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TEACHER AND STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTICULTURAL  
ISSUES

by  
Nathan Taraska

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Science in Teaching Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 30, 2004

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved August 23, 2004

## ABSTRACT

Nathan Taraska

### TEACHER AND STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

2003/2004

Dr. Marianne Cinaglia

Master of Science in Teaching

The purposes of this research were to (a) measure the multicultural attitudes of teachers in a secondary setting, grades 9-12 ( $n=6$ ); (b) measure the multicultural attitudes of the students in those teachers' classes ( $n=92$ ); and (c) determine whether these samples of students and teachers have statistically similar multicultural attitudes that indicate a positive relationship. Teachers and students demonstrated largely positive attitudes towards multicultural issues. A series of t-tests revealed the attitudes of the two groups were statistically similar on 12 of the 13 questionnaire items regarding multicultural issues. Implications for schools, teachers, and multicultural education in general are discussed.

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## Chapter 1

### Research Issue

#### *Statement of Research Problem and Purpose*

Multicultural education is defined as a progressive method for changing education that aims for social change, social justice, and educational equity (Gorski, 2000). Studies point to the positive effect on children's perspectives about multiculturalism when schools immerse students into a multicultural environment that is interactive and stimulating (White, 1998). A large factor in these positive multicultural settings is teachers who express multicultural attitudes well grounded in issues of diversity and multiculturalism (Epstein, 1985; Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003; Schofield, 2004). On the other hand, multicultural initiatives have found a less than receptive student audience when narrow-minded teacher perspectives are involved (Patchen, 1982). Keeping these observations about the influence of teachers in multiculturalism in mind, the question arises: are the attitudes towards multicultural issues currently being exhibited by teachers similar to student viewpoints on the same multicultural issues?

In other words, are students and teachers in the same school setting constructing similar understandings and beliefs regarding multicultural issues? When students and teachers respond to the same statements regarding multicultural topics, are their responses similar or different? The answers to these very important questions could help educators in their exploration of how multicultural education can be best implemented in classrooms. Concern with the improvement of multicultural education is nothing new in

the teaching profession. Article after article details methods and techniques specifically designed for better multicultural instruction. These methods and techniques range from the incorporation of anthropology and its' relevant issues to the use of CD-ROMS in the classroom (White, 1998; Kim & Clarke-Ekong, 1999).

### *Relevance and Importance of Study*

With this country growing more diverse and demonstrating a need for the incorporation of groups previously oppressed or misunderstood, multicultural education has become absolutely essential (Spindler, 1955). What is one of the primary sources for this information in children's lives? The answer is teachers, and their influence can be significant. Teachers stand on the front line in multicultural education, and in many cases, classrooms may be the only place students experience different people and places. Therefore, we need to know if teacher attitudes are associated with the way students think, as reflected in their responses to statements regarding multicultural issues. If student attitudes are similar to those of their teachers, we must then evaluate the attitudes of teachers and the attitudes expressed in classroom curriculum material. Is the right multicultural message being expressed in the material, and are the teachers adequately prepared to deliver this message? If positive teacher multicultural attitudes are not getting through to students, what methods will work?

### *Report Organization*

Following this introduction to the study is a literature review of articles dealing with multicultural education, and the relationship between teacher and student attitudes. Then, in Chapter 3, the methodological approach is presented with a detailed description of the actual research process and what it entails. In Chapter 4, there are the



results/findings and discussion sections that sum up what this research found. Finally, Chapter 5 is a conclusion section that discusses limitations and implications of this research, followed by the customary list of references and appendices.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

The topic of multicultural issues and the potential association between teacher and student attitudes has a large theoretical base, built upon a considerable body of work in both fields. Despite a great deal of information ranging from what material to include in a multicultural curriculum to how this material should be taught, every dimension of multicultural education is heavily dependent on teachers and their influence. However, to get a better understanding of the existing research, the literature review begins with the whole concept of multicultural education and what it can do for the students involved. This sets the foundation for why multiculturalism is important and needs further research. However, this alone does not justify a study on multicultural attitudes of teachers and students. For a proper analysis, there must also be tangible evidence of the relationship between teacher attitudes and an effective multicultural education for students. In particular, there must be understanding on how teachers acquire multicultural attitudes and the repercussions these attitudes have on students. Finally, after this overview of relevant literature, we explore what still needs to be done in multicultural research, and what research questions this study hopes to answer.

#### *Multicultural Education*

What is a multicultural education? As mentioned previously, this paper subscribes to the definition expressed by Gorski (2000), which describes multicultural

education as a method for increasing social change, social justice, and educational equity in the educational system. To accomplish these goals, multicultural education must include a number of important components and features. The first is an adequate curriculum that addresses the individual needs of young people and helps students become more understanding and tolerant. This can include the incorporation of many different techniques and strategies, including using anthropology and studies on CD-ROMS (White, 1998; Kim & Clarke-Ekong, 1999). However, most often, a multicultural curriculum goes about doing this through the incorporation of reading materials that emphasizes information from studies on race, class, and gender, and their relationships with one another (J.A. Banks & C.A.M. Banks, 2003; Grant & Sleeter, 1986; Fitzgerald & Lauter, 2004).

