
TE991/891-736

*Teaching across Cultural
Differences in Schools*

Approaches to
Multicultural Social
Justice Education

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While the Single Group approach focuses on putting individuals into culturally and linguistically similar groups so that each group could be integrated into a culture of diversity, Sleeter and Grant describe a more radical approach in Multicultural Social Justice Education: MSJE (Multicultural Social Justice Education) aims to change the system by targeting institutional discrimination while “reconstructing” unjust power distribution. In a sense, adherents of this theory, rooted in Marxist analysis and the Critical Theory school of thought, question the legitimacy of diversity if it exists within an unjust system.

From the perspective of MSJE, Single Group Studies could even be interpreted as “elitist” in the sense that one group is classifying others according to characteristics according to their own “vision”. MSJE suggests that instead of segregating the groups, these groups should “understand the nature of oppression in modern society” and “understand how their ascribed characteristics (e.g., race, class, gender) and their culture impact on that oppression (Sleeter & Grant, p.198)”. This understanding would “lead them to develop the power and skills articulate both their own goals and a vision of social justice for all groups and to work constructively toward these ends (Sleeter & Grant, p.198).”

In my opinion, the MSJE methodology for pursuit of social justice for all groups could be summarized as (1) educating oppressed groups on the political context in which they exist, and (2) providing political tools for change such as critical thinking and communicating, developing a vision of what social justice looks like for them and then, in the case of “coalescing”, forming coalitions with other oppressed groups to achieve their vision(s).

Because the problems are so much larger than individual groups, coalitions allow the oppressed to consolidate more power in the interest of changing problems related to power hierarchy and institutional discrimination (Sleeter & Grant, p.216)".

My own experience as a student and educator in China and America presents a distinctive comparison of two paths of MSJE. The irony of the Chinese education system is rooted in its own Marxist history. Preceding the revolution, Mao empowered the multicultural, multiethnic peasantry by educating them on their context within the power structure. He gave them the tools to think critically and to work toward their visions. However, once the power had shifted, it was no longer about the vision of the various groups, but thoroughly about the vision of Mao. The true irony is that in my entire career as a student and teacher in China I was not allowed to learn or teach critical thinking, particularly in the political realm. Then, as a student in the West, which has mostly rejected Marxism, I have found that there are many opportunities to learn political tools available to oppressed groups and these groups have been able to improve their situation, and often working together toward social justice.

References

Sleeter, C. E. & Grant, C. (2009) *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender, sixth edition*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.