The Influence of Multicultural Educational Practices on Student Outcomes and Intergroup Relations

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Background: How best to serve a racially and ethnically diverse student body has been a topic of intensive theory development for the past 30 or 40 years. We have strong theoretical models regarding the need for and practice of multicultural education, the goals of which include both increased educational achievement for students of color and improved intergroup relations. Nevertheless, there are few places where one can find a broad examination of the empirical support for the influence of multicultural educational practice on either student outcomes or intergroup relations.

Purpose: In this article, I use James A. Banks’s widely used conceptualization of the five components of multicultural educational practice—content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogies, and empowering school cultures—to examine the empirical evidence for the influence of each of these five different components on the academic outcomes of students of color and intergroup relations in schools.

Conclusions: The empirical research reveals that all five components of multicultural educational practice outlined by Banks to have a strong, positive impact on the educational outcomes of students of color and to improved intergroup relations, although research has been stronger in some areas (e.g., prejudice reduction and some equity pedagogies such as cooperative learning) than others (e.g., the specific effects of content integration and knowledge construction). The evidence suggests several additional conclusions: (1) Multicultural educational practice has benefit for the academic outcomes of all students, not just students of color. (2) Multicultural educational practice is most effective when implemented with careful attention to issues of race and power. (3) The academic and intergroup relations outcomes are linked, such that efforts designed to improve one improve the other. Implications for future research on the effects of multicultural educational practice on students, as well as teacher and administrator education programs, are discussed.
How best to serve a racially and ethnically diverse student body has been a topic of ongoing theorizing and debate for more than a century, but it has received renewed attention and effort in recent years (see J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks, 2004; Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). This increased attention stems from growing awareness that our current educational processes are not working for a large and growing percentage of the student body—indeed, that something is terribly wrong. Our African American and Latino students are dropping out of school at twice or three times the rate of their white or Asian American counterparts (Greene & Winters, 2005; Orfield, 2004). Student achievement measured any number of ways suggests that many students of color are underperforming relative to their potential (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2006; Steele, 1997), and efforts directed at improving the achievement of underperforming students of color that do not deeply and directly address issues of race and ethnicity have been ineffective (Zirkel, 2005).

We have strong theoretical models specifying the need for, and value and dimensions of, multicultural education (see J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks, 2004; Delpit, 1996; Gay, 2000, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2005a; Nieto, 2003), and an entire literature documenting the deleterious psychological and academic consequences that educational practice not based on multicultural or antiracist principles has for students of color (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Delpit; Gay, 2000, 2004; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2005a; Lewis, 2003). Much less attention has been given to a broad examination of the empirical research examining the effects that multicultural educational practices have on students. Multicultural education is founded on the assumption that practices and policies that are designed within a multicultural framework will improve schools in at least two ways: (1) by improving the academic achievement of students of color and (2) by improving intergroup relations within schools between and among students, staff, and faculty. To date, however, there has been no systematic examination of whether the full range of multicultural educational practices (see below) do, in fact, accomplish these goals. In this article, I endeavor to examine, for a broad audience, questions about the effect of multicultural educational practices on these two goals. Just how effective are multicultural educational practices at improving the educational outcomes of students of color or improving intergroup relations in schools? Given space limitations, I cannot provide a comprehensive review of every study of multicultural educational practice; instead, I approach this question by examining a few representative high-quality studies that directly address questions about the effect of these practices on students. It is my hope that such a review will be valuable to both scholars of
multicultural education and the range of educational practitioners. I hope to identify for teachers and administrators ways in which they can incorporate principles and practices of multicultural education with renewed confidence and to identify for educational researchers areas in which we have consistent, strong evidence for the effect of multicultural educational practice on students and schools, and where further study is needed.

WHAT IS MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION?

To begin, we need a clear definition of multicultural education, because the term has been used to describe a variety of different practices over time. For this article I will use J. A. Banks’s (2004) widely used and comprehensive conceptualization of the components of multicultural education, because many other conceptualizations only cover part of the ground that he highlights in his definition. J. A. Banks articulated five core dimensions that characterize multicultural education: (1) content integration—infusing the curriculum with material from diverse groups, (e.g., new authors, new historical material); (2) knowledge construction—an awareness of and focus on the way that cultural frames shape the identification and interpretation of educational content (e.g., understanding that the “westward migration” was only “west” for one social group); (3) prejudice reduction—the extent to which the teachers and administrators in a school actively work to reduce prejudice and stereotyping by students in the school, such as through the inclusion of an explicitly antiracist curriculum; (4) equity pedagogy—pedagogies designed specifically to increase the academic achievement of lower performing students and to create greater equity between students (see also C. A. M. Banks & J. A. Banks, 1995); and (5) empowering school culture—altering school structures and processes to be more empowering for all students, with particular attention to eliminating institutionalized racism in school practices.

THE INFLUENCE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Using the framework outlined above, I review the broad range of multicultural educational practices to explore the evidence concerning their influence on students’ academic outcomes and intergroup relations within schools. Several themes emerge as we examine the influence of multicultural educational practice on student outcomes and intergroup relations. First, I will demonstrate that multicultural educational practice is only effective to the extent that issues of race and power are explicitly and thoroughly addressed. As I explore a variety of multicultural educa-
tional practices, I will consider some (e.g. cooperative learning) that can be implemented in ways that do not directly address issues of race and power, but when implemented this way, the practice is unlikely to be very effective. Next, I will show that multicultural educational practices benefit all students - student achievement often improves for all students, thus demanding that we conceptualize these practices as good teaching practice, not practices suitable or necessary for a only certain subgroups of students. Finally, I will demonstrate that that the improvements in student outcomes and intergroup relations are linked, in that improvements in one leads to improvements in the other, which has implications for how we theorize the mechanisms by which multicultural educational practices affects student outcomes and intergroup relations. These links can also be seen within individual intervention efforts, which can often be construed as addressing several different components of multicultural educational practice at once - e.g., cooperative learning is an equity pedagogy, but it can also be a means for facilitating prejudice reduction and, if widely implemented, a means of creating an empowering school culture.

CONTENT INTEGRATION

Content integration refers to the integration of new, multiculturally based content into the existing curriculum. Examples are efforts to include women authors and/or authors of color in the literature that students read and to include more material on the experiences of different cultural groups in the history curriculum. Another version of content integration is educational efforts in which students are given freedom to define the content of a research project or investigation, thereby allowing students to incorporate material that is individually relevant to them (e.g., Collatos & Morrell, 2003; Hawkins, 2006). Content integration is what many most closely associate with multicultural education. It is probably the most widely implemented but least studied aspect of multicultural education. In more and more classrooms in schools and colleges, teachers and faculty are integrating content from more ethnically and linguistically diverse sources than ever. Anecdotally, teachers often report that the inclusion of such material leads to higher levels of student engagement, contributes to positive ethnic and racial identities among students of color, and has a positive influence on intergroup relations between students. Nevertheless, there has been little systematic empirical research documenting these effects, making this an area ripe for further research.
At a very basic level, those who seek to increase the range and diversity of materials that students are exposed to in school—to integrate a greater range of content—argue that such an expansion of our educational materials will serve to foster the development of a strong, positive ethnic identity among students of color, whose lives and experiences have been relatively ignored in the “canon” to date. What do we know about the influence of content integration on identity development? Essentially, we know that such relationships are complex rather than simplistic but that their effect is generally positive. Retrospective studies of college students’ descriptions of their earlier experiences reveal that being given an opportunity to explore and study the history, culture, literature, and other intellectual products of members of their racial or ethnic group can have a positive effect on the development of students’ racial or ethnic identity (e.g., Duarte, 1998; Tatum, 2003, 2004). The few studies that specifically examine the effect of multicultural literature on students’ identity development processes suggest that these materials do have a positive influence on identity among Latino (Brozo & Valerio, 1996), African American (R. T. Carter, 2000), and Native American (Powers, 2006; Villegas, 2006) students alike. However, the research studies in this area are typically small in scale and retrospective in nature. A study of a larger scale implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum in an urban, largely African American school district did not reveal it to have a positive influence on student identity, which the author felt was because the curriculum was not implemented with thoughtful attention to how it would fit with students’ own experiences (Ginwright, 2000). Ginwright’s study speaks to the need for a careful examination of the ways that multicultural educational practices are implemented, a theme that we will return to again and again. More systematic and larger-scale and prospective studies of the relationship between multicultural content integration and ethnic identity development would be a welcome addition to the field.

A second question concerns whether a stronger or more positive ethnic identity is, in fact, associated with higher educational achievement, and several recent large-scale longitudinal studies have revealed that a strong, positive racial or ethnic identity is associated with higher levels of academic performance (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006; Chavous et al., 2003; Chavous & Griffin, 2006; Chavous, Rivas, Green, & Helaire, 2002; Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Thomas, Caldwell, & Njai, 2006; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003; Wout, Shih, Jackson, & Sellers, in press; Zirkel, 2008a), higher educational aspirations (P. L. Carter, 2005; Chavous et al., 2003; Zirkel, 2008a),
greater academic self-confidence (Oyserman et al., 2001; Tatum, 2004; Villalpando, 2003), a greater commitment on the part of students of color to academic work and the educational setting in which they are working (Chavous et al., 2003; Deaux & Ethier, 1998; Ethier & Deaux, 1990; 1994; Tatum, 2004; Villalpando, 2003), and a greater ability to remain committed to one’s academic goals despite experiencing racial discrimination from teachers (Wong et al.; Zirkel, 2008a). These studies used varied methodologies, including both large-scale longitudinal studies of student development and more qualitative examinations of students’ self-reports of their experience, suggesting that this is a robust pattern. Chavous et al. (2003) studied 606 (287 male, 319 female) African American youth during late adolescence who had been identified as being educationally at risk (defined as having a grade point average [GPA] < 3.0 in eighth grade). They found that within this sample, those students for whom being African American was a central part of their identity and who reported feeling positive attitudes toward African Americans reported greater academic self-confidence and reported perceiving school as more important to their futures than those youth who did not have a strong or positive racial identity. Moreover, they were more likely to remain in school longer, graduate from high school, and enroll in college than their peers for whom being African American was not a central aspect of their identity or who did not perceive other African Americans in positive terms. Similarly, Zirkel (2008a) found that African American middle school students with a strong racial identity had higher GPAs in school, even controlling for prior GPA, and they reported spending more time on homework and had higher educational goals and expectations for themselves than did their peers without a strong, positive racial identities. Although correlational in design, these studies typically control for the effects of prior achievement to assess whether racial or ethnic identity has a unique influence on students’ later achievement, thus helping to demonstrate that these interpretations are reasonable.

Multicultural curricular content and student engagement

Another way to think about the effects of content integration on students’ educational outcomes is to examine whether the adoption of such curricular materials is likely to have an influence on student learning and academic engagement more broadly. Empirical research generally supports this claim. Several studies in which educators explored the influence of new multicultural curricular content on student engagement suggest that this relationship is a positive one (Athanases, 1996; Bean, Valerio, Senior, & White, 1999; Center, 2005; Copenhaver, 1999, 2001;
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Gaines, 2004; Tatum, 1992, 2004). However, these studies are generally case studies of student development or interpretative reports of teachers’ reflections on their practice. These studies are valuable for the insights that they offer, but the area would be strengthened by larger scale studies that could more explicitly examine the relationship between the inclusion of multicultural curricular content and students’ engagement with the material.

Several larger scale studies have been conducted with college students to examine the influence of multicultural curricular content on the development of students’ thinking, such as their levels of critical thinking or complexity of thinking. These studies show that both informal and formal discussions of issues of race and ethnicity have a positive influence on the development of students’ thinking skills (e.g., perspective taking; ability to see different sides of an issue; better decision-making; Antonio et al., 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Hurtado, 2005; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004). Similarly, studies of the inclusion of diversity courses as a college requirement reveal that these courses have a positive influence on student learning and development even when students are required to participate rather than choosing these experiences out of their own interest (Lopez, 2004). However, most of these studies revealed that the largest effect of these courses was on the development of white students rather than students of color, which suggests a different process than that proposed in much of the multicultural education literature. Moreover, diversity courses and discussions of race and ethnicity encompass many different components of multicultural education, and none of these college-based studies is able to tease out the precise relationship between inclusion of more multicultural content and student learning.

Educational content and interethnic relations

Studies of the effect of content integration on intergroup relations at school generally reveal a positive effect. Studies of interventions designed to provide room for younger students to specifically discuss issues of race and ethnicity in classrooms reveal that such discussions can lead to less stereotyping and prejudice (Aboud & Doyle, 1996a, 1996b; Aboud & Fenwick, 1999; Aboud & Levy, 2000), suggesting that a greater integration of multicultural curricular content will generally lead to improved rather than worsened or unchanged relations between groups (see also Kugler, 2002; Parker, 2003). Recent large-scale empirical studies of diversity courses across many college campuses have demonstrated the positive effect of such courses on students’ ability to take the perspective of
another, and students’ interest in, and ability to get along with, others from different racial or ethnic groups; again, this effect was strongest among white students (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 2002; Gurin et al., 2002, 2004; Hurtado, 2005; Lopez, 2004; Milem, 1994), although these courses typically include most or all components of multicultural educational practice embedded within them, rather than only content integration, so it is difficult to assess the specific influence of content integration in these studies.

KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION

Knowledge construction, as an aspect of multicultural education, makes more demands on educators than content integration in that it requires a more thorough rethinking of the curriculum. Knowledge construction asks us as educators to go deeper into our analysis of the curriculum and to carefully consider how we decide what is knowledge and how we organize or frame that knowledge. In our history curriculum, for example, from whose perspective is history told and why? How would the history we tell look if it were told from a different perspective? What history might we tell if we took the perspective of another social group or had different groups tell history as they perceive it? An important part of a more reflective, thoughtful approach to multicultural educational practice, it is difficult if not impossible to separate out the effects of knowledge construction specifically on student outcomes, and I know of no studies that attempt to do so. Nevertheless, the diversity courses or discussions of race and ethnicity discussed above most likely have their powerful effect on students’ intellectual development in large part because they expand students’ conceptions of how knowledge is generated and the ways in which that perspective shapes that knowledge. The development of studies that explore the specific influence of knowledge construction as an aspect of multicultural educational practice would be extremely valuable.

PREJUDICE REDUCTION

Prejudice reduction in schools is probably the most thoroughly studied aspect of multicultural educational practice. Prejudice reduction efforts, efforts to improve intergroup relations, and research that examines their effectiveness go back more than 75 years (C. A. M. Banks, 2005) and continues until the present (Stephan, 1999; Stephan & Vogt, 2004). Most of this work ran parallel to, rather than emerging from within, the multicultural education movement (C. A. M. Banks, 2005.) In identifying this
component of multicultural education, J. A. Banks (2004) specifically focused on prejudice between and among students, and the need for teachers to unlearn racism is addressed more directly in the section on creating an empowering school culture. Changing the racial climate between and among students at schools is an important aspect of multicultural educational practice because of the detrimental role that prejudice and racism play in the everyday educational experiences of students of color (Steele, 1997; Zirkel, 2004, 2005, 2008c).

The prejudice reduction research literature is voluminous, and a comprehensive review of the intergroup relations literature is beyond the scope of this article. Fortunately, several good recent reviews of the work exist, including several that specifically examine the prejudice reduction and intergroup relations movement and its influence in education (C. A. M. Banks 2005; Bigler, 1999; Dovidio et al., 2004; Stephan & Vogt, 2004), and several recent meta-analyses that specifically test the effect of multicultural educational practices (Stephan, Renfro, & Stephan, 2004) and Allport’s model (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000, 2006; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005a, 2005b) on intergroup contact and prejudice reduction. In this work, several core effective interventions for improving intergroup relations between and among students emerge, including (1) Allport’s (1954) contact theory, (2) open discussions about issues of race and ethnicity in classrooms, and (3) the development of racial and ethnic identity, including white racial identity, among students.

Allport’s Intergroup Contact Theory

Allport’s (1954) model, now more than 50 years old, remains the most often studied and probably the most succinct statement of the ideal conditions for fostering improved intergroup relations through intergroup contact, such as what typically occurs in a school setting. Allport argued that mere contact alone would not lead to improved intergroup relations and argued that four conditions would be important for turning contact between groups into improved relations between those groups: (1) Equal status. Individuals from different groups ideally come together on fairly equal terms. Within education, this has typically led to efforts to deconstruct status differences between students. (2) Support of authority. Groups need to come together with the support of authority figures. Within educational settings, this means that teachers and administrators need to be vocal and assertive in their support of improved intergroup relations. (3) Superordinate goals. Individuals from different groups come together to work on common goals that encourage the development of a superordinate identity that unites them. (4) Extended contact. Finally, it is best if
groups come together over an extended period because it is through extended, structured contact that individual students come to know and care for one another in psychologically meaningful ways that are more likely to change attitudes and beliefs over time.

Although these conditions are ideal and each facilitates greater prejudice reduction, reductions in prejudice between students can also occur in less ideal settings (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, for a recent meta-analysis of the extant research). The biggest deterrents to the implementation of contact theory as a means of reducing prejudice in schools are twofold, the ever-increasing level of racial and ethnic segregation of schools in the United States (Boger & Orfield, 2006; Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Kozol, 2005). On the other hand is that in many “integrated” schools, few or none of these requirements are met for ideal intergroup contact - although there is much that schools can do to facilitate the development of these conditions (see, e.g., Zirkel, 2008b).

Open Dialogues About Race and Ethnicity

Facilitating open classroom discussion about issues of race and racism is another strategy for decreasing prejudice between students and improving intergroup relations. Studies of racism and prejudice in children reveal that children’s attitudes about race and ethnicity are quite malleable and open to change through discussion (Aboud & Doyle, 1996a) and antibias curricular interventions (Derman-Sparks, 2004). Interventions that focus fairly directly on changing students’ attitudes about race and ethnicity by having them engage in direct discussions of their beliefs have proved effective in reducing prejudice and racist attitudes among K–12 students, at least in the short term (e.g., Aboud & Doyle, 1996b; Aboud & Fenwick, 1999). For example, experimental field studies with young children revealed that discussions between a less prejudiced child and a more prejudiced child about race and fairness generally led to prejudice reductions in the more prejudiced child rather than vice versa (Aboud & Doyle, 1996a). Similarly, as discussed above, studies of college students also revealed that opportunities for both informal conversations between students and formal classroom discussions regarding issues of race and ethnicity had a positive impact on both student intellectual development and students’ attitudes toward others (e.g., Chang, 1999, 2002; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Gurin et al., 2002, 2004; Lopez, 2004; Nagda et al., 2004).
Racial Identity Development

We saw earlier that the development of a strong, positive racial or ethnic identity is associated with greater achievement and commitment to academics among students of color. It is also the case that this same strong, positive racial or ethnic identity can serve to improve interethnic relations, in part because a strong racial or ethnic identity can help students to meet on a more equal footing (see also Phinney & Ferguson, 1997; Tatum, 2000, 2003). White racial identity development also plays an important role in changing attitudes and reducing prejudice among white students, in part because a greater understanding of their own racial identity frees them to explore the racial experiences of others with less resistance (e.g., R. T. Carter, 2000; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Tatum, 1992, 1994). Recent experimental research with college students reveals that when white students’ identities are affirmed in other ways, they are more open to perceiving the racism experienced by people of color (Adams, O’Brien, & Nelson, 2006; Adams, Tormala, & O’Brien, 2006). This highlights that white students’ inability to “see” racism, particularly institutionalized racism, often stems from a desire to protect their own place in the world. In a related study, Gushue and Carter (2000) found that white students with more developed racial identities are more accurate in their memories of racially coded information. In her classic study, Tatum (1992) demonstrated that helping white students understand their own racial identity development can provide a framework that they can use to understand their own resistance to material in a course that explores the psychology of racism.

Equity Pedagogy

Equity pedagogies are pedagogical innovations specifically designed to address issues of educational equity. One focus of equity pedagogies is to develop and use teaching techniques and methods that can address different learning styles and to develop pedagogical approaches that facilitate the educational achievements of lower performing students. However, equity pedagogies go beyond this to articulate a model of learning and teaching in which students are expected to actively participate in the creation of knowledge, and in which education is seen as a means to help students re-envision their worlds and opportunities and to think about the role that they will play in larger issues of democracy and social change. In looking at studies of the effectiveness of equity pedagogies, it quickly becomes evident that there have been numerous studies of concrete, specific pedagogical techniques for creating more equitable class-
rooms. However, far fewer studies really explore the longer term effects of the broader vision of equity pedagogy as a pedagogy of empowerment that is designed to help students become reflective, thoughtful citizens dedicated to social change and justice (e.g., Ball, 2000; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). C. A. M. Banks and J. A. Banks (1995) noted that specific techniques described as equity pedagogies are only effective when they are placed into a larger context of a changed understanding of the role of the social context in framing learning, and we need more research documenting the effects of the more transformative aspects of equity pedagogy.

Cooperative Learning and Learning Communities

Cooperative learning paradigms have probably been the most studied equity pedagogy, and the research is clear that cooperative learning projects must be carefully structured to have the desired effects on issues of equity. A comprehensive review of the voluminous research on cooperative learning is beyond the scope of this article. Cohen and her colleagues (e.g., Cohen, 1994; Cohen & Lotan, 1995, 1997) have provided excellent reviews and assessments specifically directed toward understanding whether and how heterogeneous cooperative learning groups can effectively improve the learning outcomes of lower performing students. Scores of studies have revealed that heterogeneous groupwork can be an effective strategy for increasing the learning outcomes of lower performing students, but that heterogeneous groups are most effective when: (1) the project undertaken by the group entails work that is actually best done by a group; (2) the project is open-ended, without a clear “right answer,” but one that requires high-level work; and (3) teachers actively and effectively work to subvert or deconstruct status differences between students. In particular, teachers need to actively work against students’ own status-based hierarchy assessments of each other through strategies such as ensuring that all students have something to contribute, actively seeking out the talents and skills of lower status students and using those, and making clear statements to students that no one student will have all the skills needed to complete the project. In other words, cooperative learning with heterogeneous groups can be a powerful tool for improving students’ learning—but only when groupwork is implemented in very thoughtful ways, with particular attention to issues of when groupwork makes pedagogical sense and to subverting students’ status hierarchies—a pattern that we will continue to see across multicultural educational practices. They are most effective when thoughtfully
and carefully implemented, with specific attention given to issues of race
and power.

Whereas those in the cooperative learning movement have typically
focused on the influence of cooperative learning pedagogies to improve
student learning (e.g., Cohen & Lotan, 1995, 1997; Lucker, Rosenfield,
Sikes, & Aronson, 1976), the potential for cooperative learning to
improve intergroup relations between students has also been discussed
(e.g., Aronson, 2002; Lucker et al.; Slavin & Cooper, 1999). In particular,
these authors noted that when heterogeneous workgroups are organized
to facilitate meeting Allport’s (1954) conditions for intergroup contact,
they are likely to lead to improved intergroup relations. In such settings,
students come together for an extended period on an equal-status basis
with a common goal and with support of one or more authority figures.
In other words, the influence of heterogeneous student workgroups on
intergroup relations is most positive when cooperative learning groups
are carefully constructed and managed in order to subvert students’ own
status hierarchies and to create conditions that foster positive interac-
tions between group members—precisely the same conditions that lead
to improvements in student learning. This is a theme that we will return
to later.