Another important component of a multicultural education is differentiated instruction and assessment. In terms of instruction, multiculturalism emphasizes that students should be placed in learning situations that are similar to their own lives and communities (Tate, 1993; Secada, 1993). Seeing the multicultural aspects of their own communities makes material more meaningful to students and leads to higher retention. In the traditional American educational system, assessment usually consists of high-stakes testing with high standards and pressure to show achievement gains (National Governors Association, 2001). In addition, tests are often the only form of assessment used in classrooms. Unfortunately, these tests are many times cultural biased to favor white, middle-class students (Kornhaber, 2004; Young, 2003). Therefore, multicultural education expands assessment beyond the customary testing and uses problem solving and other thinking skills to assess students (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

### *Benefits for Students*

With the elements of a multicultural education in mind, researchers have addressed the question: how does multiculturalism help the students involved? One of the potential benefits of a multicultural education is its ability to generate greater understanding and tolerance and these traits can help students deal with an increasingly complex and diverse world. This statement reflects an opinion expressed in an article by Dunn (2002) that emphasizes the importance of multicultural education in building a better America. This work drew upon the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and asserted that American citizens have little or no understanding of worldly events and the people involved. As a whole, they could not grasp the problems of the outside world, and this led to much of the exasperated questioning on why those terrible events took place. How is this problem resolved? As Dunn describes, schools can incorporate a world-centered, multicultural curriculum that challenges student attitudes and helps them competently examine the world. Therefore, according to the author, the solution begins in classrooms with an education built on acceptance and understanding.

These conclusions are expanded in another study that also looks at the possible benefits of a curriculum that embraces other cultures and people. According to White (1998), an education based on tolerance and empathy gives students the ability to solve tangible problems in the real world. What works in America does not necessarily work in the Middle East or Asia, and vice versa. Therefore, White believes that it is important for young people to develop knowledge on cultural similarities and differences in a proper multicultural curriculum. With this understanding, attitudes change, tolerance grows, and people are able to develop positive relationships with many different peoples. This,

makes the world a much more livable place.

In terms of helping students, multicultural education can also mitigate educational inequality, a situation where students from higher economic backgrounds tend to have greater educational achievement and attainment than students from lower economic backgrounds (Blanden & Machin; 2004). These lower-class victims of educational inequality often come from specific racial and ethnic groups historically discriminated against in American society, including Hispanics, African-Americans, American Indians, and Asian-Americans (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001; Garcia, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Lomawaima, 2004; Pang, Kiang, & Pak, 2004). In terms of school-related consequences for these marginalized groups of students, they often suffer the ill effects of educational inequality through lower achievement scores and higher dropout and retention rates (Education Trust, 1998; Schmitz et. al., 2004). In addition, the problems faced by victims of educational inequality continue well after their primary public school experience. Due to their inability to perform well on predictive achievement tests such as the SAT, many minority students have limited opportunities when it comes time to pursue further education or a career, and poverty results (College Board, 1999; Orfield & Miller, 1998).

What a multicultural education can do is empower and accommodate those young people previously disenfranchised from the education system. For example, a multicultural education could help African-American children understand the contributions of slaves to American society and that there was an active resistance to the system that oppressed them (J.A. Banks, 2004; Blassingame, 1972; Genovese, 1972; Stampp, 1956). Before multiculturalism, Black students were force fed the stereotype of slaves as docile, willing participants in the slave-holding system (J.A. Banks, 1969). This

new perception would lead to greater empowerment among African-American students, generating more self-esteem, greater achievement, and reductions in poverty and other social problems. In addition, it also helps other students involved, including Whites, who can better understand their role in challenging or maintaining racism (Curry, 2000; Daniels, 1997; Scheurich, 2002).

### *Teacher Acquisition of Multicultural Attitudes*

The previous studies demonstrate that multiculturalism involves a complex educational system with a number of important elements that seek to combat educational inequality, prepare students for the outside world, and build more positive relationships between people through greater understanding and tolerance (J.A. Banks, 2004; White, 1998). In light of the positive consequences of a multicultural education, it is important to explore and understand what factors can bring about these results. Researchers mention elements such as an appropriate curriculum and differentiated instruction and assessment. However, like many of the positives associated with education, teachers are a critical link in the process (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). In fact, multiculturalism began in large part because previous attempts to bring about greater equality and communication had met minimal success because of the teachers involved (Oakes, 1990). One of the breakthrough exposes on this topic was a conference among educational anthropologists in 1955. At that time, one of the anthropologists by the name of Spindler elaborated the results of that meeting in a book, and the conclusions centered on the difficulties associated with educating minority groups. Spindler recognized the dissonance between the conventional, mainstream American education and the specific needs of various ethnic subcultures.

