

Introduction

This book aims to provide examples of approaches and strategies that schools and teachers can adopt in order to provide educational experiences that meet the needs of all the learners in culturally diverse schools and classrooms. Many of the ideas will be especially helpful to educators in areas where new immigrants settle. The book is addressed to all teachers, administrators, and curriculum advisors in multilingual, multicultural, multiracial schools and school districts. Teachers in training, and the educators who help them to prepare for work in today's culturally diverse schools, will also find many useful suggestions and ideas for effective practice in this book. Some of the ideas and topics in this book may suggest themselves to educational researchers as subjects for study.

PERSPECTIVES

Although I have lived and taught in other countries, most of my professional life has been in Canada. Therefore, this book was written from a Canadian perspective, and uses many Canadian examples. Canada currently has the largest per capita immigration program in the world, and its largest city, Toronto, is the most multicultural city in the world. Although Canada has two official languages, English and French, multilingualism was a fact of life long before there was a Canadian nation. In addition to the Aboriginal languages spoken by the descendants of the country's first inhabitants, some of which are used as languages of instruction today, more than a hundred other languages have arrived over the last four hundred years.

Many of the lessons learned in the schools of Toronto, Vancouver, and other urban school districts in Canada can be generalized to other cities in other countries where immigration, past and present, has had an impact on schools, and to all schools in culturally diverse communities. This is not to say that Canada has found successful ways of dealing with all the issues — some of the lessons are about what not to do, as well as what has been successful. Nor do all the successful practices originate

in Canada; Canadian schools have learned from the experience of educators in other countries, especially the United States and the United Kingdom.

There is unlikely to be a school in existence that already has in place all of the procedures and practices described in this book. The multicultural school I envision here is a composite ideal, and includes some ideas about what might be. Many of the approaches I recommend will require adaptation to conform to local policy and practice. For example, the suitability of some of the recommendations may depend on whether all, many, or only a few of the students are from cultural backgrounds other than the mainstream culture of the larger society. Therefore, I offer this book as a menu of options for teachers and administrators to choose from and adapt according to local needs, resources, and constraints.

A word about the title of this book: 'Teaching and Learning' are viewed as reciprocal, in that teachers in multicultural schools are also learners, and learners are also teachers. The term 'multicultural' is used in the title and throughout this book — as in 'the multicultural school', or 'a multicultural environment' — as a succinct way of encompassing cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity. The book is subtitled 'An Integrated Approach' because it is about the integration of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds into every facet of school life, through the adoption of a integrated whole-school approach that encompasses curriculum development, classroom practice, school policy, and school–community relations.

Some chapters in this book focus on the needs of students who are recent immigrants or the children of immigrants. In others, the discussion includes children of indigenous or historical minority groups such as Aboriginal peoples and African Americans.

It is important to examine the use of the word 'minority'. The term is especially common in the United States, where minorities include such groups as Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and various immigrant groups. Expressions such as 'linguistic minority' or 'racial minority' are also common. However, according to Cummins (1996), the term may be viewed as pejorative among some educators and in some communities, and is inaccurate in terms of the demographic composition of some school districts. 'Minorities' actually constitute a numerical majority in many school districts in the United States and Canada, or soon will do so, but they are a minority among those who have power, status, and influence. In the educational context, they constitute a minority among teachers and school administrators, curriculum developers and textbook writers, and officials responsible for educational planning. As a result, their achievements, contributions, experiences, and perspectives are often under-represented in the curriculum that is offered to all students. In this book, I use the word 'minority' as a shorthand for 'groups other than the English-speaking white mainstream which constitutes the dominant social and cultural group in countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia'.

An underlying assumption in this book is that schools can become agents of change in society. For example, some of the strategies and activities suggested in the book will transform the school into an important site of antiracist activity, where students, teachers, and parents can learn to recognize and counter inequities that result from existing power relationships in the school and in society.

CONTENT

Living in linguistically and culturally diverse communities is interesting and stimulating, and provides all students and teachers with valuable opportunities for cultural enrichment and global education. At the same time, this diversity poses special challenges for educators, especially those whose education and training did not prepare them to live in multicultural societies and work in multicultural schools. In this book I hope to support teachers by outlining some of the knowledge they need, with reference to relevant research, and describing some practical examples that build on that knowledge.

Note: Although many students in multicultural schools are learning the language of instruction, this book does not attempt to provide specific advice on how to teach English as a Second Language. To do so would make the book twice as long; therefore, I have put second language learning and teaching aside for another book.

ORGANIZATION

The book consists of nine chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the sources of cultural diversity and describes some public policies that have a direct impact on the cultural composition of many classrooms. Chapter 2 focusses on the special needs of students who have recently arrived from other countries, or who are the children of recent immigrants. The chapter describes the effects of the immigrant experience on families, and on children's psychological adjustment and eventual integration into the academic and social life of the school. Chapter 3 suggests some practical ways of receiving and welcoming all students and helping them to get off to a positive start in their new educational environment. The chapter includes detailed practical advice on the assessment and placement of recently arrived students and children who start learning English when they start school. Chapter 4 suggests some ways of helping everyone — immigrants and the children of immigrants, indigenous minorities, and members of the mainstream cultural group — to feel valued and included in the multicultural school community. Chapter 5 describes how each teacher can create a positive and inclusive classroom environment, where students learn to work together and appreciate each other's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Chapter 6 describes important elements of an inclusive instructional style in the multicultural classroom. Chapter 7 provides an overview of antiracist education as a context for Chapter 8, which examines the content of the curriculum, and recommends specific actions that schools and individual teachers can take to develop a curriculum that is inclusive in orientation and equitable in

effect. The final chapter discusses issues related to assessment reform, and provides advice on curriculum related assessment in the multicultural school.

Throughout the text there are graphics and text boxes consisting of quotations, commentaries, instructions, and examples that explain, expand on, or illustrate a key point or suggestion in the main text. At the end of each chapter there is an annotated list of resources for teachers who would like to explore some of the ideas in more detail. Several chapters also provide checklists that educators can use to assess progress in implementing some of the approaches and strategies suggested in this book.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Use this book as a 'menu' of information and suggestions, selecting topics and strategies as and when they seem appropriate to your school and your needs. Although the chapters may be read selectively and in any order, some chapters may refer to some concepts introduced in another chapter. For example, some of the strategies suggested in Chapter 3, 'Getting Started in the Multicultural School', respond to the needs of recently arrived immigrant students as described in Chapter 2, 'The Immigrant Experience'. Throughout the book, reference is made to other sections or chapters that may be relevant to a particular topic.

I address many of the ideas and suggestions in this book directly to teachers, giving practical advice on what 'you' can do in your classroom or in your role as a teacher-counsellor. If you are a school administrator, curriculum advisor, or teacher educator, these ideas are suggestions on what to encourage, expect, and look for in the classrooms where you have influence.

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