Learning communities are a longer term pedagogical approach to fos-
tering relationships between students and improving the academic out-
comes of students of color. Learning communities can be small or large,
but they represent groups that interact over extended periods to foster
learning in a specific area, such as workgroups that study together in a
calculus class or groups of students who come together to form an iden-
tity-based academic support group. Zhao and Kuh (2004) recently con-
ducted a review of learning communities in 365 four-year colleges and
found that participation in such communities is linked to greater invest-
ment in academic work, improved academic outcomes, and greater satis-
faction with the college experience. Those who have specifically exam-
ined the relationship between learning communities and the academic
achievement of students of color have found learning communities to be
a powerful equity pedagogy that has a positive effect on students’ academ-
ic performance and persistence, particularly in science, mathematics,
engineering, and technology (SMET) majors (e.g., Hrabowski, Maton,
Greene, & Greif, 2002; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Maton &
Hrabowski, 2004; Ogbug, 2003; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1999;
Steele, 1997; Treisman, 1992, 1993). For example, Treisman and col-
leagues have conducted numerous studies of the effect of organized
study groups on middle, high school, and college students’ performance
in advanced mathematics courses. They found that study groups in which
students are encouraged to learn from each other and to take a developmental approach to their work have a dramatic positive effect on both students’ academic performance in those courses and the longer term retention of students of color and women in math and science at the middle, high school, and college levels (Charles A. Dana Center, n.d.; Treisman, 1992, 1993).

**Service Learning**

Service learning has emerged as a pedagogical technique with strong potential as an equity pedagogy (Sausjord, 1997). This is an area ripe for further research; I know of no studies that explore its influence on either the educational outcomes of students of color or intergroup relations. Fredericksen (2000) reported a study of a voluntary service learning program in a college government course in which she found that women and lower income students were more likely to participate in service learning activities and that participation in the service-learning project was generally associated with higher academic performance. This research is suggestive of the potential of service learning as an equity pedagogy in the context of multicultural educational practice, but the area requires further exploration.

**EMPOWERING SCHOOL CULTURE**

The most far-reaching aspects of the multicultural educational principles outlined by J. A. Banks (2004) concerns creating school cultures that are empowering to all students. Empowering schools are designed and operated with thoughtful attention to the myriad ways that aspects of race and ethnicity can be encoded into the basic structures of a school. No matter how or why multiethnic schools were created—whether through federally mandating busing, through the development of an entirely new school, or through the best intentions of a liberal community—an academic achievement gap between white and students of color often remains (e.g., Lewis, 2003; Ogbu, 2003; Schofield, 1989; Wells & Grain, 1997). In each case, this achievement gap can be traced back to ongoing issues of racial stigma and racial tension in the school (Zirkel, 2005). An empowering school culture is one that directly and forcefully addresses the ways that racism is encoded in school policies and practices, from disciplinary procedures and special education assessments to students’ relationships with teachers in the classroom. In this section, I examine evidence that specific attention to the creation of an empowering school culture that directly addresses issues of institutionalized racism positively influences
student outcomes and intergroup relations. It is beyond the scope of this article to review every intervention that has been attempted that might be construed as creating a more empowering school culture for a wider range of students. Instead, I will highlight examples of high-quality studies that have examined the impact of particular efforts to create a more empowering school culture. Empowering school cultures generally has two components: schools that focus on building strong relationships among students and between students and teachers, and schools that focus on altering pedagogical and institutional practice in ways that address institutionalized racism.

**Positive Relationships within School**

School is, at its heart, a relational enterprise. Authentic, caring relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to learning (Kroll et al., 2005), as are relationships between and among students in school (Zirkel, 2004, 2008c). Studies of student achievement (Adams & Singh, 1998; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Sanders & Jordan, 2000), satisfaction (Baker, 1999), and persistence (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Kelly & Schweitzer, 1999; Pianta, 1999) demonstrate that close, positive relationships with teachers have tangible benefits for student skill development and motivation, and this is particularly true for students of color. Currently in the United States, students of color make up approximately 40% of the student body (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004), but the K–12 teaching force is 90% white (National Education Association, 2001). This means that students of color are typically in classrooms staffed by white teachers, so in addition to relationship issues that all students must negotiate, their relationships with their teachers also contain the issues that confront other cross-race relationships. Students of color are often apprehensive about their white teachers and worry particularly about they will treat them fairly (e.g., Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Brown, 1998; Brown & Dobbins, 2004; Casteel, 2000; Galguera, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001; Wayman, 2002), but this fear can be attenuated by a teacher’s self-description as being open to cultural diversity and explicit about his or her belief in the academic ability of all students (Brown, 1998; Brown & Dobbins, 2004; Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Wout et al., in press).

Large-scale interventions reveal that efforts to improve the quality of teacher-student relationships can have a positive influence on student outcomes. The Seattle Social Development Project is a school-based intervention designed as a field experiment. The intervention was specifically designed to focus on students’ social development and their bond-
ing with school through building more effective relationships between teachers and students. Starting in 1981, first-grade students at five elementary schools were assigned either to an intervention group or a control group. Parents and teachers of children in the intervention group were given training that specifically focused on strengthening bonds between family, children, and schools, to actively engage children in learning, and to encourage positive behavior in children. For example, teachers were taught a number of simple strategies for building more personal relationships with all their students, such as greeting each child at the door each day, calling students by name, and speaking to them more often on the playground or in other school settings. Four years later, when the students entered fifth grade, the study was expanded to include a total of more than 800 students from 18 elementary schools. Long-term outcome studies revealed that compared with students in the control group, students in the intervention group reported being more attached to their school and committed to education throughout their school career (Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, & Abbott, 2001). Intervention group students were more likely to graduate from high school and more likely to show positive emotional functioning and were less likely to engage in risky adolescent behaviors than were control group students. These positive effects of the intervention were stronger for students of color (Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2005). Finally, a study exploring whether teachers actually implemented the intervention model revealed that the more teachers engaged in these behaviors, the greater the effect on students’ educational outcomes (Abbot et al., 1998).

Similarly, small schools’ interventions have been implemented in large part to create “warmer” school cultures based on positive relationships among students, teachers, and staff. In early research, small schools or schools within schools have been demonstrated to foster more personalized relationships between students and teachers and to improve students’ sense of belonging at school (e.g., Kahne, Sporte, & de la Torre, 2006; Lee & Smith, 1999; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Ready, Lee, & Welner, 2004; Wasley, 2002), feelings that in turn have been shown to be associated with greater academic performance (Lee & Smith, 1999; McNeely et al.) and higher levels of educational persistence (Kahne et al.) for all students—students of color in particular (e.g., Achilles, 1996; Achilles et al., 1997; Finn & Achilles, 1990; Lee & Smith, 1995, 1997; Ready et al.; Scott-George & Ward, 2006).

Efforts by individual teachers to create more positive relationships with students of color can have a marked effect on student motivation, achievement, and educational persistence. By becoming keenly aware of
the racial dynamics within schools and classrooms and actively working to mitigate their effect on students, teachers can create what Dorothy and Claude Steele termed “identity safe” classrooms—classrooms in which all students are treated as welcomed, valued, and contributive members of the class. Early studies of this construct are promising. A classroom observation study revealed that standardized test scores for all students, particularly those of lower socioeconomic status (SES), were higher than expected based on previous years’ scores after students spent a year in identity safe classrooms (D. M. Steele et al., 2007).

Teachers can also improve the classroom relational climate by articulating for students models of intelligence and learning that focus on change and development rather than on static demonstrations of ability (see Dweck, 2000). J. Aronson, G. Cohen, and their colleagues revealed that when peers or teachers construct school or classroom narratives in which educational struggles are normalized and intelligence is described as malleable, students of color showed improved performance, greater enjoyment of school, and greater academic persistence (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

An empowering school culture is one in which all students feel welcomed and valued and in which all are seen as contributing members of the community. Studies of school warmth highlight the importance of these issues for all students. For example, in a study of a national sample of eighth graders, Voelkl (1995) found that school warmth led to higher levels of student participation in class, which in turn led to higher levels of achievement. Creating empowering school cultures for all requires ensuring that a school is equally warm and welcoming for all students. Peer relationships in school constitute an important aspect of a school’s atmosphere, and we know that classroom warmth can influence intergroup relations in school. Hallinan and her colleagues found that creating classrooms focused on learning and development rather than test scores and student achievement fosters both the development and maintenance of cross-race friendships (Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987a, 1987b; Khmelkov & Hallinan, 1999).

Hains (2001) used indigenous research methods to address the problem of a very high dropout rate among First Nation students in her high school in Canada. First Nation students were invited to form talking circles about the issues that led students to leave school, and the process of engaging in these conversations empowered students to design their own anti-dropout program for First Nation students in the school. One component of the program that the students developed was a mentoring system whereby new high school students would be mentored by a more senior student at the school. Another was to petition the school
leadership for more culturally relevant curriculum content. Over a 2-year period, the dropout rate among First Nation students at the school dropped dramatically, from 90% to less than 10%.

Changing Institutional Practice

Building schools that are empowering for all students involves a deep examination of school policies and practices to uncover and dismantle institutionalized racism. Policies and practices surrounding issues of school discipline (e.g., Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), academic tracking (e.g., Oakes, 2005), assignment to specific programs (Conchas, 2001; 2006), and assignment to special education programs (e.g., Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Faggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005; Skiba et al., 2006) are all deeply shaped by histories of racism in educational practice. In many areas, researchers are still at the stage of exploring and articulating the ways that race and ethnicity give rise to deeply institutionalized policies and practices in schools, and we do not yet have much research that examines what happens when changes are implemented to undo those processes to make schools treat students more equitably. We need to begin to move beyond analysis and into intervention so that we may begin to assess the ways that changed policies change students’ experiences and outcomes. However, one area in which we have a substantial body of evidence on the outcomes of creating a more empowering school culture for student outcomes and intergroup relations is detracking the curriculum.

Studies of schoolwide and districtwide detracking efforts reveal that this can be a powerful tool for improving student outcomes. Often, parents, teachers, and administrators resist detracking efforts because of concerns about whether it will result in generally lower academic standards and whether high-performing students will no longer be able to experience a high-level curriculum (e.g., Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997; Wells & Serna, 1996). However, extant research demonstrated that these fears are generally unwarranted. Oakes (2005) found that after detracking, the curriculum implemented with the larger student body was geared to a higher, rather than a lower, level. Moreover, a wide range of recent studies reveal that detracking is associated with strong improvements in the academic performance of all students, including those who were previously enrolled in the higher academic tracks (see Rubin, 2006, for several research studies on the implementation of detracking efforts; also see Cooper, 1999; Datnow & Hirshberg, 1996; Mason, Schroeter, Combs, & Washington, 1992; Oakes, 2005; Swartzbaugh, 1988, and the material on research conducted by Burris and her colleagues, below).
Burris and her colleagues (Burris, Heubert, & Levin, 2004, 2006; Burris & Welner, 2005) have recently undertaken a careful study of a systematic effort to detrack the mathematics curriculum in a racially diverse suburban school district. The districts’ efforts were specifically designed to address issues of racial disparity in mathematics learning and course enrollments and to ensure that all students engaged in the highest level math curriculum. The program was implemented sequentially, beginning with students in the sixth grade, traditionally the first point at which students were officially tracked into different math curricula. After the first year, a new cohort of students was added every year so that eventually, the entire middle and high school student body was receiving an accelerated mathematics curriculum. By implementing the program over time, Burris and her colleagues avoided confronting the problems of the cumulative disadvantage that students experience in the tracked curriculum, and they were better able to implement the new pedagogical processes necessary for such a revised curriculum. By ensuring that all students received the same accelerated mathematics program that had previously been available only to “gifted and talented” students, the schools avoided some of the resistance that can come from high-status parents who worry that their children’s education will suffer (e.g., Wells & Serna, 1996), and they created an empowering context for their students of color.