One of the primary reasons for this chasm between the education system and minorities were the “racist and ethnocentric principles” that permeated the teaching profession (Spindler, 1955). Educators took their cues from the society and school around them. These cues emphasized white, western European values and gave little credence to the ideas of tolerance and the importance of diversity. As a result, immigrants and other minority groups were expected to assimilate and Americanize their lives. Accordingly, minority students faced a great deal of educational inequality and intolerance from teachers and fellow students alike. Disregarded initially, Spindler’s work gained increasingly relevance in the social turmoil that characterized much of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Rather than have minority students conform to unrealistic and oppressive teacher attitudes, more and more individuals in the education field called for a new form of education with changes in teacher attitudes as a major focal point.

The process of altering teacher attitudes necessitates a number of changes, including the incorporation of multicultural and diversity platforms in education schools’ training of future teachers. This is the subject of a study by Futrell, Gomez, and Bedden (2003). The authors declared that new teachers were not adequately prepared to handle the growing diversity of American schools and emphasized that diversity and multicultural goals have to become an integral part of the objectives that define education schools’ teacher training. The authors suggested that these schools have to think differently about the way they prepare their students, or educational problems will continue to persist. However, there also are a lot of teachers already in the profession and do not have the opportunity to go through training in education schools. For these individuals, the authors suggest that in-service professional development programs can be

beneficial, but some form of multicultural training and the development of appropriate attitudes are essential.

### *Effects of Positive Teacher Multicultural Attitudes*

Changes in teacher attitudes towards issues such as diversity and cultural appreciation in a positive direction can produce substantiated and verifiable effects. Like the benefits associated with a diverse curriculum and assessment, positive multicultural attitudes on the part of teachers can decrease educational inequality. As a study by Weisman and Garza (2002) points out, teachers who received a program on multicultural issues handled the students in their classrooms differently. These young people received teaching and attention that addressed their individual needs and backgrounds, and when teachers do this, it leads to greater achievement for all students involved (Capella-Santana, 2003).

As mentioned in previous studies, one of the primary reasons multicultural education has been advocated is its' ability to help students develop attitudes and knowledge that promote better relationships with other peoples (Stephan & Stephan, 2004). Teachers with positive multicultural attitudes can be a primary factor in why students are able to gain this knowledge, and more importantly, appropriate multicultural attitudes. As Robinson et. al. (2002) points out, in the educational setting, student tolerance and understanding of others only arises when teachers appropriately model these characteristics. This conclusion is expanded in the work of Dunn (2002), who declares that a multicultural program is completely ineffective without instructors dedicated to incorporating materials and resources that include multicultural elements.

The study that sets the tone for our research is Schofield (2004), as this article



provided an extensive literature review on how teachers can facilitate or impede positive relationships between different ethnic and racial groups of students. These relationships can only develop when a climate of tolerance and understanding have been established. For example, Schofield (p. 806) cites a study where positive teacher attitudes towards desegregation led to more students with similarly positive attitudes towards this important multicultural issue (Epstein, 1985). Specifically, the teachers treated all students as equals, and this democracy in the classroom influenced students a great deal in their attitudes. More recently, Flanagan (2000) found that teachers who create democratic and equal classroom environments produce students with similar attitudes towards equality.

These studies on democratic classrooms also indicate that positive teacher attitudes can affect student actions towards others. In Greenfield (1998), coaches of multicultural teams in Californian high schools were studied to understand what characteristics promote respect between different ethnic groups. What the author found was that the coach who had the least problems established respect and tolerance early on in the coaching process through “immediate public punishment” for those individuals who displayed disrespect toward other members of the team. The appropriate behavior was therefore modeled, and students responded positively. On the other hand, teachers with intolerant and biased attitudes often have students who share negative attitudes towards multicultural issues. A clear example of this scenario takes place in a study by Patchen (1982), which found that White students would avoid African-American classmates more when their teachers expressed negative attitudes towards intergroup relations.

### *Research Questions*

Teacher attitudes can have a tremendous influence over student attitudes towards multicultural issues, but a problem still persists. The results mentioned in the previous studies have shown that teachers and students alike can have positive or negative attitudes towards multicultural issues (Flanagan, 2000; Patchen, 1982). It would be foolish for a school district to incorporate a multicultural program and then realize that instructors do not have the requisite attitudes to pass on to students. Therefore, this research will explore the multicultural views of teachers. If teachers in a particular school district have positive multicultural attitudes, this would give a district the basis to plan a comprehensive multicultural program.

*Research Question #1* Do teachers in the sample have positive attitudes towards multicultural issues as determined by a multicultural questionnaire?

In addition, how young people feel towards multicultural issues could be a very important factor in what direction multicultural education should be headed, and therefore, this research will also serve as a measure of what student attitudes are.

*Research Question #2* Do students in the sample have positive attitudes towards multicultural issues as determined by a multicultural questionnaire?

In addition to being unclear on whether teachers and students possess positive or negative attitudes towards multicultural issues, there also is a question of whether the similarity between teacher and student multicultural attitudes will continue in further research. The results in previous studies have come from a limited number of settings, and there are huge gaps of time between the different studies. New settings and subjects

of the teacher/student attitudinal relationship is needed to verify that the results of the previous studies are valid. Therefore, what this research hopes to do is apply the same principle to a new setting, with new teachers and students.

*Research Question #3* Do the teachers and students in the sample have the same multicultural attitudes, whether positive or negative?

With this literature review and research questions in mind, the next section details the methodological approach that will be used.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### *Research Design*

Before any research could take place, there needed to be approval from the IRB Review Board, which authorizes research on the university level. There is a copy of this form in Appendix A. This study used a non-experimental quantitative research design because we were attempting to describe existing conditions, without manipulating an independent variable. Under the large umbrella of non-experimental research are a number of different types of studies, and in comparing teacher and student attitudes, this study uses a comparative design. To be more specific, we examine whether the score on a questionnaire of multicultural attitudes in teachers is different or the same as the value of multicultural attitudes in students. However, this research is also examining the general attitudes of teachers and attitudes, and whether they are positive or negative. Therefore, a descriptive design is also used, and this simply consists of describing participant attitudes through statistics, such as means and standard deviations.

#### *Subjects*

The population in this research was all teachers and students at the research setting. However, for obvious reasons, this large number of individuals needs to be reduced. To do this, the research took a convenience sample of teachers and students. Teachers and their classes were included because of their availability and willingness to participate. In terms of this study's participants, there are the six teachers, and

collectively, their 92 students. The participating teachers have a variety of experience and training in not only multicultural issues, but also teaching in general. Their experience in multiculturalism includes education courses, in-service programs, and curriculum that directly deal with multicultural material. In addition, all are White and have more than a year's experience at teaching in this particular school. As for the students in the six classes, the most that could be ascertained about their multicultural experience is based upon the education they received at the high school. This includes multicultural materials such as a textbook or readings, but no formal multicultural program. Overall, this collection of students contains 29 seniors, 32 juniors, 12 sophomores, and 19 freshmen.

### *Setting*

This research will take place at my student teaching site in the spring of 2004. This is a secondary institution in Salem County, New Jersey, with approximately 700 students, grades 9-12. It draws students from a predominantly rural community that is diverse, both economically and demographically. More specifically, this study's settings are classrooms of six different courses. Three of these are college prep classes, with all of them in the Arts and Humanities Department. These include a class in World History, another in United States History II (1865-2004), and finally, an elective known as Contemporary Issues. This is a course that explores current events and the issues surrounding them. There also are students and teachers in two Honors classes in Chemistry and French, and an AP English course in the sample.

### *Instrument*

In this study a paper-based attitude questionnaire was used that is based upon a

Likert scale. In this format, there is a statement followed by a scale of responses, and this research's scale ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with disagree and agree in between. Each of these responses is associated with a numerical option in this research with strongly disagree being the equivalent of "1" and strongly agree equal to "4".

Numbers are necessary in this instrument because we are attempting to statistically analyze the subjects' responses.

As for the questionnaire items, they are based in large part upon the Multicultural Questionnaire-Revised (MCR), which shows reliability estimates above .81. This questionnaire is designed to measure attitudes towards international, national, and most importantly, diversity and multicultural issues (Ambrosio, 1998). However, it employs no specific content areas, so every questionnaire item is assessed individually. In this study, a field test was used because of the importance in knowing whether the questionnaires were easy to understand for the participants and if any survey statements need correction or clarification. Also, with an issue such as multiculturalism, it is necessary to determine whether any statements caused stress for the participants.

This particular field test was conducted with my own students in a United States History II (1865-2004) class. Before distributing surveys to these students, each received an informed consent form, and they were required to get it signed by a parent or guardian before participation. A sample of this consent form can be found in Appendix B. After returning these forms, 19 students were part of the field test, and as the experimenter, I reiterated the directions at the top of the sheet, in addition to asking that no one put any identifying marks on the surveys. The students were then asked to complete it and identify any statements that caused them confusion or stress. After everyone finished, the

surveys were collected, and there was no indication that any of the statements were hard to understand. In addition, no subjects felt the statements were inappropriate or stressful in any way, and therefore, no changes were made to the survey.

Overall, there were 13 questionnaire items in this research, and two (#'s 3 and 4) were reverse order items. That is, the most positive attitude towards multiculturalism on these two items was strongly disagree, rather than strongly agree. Therefore, in future data analysis, the numerical values of the responses are reversed for these two questionnaire items. The reversal was done to determine whether subjects were responding honestly, or just filling in the same answer for every item. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

#### *Data Collection*

Like the field test, all students and teachers received consent forms before their actual participation, and an alternate teacher version of the consent form can be found in Appendix B. After two days, all signed consent forms were collected, and only students who returned them were allowed to participate. Students not taking part in the research were instructed by their cooperating teachers to continue with work for the class. The surveys were then distributed, and participants received specific instructions not to put any sort of identification on their survey sheet. The only distinguishing features of the surveys were a letter and number in the upper, right hand corner of the sheet. "A's" were reserved for teachers and "B's" for students, and each of the six classes received a number. There was no other differentiation between the participants, and therefore, anonymity was maintained. Then, the surveys were finally distributed, and all subjects completed the survey in about 5-6 minutes. Finally, after everyone was finished, the

subjects received information on sources (me, my advisor, etc.) they could contact if any concerns or issues came up.

