academic Bachelor of Education Degree (B.Ed) as well as the prestigious academic Master of Education Degree (M.Ed.). Gordon College has a student body of 1200 and 200 faculty members. The student body consists mainly of women, most of them in their 20’s. In addition, there are also older students, many who are in-service teachers, having returned to study in order to receive the academic B.Ed. degree. Gordon, the Academic College of Education is proud of the fact that Jews, Moslems, Christians, and Druze students all study together in order to achieve their professional goals.

Gordon College's Multicultural Education Resource Center

Believing in the importance of training teachers to work in the multicultural realities of Israel, Gordon College of Education was the first teaching college in Israel that established the Multicultural Educational Resource Center (MERC) in 1997. MERC's goals are aimed at training teachers and developing educational programs which promote pluralistic values and leadership based on mutual respect and understanding, and enhance attitudes of tolerance and co-existence among different cultural, ethnic, religious and secular groups in Israel.

MERC's programs and activities integrate a dynamic and holistic approach in the whole process of the cultural diversity training of students of education and teachers. MERC's staff understands the importance of modeling in promoting values which they consider important for the students. The staff developed a holistic model which would promote cultural diversity and multicultural education values on all levels of the college.

A specialization trend was created which offered numerous courses and workshops relating to different aspects of multicultural education for its students. Each student who graduates from Gordon College is required to take at least one course in this trend. Many students chose to take more courses. Gordon College is the only college in Israel to have this requirement.

Gordon College's pedagogical faculty who guide the students of education in their practice teaching, were given a series of workshops aimed at providing them with the understanding of the importance of multicultural education and cultural diversity sensitivity training in their work. Moreover, these workshops suggested various pedagogical tools that the staff could use in guiding their students in their apprentice teaching.

Gordon College's faculty was encouraged to initiate research projects relating to different aspects of multicultural education in the Israeli educational. Moreover, Gordon College's faculty who were experts in the development of learning material for all levels of education, were given support in developing new curriculum aimed at furthering values and goals of cultural diversity and multicultural education. The administration at Gordon College facilitated the publication of this new curriculum and the resource development staff at Gordon College, searched and found foundations that financially supported the implementation of some of this curriculum into schools in Israel. To date, over 30 schools in northern Israel, hundreds of teachers and thousands of children have benefited by curriculum aimed to nurture and develop multicultural and diversity values and behaviors.

College activities and events were also incorporated in the process of promoting cultural diversity. National Conferences on different topics of multicultural education and cultural diversity training in Israel were organized. Cultural events and art exhibitions at the college were initiated that emphasized the multicultural character of Israel and Gordon College's students, faculty and staff. Almost every educational learning trip for the college now includes at least one aspect of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in Israel.

Promoting equality and social justice is integrally connected with multicultural education and cultural diversity training. Promoting these values includes involvement in the community, which has always been a central principle for Gordon College of Education. Community programs that are initiated by Gordon College's staff are varied and some examples are:

- Workshops in the subjects of reading, mathematics and English for children (Hebrew and Arabic speaking) with special needs and their parents;
- Program for gifted children (Jewish, Arab and Druze),
- Mentoring Ethiopian children in elementary schools
- Promoting teacher training for Jews from Ethiopian Background
- The college for young adults with special needs and
- Puppet theatre for children (Jewish and Arab) with special needs

Moreover, believing in the importance of students and teachers being involved in the community, Gordon College's faculty has developed a "mandatory" volunteering program for every student at the college. Each student of education, who graduates from Gordon College, needs to volunteer at least 60 hours of community service. The volunteer programs are varied and range from visits to nursing homes and elderly residencies, mentoring children from under-privileged areas, to volunteering in shelters for battered Jewish and Arab women and helping Arabic speaking women fill out forms for legal procedures at courts (to help Arabic speaking women fill out forms) and Women's Organizations.

Gordon College's faculty provides a model of volunteering for their students with several programs within Israel and beyond. The Special Needs Educational Resource Center (ERC) housed at Beit Channa's teaching College in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine is one example. Since 2002, Gordon College's experts in special education have been going on bi-annual education missions to the ERC and have contributed to the professional training and development of their staff.

Conclusion

Cultural Diversity Training and promoting values in multicultural education for students of education and teachers requires more than academic learning and taking specific courses. It requires a commitment of the Educational Institution to adopt these values and behaviors at all

levels of the college and become part of the culture and spirit of the college. It is only through providing the model and *putting into practice what we are preaching*, can academic institutions of higher learning that train students to be teachers who will succeed in developing emotional and social intelligence, the ability for critical thinking and skills to communicate among children, the next generation of leaders and citizens of our global world.

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