

## Social Justice Perspectives

### Using the Dialectic of Social Justice to Enliven the Dialogue between Global Education and Multicultural Education

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In 2002, during my first year of teaching global education at Florida International University (FIU), one of the articles I assigned to my students was 'Multiculturalism vs. Globalism' (Ukpokodu, 1999). In this article, Nelly Ukpokodu, Associate Professor of Education at the University of Missouri, defined multicultural education and global education, and delineated the differences she saw between the goals of the two fields of study. The goal of multicultural education, according to Ukpokodu, is transforming the curriculum so that students attain the ability to view issues, concepts, and events from multiple perspectives that "reflect the diversity within our society," (p. 298), while the goal of global education is developing students' knowledge and understanding of peoples and cultures of other lands. Ukpokodu ended this article by highlighting the shared purposes of multicultural education and global education, articulating the pressing need for both areas of study in the K-16 curriculum, and calling for dialogue between faculty and administrators who identify with these academic fields.

Fast forward 10 years, and I find myself directing a university-wide global education initiative at FIU, the seventh largest institution of higher education in the U.S. Global Learning for Global Citizenship is a 10-year program that provides every undergraduate at FIU with multiple educational opportunities to achieve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to become informed and engaged citizens of the world. Through my work with global learning at FIU I have come to view global education very much as an action-oriented field. For me, the goals of global education encompass not only knowledge and understanding of the interconnectedness of the world, but also the ability to analyze global issues from multiple perspectives, and, most importantly, a willingness to use one's knowledge and skills to solve problems, both near and afar.

Regardless of the differences in our definitions of global education, I wholeheartedly agree with Ukpokodu that global education and multicultural education are distinct disciplines, and that these distinctions need to be acknowledged and understood. I also agree with her that the two fields share common purposes, and that they are two important areas of teaching and learning, research, and action.

What surprises me today is not that the two fields are separate or that the separation between them has not narrowed with time, but that, by and large, the discussion in higher education among faculty, staff, and administrators representing multicultural education and those representing global education has not moved. We are continually asking how to link or synthesize or connect or merge these two dynamic fields. Given our increasingly globalized and multicultural world, I would advocate for a positive

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ongoing dialogue between the two disciplines, a dialogue that recognizes differences and tensions, and reinforces the value and complementary implementation of both disciplines in K-16 education.

Similar tensions exist within the construct of social justice. Social justice is often linked with global or multicultural education, particularly in a rights-based context. Social justice also has varying definitions, underlying philosophies and usages, some in apparent opposition to others. By examining the tensions inherent in this complex construct, I propose that the dynamic of social justice be used as a model to enliven and advance the dialogue between multicultural education and global education.

### **Multicultural Education and Global Education**

The most comprehensive definition of multicultural education is that of James Banks. For Banks (2004), multicultural education is a field of teaching and learning that has the following dimensions: content integration; the process of knowledge construction; pedagogical strategies focusing on equity; the goals of prejudice reduction and an empowering school culture and social structure (p. 5).

As for global education, it has been characterized as a field of study, a movement, a curriculum, and an approach to learning (Landorf, 2009). Merry Merryfield's (1996) definition is, as Toni Kirkwood-Tucker has put it, 'all-inclusive' (Kirkwood, 2001). For Merryfield (1996), global education is a curriculum that includes eight elements: the study of human beliefs and values, global systems, global issues and problems, cross-cultural understanding, awareness of human choices, global history, acquisition of indigenous knowledge, and development of analytical, evaluative, and participatory skills. Defined by Banks and Merryfield and applied by higher education practitioners, multicultural education and global education both address human diversity and perspective consciousness, advance the goals of justice, equity, and peace, and point to a process of institutional transformation.

Beside the overlapping goals of the two fields, multicultural education and global education exhibit several differences. Their origins and historical contexts, justifications, institutional structures, and motivations of the faculty and students who participate in their programs diverge (Heilman, 2009; Olson, Evans, & Schoenberg, 2007). These differences can help explain tensions or potential flashpoints between the two fields.