### *Data Analysis*

The descriptive section of the analysis consisted of taking the numerical responses of participants, and placing them in the computer program, SPSS 11.0. This is a statistical package that allows for extensive data analysis. SPSS 11.0 took the numerical responses, and computed a number of descriptive statistics including means, standards deviations, in addition to visual images. As for the comparison of teacher and student attitudes, a t-test was used to compare the attitudinal means of the different groups on the various questionnaire items. With a t-test, the researcher works under the assumption that there is no difference between the means of the two groups. With this research in mind, this test compares the means of teachers and students on different questionnaire items, and generates a  $t$  and  $p$  value that indicate whether the means of teachers and students are statistically different.



## Chapter 4

### Results and Findings

#### *Teacher Attitudes*

To reiterate, the first research question centered on whether teachers had positive attitudes towards multicultural issues. The descriptive results for the participants involved in this research sample are presented in Table 4.1. Table 4.1 details teacher means and standard deviations for each questionnaire item. As these results show, all the average responses were above 3 (i.e. agree), except for item #10. This indicates that teachers had an overall positive attitude towards multicultural issues.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Attitudes Towards Multicultural Issues

Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
#1. I accept others, despite their differences.	6	3.17	.408
#2. There are important lessons to be learned from other people in other countries.	6	3.00	.633
#3. American values and customs are always correct.	6	3.33	.516
#4. We cannot learn anything from different or foreign people.	6	3.33	.516
#5. Individuals from many different backgrounds are deserving of my respect.	6	3.33	.516

Table 4.1 (Continued)

Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
#6. Diversity is an important part of learning	6	3.17	.408
#7. I try to understand issues and problems facing America and the world.	6	3.00	.000
#8. Tolerance of many different groups of people is necessary for this country	6	3.17	.408
#9. Learning should include the contributions of many different groups of people.	6	3.17	.408
#10. I want to surround myself with as many different types of people and experiences as possible.	6	2.83	.408
#11. Different cultures and customs from my own should be recognized and accepted.	6	3.17	.408
#12. There are many solutions to the same problem.	6	3.17	.408
#13. Greater understanding of others is the best solution to any problem between people	6	3.17	.408

The positive multicultural attitudes that teachers show in these results stand in contrast to much of the previous literature which described educators as having stereotypes and misconceptions towards multicultural issues (Capella-Santana, 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Weisman & Garza, 2003). However, the studies that brought about these results often focused on future teachers or new individuals in the profession, just out of

educational schools. These persons had little or no experience with multicultural classrooms, curriculums or programs. On the other hand, according to Ladson-Billings (2004) and Gollnick (1995), there is not an experienced teacher in America who has used a textbook or curriculum without some form of multiculturalism being present. As this was a study with instructors who had varied experience in using multicultural textbooks and other similar materials, this multicultural experience may have influenced their multicultural attitudes in a positive direction. Despite the positive attitudes expressed on nearly all the items by teachers, the strength of these results is mitigated by the small sample size, and the fact that these subjects were selected out of convenience.

As for #10, the lone questionnaire item in which teachers did not express clearly positive attitudes, the explanation may lie in the implication that agreeing with this item means a change in the participants' lives. Surrounding yourself with different peoples and experiences can be frightening to some individuals. People feel comfortable with those who are similar, and this item challenges that comfort. In terms of implications in the classroom, these results point to the potential that exists in today's public schools. Educators have the proper disposition to incorporate multiculturalism in the classroom, and the school as a whole must take advantage of this situation. School districts must implement multicultural curriculums, with the positive attitudes of the teachers in mind, and more importantly, instruct these teachers on how to best use these curriculums. Otherwise, the positive teacher multicultural attitudes may be wasted.

### *Student Attitudes*

The second research question also focused on multicultural attitudes, but this time, the subjects were students. The descriptive results for the participants involved in

this research sample are presented in Table 4.2. Table 4.2 lists student means and standard deviations for each questionnaire item. As these results show, all the average responses for the questionnaire items were above 3 (i.e. agree), except for #'s 3 and 10. Overall then, the students also had positive multicultural attitudes.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Student Attitudes Towards Multicultural Issues

Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
#1. I accept others, despite their differences.	92	3.11	.733
#2. There are important lessons to be learned from other people in other countries.	92	3.01	.638
#3. American values and customs are always correct.	92	2.87	.650
#4. We cannot learn anything from different or foreign people.	92	3.20	.745
#5. Individuals from many different backgrounds are deserving of my respect.	92	3.08	.788
#6. Diversity is an important part of learning.	92	3.12	.644
#7. I try to understand issues and problems facing America and the world.	92	3.02	.513
#8. Tolerance of many different groups of people is necessary for this country.	92	3.09	.860
#9. Learning should include the contributions of many different groups of people.	92	3.07	.643

Table 4.2 (Continued)

Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
#10. I want to surround myself with as many different types of people and experiences as possible.	92	2.91	.706
#11. Different cultures and customs from my own should be recognized and accepted.	92	3.14	.692
#12. There are many solutions to the same problem.	92	3.12	.608
#13. Greater understanding of others is the best solution to any problem between people	92	3.21	.672

The multicultural attitudes expressed by students in this research were a revelation in many ways. In previous literature such as Greenfield (1998) or Flanagan (2000), researchers solely focused on the issue of student attitudes in relation to their instructors. Much of the previous research concerning student multicultural attitudes was initiated for the sole purpose of improving the multicultural attitudes of the young people involved. Therefore, it stands to reason that positive multicultural attitudes were lacking in the student population. With a lack of previous research directly assessing student multicultural attitudes, it is difficult to ascertain the true explanation for these positive findings. However, the results of students in this sample are very possibly the result of the large presence of multiculturalism in schools. Like teachers, Gollnick (1995) says that students are constantly bombarded by examples of multiculturalism in their typical school day. These multicultural textbooks, readings, and activities may be influencing

student attitudes in a positive direction.

Once again, the weakly positive results for item #10 may be the result of the change of lifestyle implied from the statement. However, similar results on item #3 quite possibly stem from a different set of circumstances. As the work of Dunn (2002) details, Americans are quite ignorant when it comes to the ways and customs of foreign peoples and many times, are ethnocentric. The true intention of the statement was to assess whether participants believed that other cultures and ways of life could be valuable or essential in their own lives. However, many students may have fallen into the group described by Dunn (2002) and remained narrow-minded in their views. Whatever the causes may be, it must be noted that the results of this research were limited in generalizability. All students involved were in upper-level classes, either college prep, honors, or AP, and therefore, this sample's results may not generalize to other students with different academic abilities.

The classroom implications of students with positive multicultural attitudes mainly deal with the impetus and burden they place on teachers and instructors. Even though students in this sample have positive attitudes towards multicultural attitudes, multicultural education may still fail because teachers do not teach to the abilities and strengths of students. Different students learn best from a varying array of instructional strategies and methods that may range from visual aides to observational analysis. As mentioned previously in Darling Hammond (1990), differentiated instruction is a crucial component of multicultural education, and educators use their knowledge of students' learning preferences to take advantage of these positive multicultural attitudes.

### *Teacher/Student Attitudinal Relationship*

The last research question asked whether the means of the students and teachers on these different questionnaire items showed a positive relationship between the two groups. The t-tests comparing these means on the different questionnaire items are presented in Table 4.3. This table lists the means of the teachers and students in the sample, but most importantly, it lists the p-value, and this statistic indicates that only one item, #3, showed a significant statistical difference between teacher and student means. The other questionnaire items indicated that the means of students and teachers were not statistically different.

**Table 4.3 t-test Results for Teacher and Student Multicultural Attitudes**

Questionnaire Items	Teacher Mean/SD	Student Mean/SD	P Value
#1. I accept others, despite their differences.	3.17(.408)	3.11(.733)	.42
#2. There are important lessons to be learned from other people in other countries.	3.00(.633)	3.01(.638)	.48
#3. American values and customs are always correct.	3.33(.516)	2.87(.650)	.045*
#4. We cannot learn anything from different or foreign people.	3.33(.516)	3.20(.745)	.33
#5. Individuals from many different backgrounds are deserving of my respect.	3.33(.516)	3.08(.788)	.22
#6. Diversity is an important part of learning.	3.17(.408)	3.12(.644)	.43

Table 4.3 (Continued)

Questionnaire Items	Teacher Mean/SD	Student Mean/SD	P Value
#7. I try to understand issues and problems facing America and the world.	3.00(0.00)	3.02(.513)	.46
#8. Tolerance of many different groups of people is necessary for this country.	3.17(.408)	3.09(.860)	.41
#9. Learning should include the contributions of many different groups of people.	3.17(.408)	3.07(.643)	.35
#10. I want to surround myself with as many different types of people and experiences as possible.	2.83(.408)	2.91(.706)	.39
#11. Different cultures and customs from my own should be recognized and accepted.	3.17(.408)	3.14(.692)	.47
#12. There are many solutions to the same problem.	3.17(.408)	3.12(.608)	.43
#13. Greater understanding of others is the best solution to any problem between people.	3.17(.408)	3.21(.672)	.44

\* denotes statistical significance,  $p < .05$ .  $n=6$  for teachers; 92 for students

The results of this portion of the study confirm much of the previous research measuring the relationship between teachers and student multicultural attitudes (Epstein, 1985; Flanagan, 2000; Patchen, 1982). In these studies, the multicultural attitudes expressed by teachers were also found in the young people under their supervision, whether it be positive or negative. The results of this research show positive attitudes by both groups, and like the earlier research, this may in large part be due to the influence and sway teachers hold over their students. This study indicates that teachers in this



sample are expressing positive attitudes towards issues such as tolerance and diversity, and this may be reflected in the ways students think as well.

However, the results of this section of the research are limited by a number of different factors. First and foremost, only one teacher the students were encountering on a typical school day was included. There are a number of teachers that a student runs into on a normal day, whether it be through actual classes, coaching, or other school-related activities. Comparison with these other teachers was not included in this research and could reveal different results. In addition, another limitation of these results is a lack of generalizability. This study only contains the responses of teachers and students from one high school and is limited in both scope and duration. The results of this comparison between teacher and student attitudinal means are from one school, during a short period of time. However, the ideas espoused in this research can be used to determine the multicultural status of other schools.

With a statistical significance of  $p=.045$ , item #3 qualifies as an example where student and teacher attitudes were statistically different. To examine why this is the case, we can go back to what this questionnaire item was truly attempting to measure. As mentioned previously in the findings on student attitudes, this item was asking participants if they thought that values outside of the American norm are important and potentially useful in their own lives (Dunn, 2002). Possibly, the high teacher attitudes indicate that they understood the intention of this questionnaire item, responded positively, and remained open-minded. On the other hand, the students may have seen this as an attack on the American value system, responded more negatively, and fallen into the ethnocentric label described in Dunn's work. High school students may have

simply felt that other customs and ways of life are not important.

The major classroom implication of shared multicultural attitudes between teachers and students focuses on the backgrounds of the instructors involved in these multicultural endeavors. Are they shared because of the teachers' effect on their students? Considering the strong presence of teachers in multicultural education, it becomes the obligation of every educator to receive adequate training in multiculturalism and its' appropriate attitudes. Quite possibly, some students are influenced by teachers in their multicultural attitudes, and as Futrell et. al. (2003) warned, America will suffer the ill consequences of teachers who are not adequately prepared to enter classrooms with proper multicultural attitudes. To possess incorrect multicultural attitudes and then interact with young people could be potentially devastating not only for the students involved but also for the community and society at large.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

#### *Research Questions Revisited*

This research asked whether teachers and students in a secondary setting had positive attitudes towards multicultural issues, and whether these two groups of participants share statistically similar multicultural attitudes. What this research found was that teachers and students in the school in this study possess predominately positive multicultural attitudes. Although there were a few questionnaire items that produced ambiguous average responses, the majority of the participants responded favorably to multicultural issues. In addition, the results of this research also indicated that teachers and students share statistically similar positive attitudes on these same multicultural issues, with no statistical difference between the item mean scores, except on item # 3. With the demographics of the setting in mind, this study's results may reflect the attitudes to be expected from a teacher and student population in similar schools. While the results of this study point to a positive future for multicultural education, this research is by no means the end of research on the subject of multicultural attitudes among students and teachers as we must try to better understand what influences these attitudes in a positive direction.

#### *Directions for Future Research*

In terms of the first research question concerning teachers, further research must first be focused on other schools. There certainly is the potential for different teacher

multicultural attitudes in different school settings. Therefore, future research on teacher attitudes must include a variety of educational institutions, differing on a wide spectrum of factors and these factors must be identified in the study. In addition, there should be variations in instructor age, multicultural experience, and at what type of school they teach (elementary, secondary, etc.). Also, research must try to clarify what exactly are the primary influences for teachers in forming multicultural attitudes. Are positive attitudes a byproduct of individual experiences, or does the influx of multicultural materials and perspectives in schools influence instructor perspectives? Future research should attempt to isolate potential influences such as textbooks or multicultural training to assess whether these factors are the impetus behind positive multicultural attitudes.

Regarding student multicultural attitudes, we must realize that all students are part of the multicultural equation, not just the young people in upper level classes. Therefore, research on the multicultural attitudes among all types of students is necessary, regardless of academic ability. Also, it would be beneficial to know whether the multicultural attitudes of students change as they get older (e.g. middle school vs. high school). It could give researchers and teachers an idea on what type of appropriate multicultural program is needed at the various levels of student education. In addition, isolating what causes positive multicultural attitudes in students must also be a focus of future research. Are student multicultural attitudes a result of the teachers these young people are encountering on a daily basis or is it more a product of the out-of-school experiences a student receives from parents and peers? Although it will be very difficult to isolate one factor such as teaching influence, research must attempt to analyze what it truly influencing students one way or another on multicultural issues.

On the issue of shared attitudes of teachers and students regarding multicultural issues, it is becoming evident from prior research and these results that some sort of attitudinal relationship between the two groups exists. However, this statement notwithstanding, research must determine the nature of the multicultural relationship between teachers and students. Do the groups mutually influence one another in terms of their respective multicultural attitudes? Or, is teacher influence more significant than that of students? Due to the difficulty associated with drawing conclusions regarding the influence of teachers or students using Likert survey data, it would be valuable if future research used a qualitative approach to addressing this issue. That way, school districts and researchers could have tangible, first-hand accounts from students and teachers describing how they came to possess their attitudes on multicultural issues, rather than a conglomeration of numbers.