In their research concerning this process, Burris and her colleagues (Burris et al., 2004, 2006; Burris & Welner, 2005) found that more students at every level of prior achievement (previous low, middle, and high achievers) took more advanced mathematics courses in high school after detracking. More specifically for our purposes here, large and statistically significant gains in the number of math courses taken and scores on standardized tests were seen among African American and Latino students, and among lower SES students. In addition, however, white and Asian American students, who had succeeded in the tracked curriculum, also showed significant gains in the number of math courses taken and in their standardized test scores after a move to heterogeneous classrooms. The performance of all students improved, and the achievement gap between white students and African American and Latino students narrowed. Over time, African American and Latino students in the district were performing significantly better than white and Asian American students in national samples.

Studies of detracking and heterogeneous classrooms also reveal improvements in intergroup relations between students and between students and teachers. In heterogeneous classrooms, students are less likely to make racist comments about fellow students (Boaler, 2006; Braddock
& Slavin, 1993) and are more likely to have and maintain cross-ethnic-group friendships both inside and outside class (Boaler; Hallinan & Tuma, 1978; Hallinan & Williams, 1987, 1989, 1990; Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Slavin & Cooper, 1999). Finally, detracking the curriculum can improve relationships between students previously in the lower academic tracks and their teachers after moving to heterogeneous classrooms (Cooper, 2000; Oakes, 2005). This is important because it suggests that detracking the curriculum has a broader and more pervasive influence on the school beyond improved academic achievement.

**WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE FOR STUDENTS?**

For decades, theorists and scholars have articulated the need and rationale for multicultural education, a rationale that included the argument that such practices would lead to improved educational outcomes among students of color and better intergroup relations both within schools and in our larger society. Theorists have tied multicultural educational practice to both idealistic and pragmatic goals, invoking reference to our democratic ideals, a desire for better racial and ethnic integration, and the need for greater educational equity in our increasingly ethnically diverse schools. The primary purposes of multicultural educational practice, however, have been its potential for increasing the academic achievement of students of color and fostering improved intergroup relations in schools. My focus up to this point has been to discuss the extensive documentation that we have of the effectiveness of a broad range of multicultural educational practices to accomplish these goals. Going forward, I articulate several themes that emerged across the investigations reported here that are relevant to our continued efforts to expand and explore the value of multicultural educational practice and to inform teacher and administrator training for working with racially and ethnically diverse student populations.

*Multicultural Educational Practices Benefit All Students*

A consistent finding that emerged from research on the influence of multicultural educational practices is that such practices do indeed improve the educational outcomes of students of color. Multicultural educational practices such as integrating content from diverse people, deconstructing status hierarchies between students, and creating more empowering school cultures through a reconceptualization of who can achieve high
levels of learning all serve to increase the learning, achievement, and engagement of students of color. However, the empirical research also demonstrates a somewhat more unexpected finding: Multicultural educational practice also improves the learning, achievement, and engagement of all students—higher and lower achieving students, students of color and white students, lower and higher SES students. This pattern of findings is important because it highlights the way that good multicultural educational practice is, at its core, simply good educational practice. Describing multicultural educational practice in this way does not minimize its importance. Ladson-Billings (1995) reported that when she is asked, “Isn’t what you described just good teaching?” she replies with the question, “Why does so little of it seem to occur in classrooms populated by African American students?” (p. 484). When we start to reframe multicultural educational practice in this way, the implications for teacher and administrator training are highlighted. The effectiveness of multicultural educational practice for improving student outcomes and intergroup relations in school underscores the need for these principles and practices to be a core, rather than a peripheral, part of our teacher and administrator education programs.

The five components of multicultural educational practice outlined by J. A. Banks (2004) could be rephrased to highlight their centrality to good educational practice for all students: (1) Expose students to a wide variety of materials, information and ways of being. (2) Help students learn to question and consider how knowledge is constructed and who is doing the constructing as they explore curricular content. (3) Learn about other groups and explore similarities and differences between people in an open, reflective way. (4) Teach students in a way that empowers them as constructors and explorers of knowledge, and teach in such a way that diverse learning styles are accommodated. (5) Create schools and classrooms in which students feel empowered to achieve their best, in which all students are exposed to the highest level of curricular content, and in which the most effective educational practices and policies are enacted in just and equitable ways that attend closely to the needs of individual students. When described in this way, the implications of multicultural educational practices for the educational outcomes of all students become clear, and the rationale of those who argue that multicultural educational practice is divisive is undermined. Such phrasing also highlights why multicultural educational practices are central, rather than peripheral, to our teacher and administrator education programs. These concepts are not “extras” to include in a single course within a larger program; rather, they are essential philosophical assumptions relevant to all teaching practices (see also Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-

Colorblind Versus Diversity Perspectives in Education

The benefits of multicultural educational practice for all students only emerge when they are implemented with conscious and specific attention to issues of race and ethnicity—an insight that runs counter to a “colorblind” or “race-neutral” model, which presumes that progress toward racial equality only occurs when we stop attending to race and ethnicity (see, e.g., Howard, 2001; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000; Plaut, 2002; Plaut & Markus, 2007). Paying careful attention to issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom facilitates one’s acknowledgment that race and ethnicity are powerful social categories that are used by students and families to understand their experiences inside of school (Lewis, 2003; Lewis et al.) and outside (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Jones, 1997) and is consistent with a critical race theory perspective on education (see e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2005b). Similarly, paying careful attention to issues of race and ethnicity also allows one to perceive and acknowledge the genuine and important influence of racial and ethnic stigma in students’ educational lives (Zirkel, 2005).

Links Between Educational Outcomes and Intergroup Relations

A theme that has emerged here and elsewhere (Zirkel, 2008b) is that although improved intergroup relations and improved educational outcomes for students of color are theoretically distinct, interventions or practices that have a positive influence on one also have a positive influence on the other. I argue that these twin effects are due in large part to the role that racial and ethnic stigma play in both intergroup relations and in the educational outcomes of students of color (see also Zirkel, 2005, 2008b for a more detailed analysis of the role of stigma). Racial and ethnic stigma negatively shapes the educational outcomes and academic performance of students of color (e.g., Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002; Zirkel, 2005) and creates conditions that tend to lead to poor intergroup relations (e.g., Cohen, 2004; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005a, 2005b). Multicultural educational practices work best when applied within a framework of understanding that seeks to thoughtfully, actively, and directly address issues of racial and ethnic stigma, and through such attention, educators are likely to effect positive change in multiple areas of school functioning.
Problems of Implementation

Despite the extensive evidence of the positive influence of multicultural educational practice, these strategies have not been widely implemented. Moreover, there is an inverse relationship between the quantity of research on a given aspect of multicultural educational practice and the extent to which it is implemented. That is, the inclusion of more multicultural content in the curriculum is the most widely implemented aspect of multicultural education, and yet it is probably the least well-studied component of multicultural educational practice. Conversely, research demonstrating the positive effect of prejudice reduction efforts or some equity pedagogies on student outcomes and intergroup relations is vast, and yet they are far less widely implemented. Why is that?

One reason for the greater implementation of multicultural content integration is that content integration requires only a superficial reworking of the curriculum. As J. A. Banks (2004) noted, content integration places the fewest demands on educators. Content integration does not demand us as educators to rethink how knowledge is constructed or to make dramatic changes in our pedagogical practices, but the other components of multicultural educational practice do make these demands. As a consequence, content integration is easier to implement.

Another, and perhaps related, reason is that there is far less resistance from high-status parents to the inclusion of more multicultural content than there is to the inclusion of equity pedagogies or intensive prejudice reduction efforts (although resistance even to multicultural content integration still exists in some communities, particularly regarding the inclusion of material on gay and lesbian families). The demands made by other multicultural educational practices are far more threatening to the status quo, and therefore are, perhaps correctly, perceived by high-status parents as more threatening to their children’s high-status place in the school. Successful implementation of such pedagogies requires a strong commitment on the part of administrators and teachers across an entire school, and these pedagogies are more likely to be successfully implemented when the parents of high-achieving students are educated about its benefits for all students and included meaningfully in the planning process (Oakes et al., 1997; Wells & Serna, 1996). All of this requires a high level of commitment from educators.
Future Directions

It has become clear in analyzing this research that there are enormous numbers of studies on the influence of some components of multicultural educational practice on student outcomes, and far fewer or no studies in other areas. Aspects of multicultural education that lend themselves to specific, concrete interventions (cooperative learning; prejudice reduction) have been very well documented, and the studies clearly point to their effectiveness. In contrast, dimensions that describe constructs that do not lend themselves to concrete interventions (knowledge construction; the social justice aspects of equity pedagogy) have been studied much less often. Similarly, there are only a few small-scale and qualitative studies of the influence of content integration on student outcomes, and I found no large-scale examinations of this issue. Given that this is the most widely adopted component of multicultural educational practice, more systematic research documenting its effects would be extremely valuable.

The differences in what has been studied and how it has been studied itself reflects disciplinary differences in assumptions about how knowledge is constructed. Nevertheless, in a period in which much educational policy and innovation is guided by No Child Left Behind (2002), more large-scale, quantitative studies demonstrating the influence of multicultural educational practice on discrete measures of student achievement would be very welcome. Such studies need not focus on measures of student outcomes that would be considered inappropriate to the task. Rather, they should include assessments of the effect of multicultural educational practice on the kinds of outcomes that we all care about: student grades; student persistence in school; commitment to school; enrollment and success in college preparatory coursework; graduation rates; and college enrollment, performance, and graduation rates. These are not the only measures of student achievement that we care about; we certainly care about the development of critical thinking skills and civic participation and leadership skills. However, linking these developments to concrete advances in student educational achievement will be a very powerful tool in the development of educational policy and educator training that places multicultural educational practice at its center.

Finally, research concerning the influence of multicultural educational practice on student outcomes and intergroup relations would advance further if theories of action were articulated and tested within the research. In some areas, theories of action have been explored; for example, we know that a large part of the effect of successful cooperative strategies on student learning occurs through the greater levels of active
participation among students of color that such pedagogies tend to elicit. However, we can only speculate from current research that content integration influences student learning through greater engagement of students of color with the material and/or through the development of stronger, more positive ethnic identities. Better articulation and testing of these hypothesized relationships will greatly advance the development of more convincing multicultural pedagogical practices that will better serve all students.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

For several decades or more, educators and educational researchers have been calling for more culturally relevant pedagogies and for multicultural educational practices that will better serve the diverse student body found in our public schools. This call has clearly articulated the need for a more multicultural educational practice and has carefully and insightfully articulated what such a practice should look like. In this article, I explore the literature examining specific multicultural educational practices to assess the extent to which such practices are demonstrated to achieve the twin goals of high(er) academic performance of students of color and improved intergroup relations in school settings, suggesting core themes that emerge across the components of multicultural education outlined by J. A. Banks (2004). First, this review reveals that multicultural educational practices are academically beneficial to all students, in that the academic achievement of all students is increased through their use. Second, an essential feature of successful multicultural educational practice is that careful and conscious attention is given to issues of race and ethnicity and the concomitant issues of status and power, and that educators avoid trying to implement these practices in a “colorblind” way. Thirdly, I note that the evidence suggests that the goals of improved academic performance of students of color and good interethnic relations are linked, in that improvements in one lead to improvements in the other. I argue that most multicultural educational practices exert at least some of their influence and effectiveness by directly addressing issues of racial and ethnic stigma, and it is this process that is most likely to have a positive influence on student outcomes and intergroup relations. Also emerging from this examination is the argument that multicultural educational practice is best conceived as simply good educational practice, and as such, it is an essential component of good teacher and administrator training rather than specialized knowledge only for educators interested in working with particular populations.
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