The origins of multicultural education can be found in the emergence of the black, ethnic, and multiethnic studies movements of the early 20th century, the intergroup education movement in the mid-20th century, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In its examinations of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and exceptionality, multicultural education draws on theories in ethnic and women's studies, history, and the social sciences. The impetus for establishing multicultural education as a field of study and a curriculum was to expand the canon of these studies to include people whose voices had long been neglected. In addition, it was established as an educational and social action movement seeking to gain equality and equity for the silenced and oppressed.

Global education had different origins. As a field of study, it emerged in the post-World War II era from the need for institutions to address the growing interrelatedness of peoples around the world (Cortes, 1998). As Heilman notes (2009), global education drew on four interrelated contexts: (1) foreign policy issues that dominated the American political landscape; (2) global economic systems that came in the wake of WWII; (3) the environmental education movement; and (4) the influence of a global focus in

academic fields ranging from anthropology to political science and history.

A major distinction between multicultural education and global education that springs from their different historical roots is the fact that multicultural education policies, such as disability or gender rights, are often mandated by law, whereas global education lacks this legal grounding, and therefore must continually lobby to justify its goals and outcomes. However, the existence of legal guarantees in multicultural education sometimes leads to its isolation in higher education. To ensure that institutions of higher education effectuate the legal guarantees to equality of education, they often have an Office of Multicultural Education. However, the existence of an office which focuses on enforcement of legal guarantees to an equal education may detract from the content and value of a multicultural education curriculum. This isolation may occur in global education as well, particularly when global education is perceived as synonymous with internationalization. Just as the purview of the Office of Multicultural Education is to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to education, internationalization efforts are focused on the student experience rather than on the curriculum per se, and internationalization offices are scattered throughout the university. For example, the Office of International Student Scholar Services may be housed in Student Affairs, whereas the Study Abroad Office may be housed in Academic Affairs. Faculty doing global education may be dispersed throughout the curriculum as well, in such fields as social studies education, international affairs, area studies, and foreign languages. With this dispersion, establishing a discussion to get multicultural education and global education to coordinate on strategic plans, policies, and curriculum becomes quite an endeavor.

Given the divergent histories and administrative structures of multicultural education and global education, it is not surprising that the motivations of faculty who pursue these fields often differ. Whereas multicultural educators are often motivated by giving voice to the lives, needs, and concerns of minorities within a society, global educators often come to the field committed to heightening intercultural understanding, awareness of the interconnectedness of global issues, and a desire to make the world a better place (Bennett & Bennett, 1994).

### **Bridging the Separations between Multicultural and Global Education**

Many teacher educators have written about ways in which to bridge the separations between multicultural and global education. One of the most comprehensive of these writings is *Making Connections between Multicultural and Global Education: Teacher Educators and Teacher Programs* (Merryfield, 1996). Edited by Merry Merryfield, this is a rich collection of short essays by leaders in the fields of global and multicultural education throughout North America. These leaders articulate their rationales for making connections between multicultural and global education, and give examples of strategies and readings they have used to effectively bridge the gap between the two educational endeavors. Dr. Graham Pike, currently the Dean of International Education at Vancouver Island University, summarized most, if not all of the educators' stances on linking the two fields. When asked, why make connections between multicultural and global education? Pike replied, "I would rather rephrase the question: in an interdependent world system, can there be a coherent and profound rationale that argues for their separateness as fields of education? (Pike, 1996, p. 18). Much more recently, Elizabeth Heilman (2009) advocated for "a creative synthesis of multicultural and global education" (p. 43).

In 2011, the American Council on Education (ACE) selected eight institutions of different sizes and demographic make-up to participate in a three-year project called *At Home in the World: Educating for Global Connections and Local Commitments*. As the title suggests, and the ACE *At Home in the World* website states, the aim of this three-year project is to examine “the collaboration potential between diversity/multicultural education and internationalization” (ACE, 2013, About the Initiative section, para. 1).

Rather than continuing to look for ways to link or merge multicultural and global education, I would submit that we turn to the dialogue surrounding the dialectic of social justice as a model educators can use to engage in an ongoing and purposeful discussion between multicultural and global education, one that focuses on common objectives and moves both disciplines forward.