As this research shows, teachers and students in this study's sample are displaying positive attitudes towards general concepts like tolerance, diversity, and cultural appreciation. However, we must realize as scholars and teachers that acceptance of general concepts associated with multicultural education is not the ultimate goal. Positive action is the true aim of this educational perspective. Intergroup relations and social justice are also crucial components of multiculturalism. Research must also measure whether subjects are willing to act upon their attitudes and make the world a more equitable place. Multicultural education is constantly expanding with new emphases of study, as the potential associated with multiculturalism requires those concerned for American education to continue exploring all facets of multicultural education. Improvement in our society can only arise when multicultural education, with

all its related issues, becomes a constant presence and catalyst for thought in the classrooms of America.

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## Appendix A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
DISPOSITION FORM

Principal Investigator  
Nathan Taraska

Co-Principal Investigator(If applicable)

Address of Principal Investigator  
P.O. Box 118 Roberts Ave.

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City, State, and Zip Code

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(856)694-0586 ntaraska@hotmail.com

Telephone # Fax # e-mail address

TITLE OF RESEARCH  
Teacher and Student Attitudes Towards Multicultural Issues on the Secondary Level

ADMINISTRATIVE DISPOSITION - DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

Your claim for exemption for the research study identified above has been reviewed. The action taken is indicated below:

- APPROVED FOR EXEMPTION AS CLAIMED: CATEGORY # \_\_\_\_\_  
Note: Anything that materially changes the exempt status of this study must be presented to the IRB for approval before the changes are implemented. Such modifications should be sent to the IRB Office at the address above.
- APPROVED FOR EXEMPTION - BUT NOT AS CLAIMED. Your claim for exemption does not fit the criteria for exemption designated in your proposal. However, the study does meet the criteria for exemption under CATEGORY # \_\_\_\_\_
- A determination regarding the exempt status of this study cannot be made at this time. Additional information is required.
- Your proposal does not meet the criteria for exemption, and a full review will be provided by the IRB.

EXPEDITED REVIEW:  Approved  Denied

FULL REVIEW:  Approved  Approved with modifications  Denied

DENIED: \_\_\_\_\_

See attached Committee Action Letter for additional comments.

J. Surak  
Chair, IRB

Janet Hartman  
Co-Chair, IRB

Date 3/1/04

Date 3/1/04

## Appendix B

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Your child has the opportunity to participate in research for a master's thesis regarding the multicultural attitudes of teachers and students. The students involved in this research were selected because their teachers chose to take part in the study. Participants will take 5-10 minutes completing a questionnaire posing a series of statements on multicultural issues. There are no risks or discomforts associated with this research. All student responses will be kept confidential, and subjects may terminate their participation at any time. If you have any concerns or questions regarding this research you can contact me, Nathan Taraska, at (856)694-0586, or my advisor, Dr. John Gallagher, at (856)256-4754. Thank you.

\_\_\_\_\_ I allow my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not allow my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

Dear Cooperating Teachers,

You will be participating in a research study for a master's thesis measuring the multicultural attitudes of teachers and students. Participants will spend 5-10 minutes completing a questionnaire positing a series of statements on multicultural issues. There are no risks or discomforts associated with this research. All responses will be kept confidential, and you may terminate your participation at any time. If you have any concerns or questions regarding this research you can contact me, Nathan Taraska, at (856)694-0586, or my advisor, Dr. John Gallagher, at (856)256-4754. Thank you.

\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)



## Appendix C

## Multicultural Questionnaire

---

Following are a series of statements regarding multicultural issues.

Your job is to respond to these statements as honestly as possible.

Remember, there are no “right” answers, only your opinion. Good luck!!!!

---

1= strongly disagree

2=disagree

3=agree

4=strongly agree

1. I accept others, despite their differences.

1

2

3

4

2. There are important lessons to be learned from people in other countries.

1

2

3

4

3. American values and customs are always correct.

1

2

3

4

4. We cannot learn anything from different or foreign people.

1

2

3

4

5. Individuals from many different backgrounds are deserving of my respect.

1

2

3

4

6. Diversity is an important part of learning.

1

2

3

4

7. I try to understand issues and problems facing America and the world.

1

2

3

4

8. Tolerance of many different groups of people is necessary for this country.

1                      2                      3                      4

9. Learning should include the contributions of many different groups of people.

1                      2                      3                      4

10. I want to surround myself with as many different types of people and experiences as possible.

1                      2                      3                      4

11. Different cultures and customs from my own should be recognized and accepted.

1                      2                      3                      4

12. There are many solutions to the same problem.

1                      2                      3                      4

13. Greater understanding of others is the best solution to any problem between people.

1                      2                      3                      4