### **Social Justice and its Inherent Tensions**

Social justice is a complex concept that is rooted in philosophical discourse that can be traced from Plato and Aristotle to Hobbes, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mills and Rawls (Jost & Kay, 2008).

Social justice may be defined as a moral virtue, in which case it is ascribed only to the reflective and deliberate acts of individuals rather than to a social system. Alternatively, social justice may be defined as a societal right, based on the idea of a society which gives fair treatment and a just share of its benefits to all individuals and groups. (Landorf & Nevin, 2007). A shift in the meaning occurs, however, when social justice describes a goal or ideal rather than a right. In that case, the ‘social’ in ‘social justice’ refers to something that does not emerge organically from rule-abiding citizens, but rather from an abstract ideal of justice, imposed from above (Novak, 2000). When American educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1998) speaks of social justice, she embraces an interpretation that is concerned with equity rather than equality: ‘Equitable or fair treatment . . . does not mean equal treatment – certainly when that means treating people with widely disparate needs in the same way’ (Green, 1998, p. xxxviii).

In many corners of higher education, practitioners use the term today with the assumption that it has one definition known to all. For example, a Google search of the combined terms ‘social justice’ and ‘FIU’ yielded over 90,000 entries. Social justice is included in the mission statements of 5 of our 12 Colleges; as one of the goals for student clubs as varied as ‘CRU: A Caring Community Connecting FIU, Miami, and the World to Jesus Christ’, and ‘Students for Social Justice’, as part of the title of on-campus events that range from ‘The Death Penalty and Social Justice’, to ‘How Soon is Too Soon to Teach for Social Justice’; and public relations videos such as one in the College of Business Administration that features an alumnus speaking about the connection between surfboards and social justice.

Social justice is a complex, multilayered construct that presents interlocking tensions (North, 2006). One of these tensions centers on social justice as concerned with the politics of redistribution and, on the other hand, with the politics of recognition. The relationship between redistribution and recognition is complicated. A focus on recognition may distract from the ongoing exploitation of workers and the marginalization of the impoverished. By the same token, a focus on redistribution may neglect underlying social structures that help to perpetuate unequal power relations. In its usage, an assertion of recognition may legitimize an unequal division of labor, as when feminists make a claim to ‘caring’ or ‘nurturing’ and in so doing, reinforce power relations in the workforce.

A second tension concerns the emphasis of social justice on equality as sameness and an emphasis on

equality as difference. Consider the issue of racial preference quotas. When public institutions of higher education implement programs to achieve racial diversity by giving preference to minorities in order to establish a racial balance, they are using the concept of social justice as difference. When a student who is denied admission to that institution appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court claiming that such programs are discriminatory, she is using the concept of social justice as equality.<sup>1</sup>

Although these and other tensions present apparent friction in social justice discussions, these frictions themselves can serve to enlarge the possibilities for productive dialogue on the role of social justice. Understanding and recognizing these tensions serves key purposes in social justice discussions. First, they highlight issues and factors to be taken into account in reaching conclusions or solutions to social justice problems. As Young (1990) says, 'Where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression' (p. 3). Far from having a negative quality these seemingly opposed interests afford opportunities for discussion and resolution in reaching the ultimate goal of protecting human rights and equality. In the example of racial quotas the needs of both parties are framed in different terms of social justice and the perspectives of both parties must be considered in order to achieve a structure which acknowledges the rights of all.

Secondly, acknowledging different or competing interests serves as an opportunity for advancing, expanding and strengthening the general cause of social justice. These different perspectives are opportunities to promote and examine values, motivations and ideas for the various causes under the umbrella of social justice. Finally, the presentation of these various perspectives and competing interests gives a more realistic and nuanced presentation of the complex societal issues and challenges facing our world today.

Understanding and valuing difference is one of the overarching goals of both multicultural education and global education. It is by adopting the dialectic model of social justice, in which educators openly acknowledge, examine, and draw on differences, that both fields may be strengthened.

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<sup>i</sup> See the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court case of Abigail Noel Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin.