

Chapter 16

Beyond Ethnicity and Racism: Teaching in Multi-Sectoral Classes

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ABSTRACT

According to Robertson (2000), globalization has changed the human texture in classrooms at universities and colleges. The need to acquire knowledge, and the importance of higher education have contributed to the diversity. The 21st century has made teaching a challenging task, in which the teacher is a major player in the arena. Political struggles about and through education occur in university campuses, different groups of students participate actively or passively in political activity. This complex situation requires new methods of teaching and guidance. Teachers should expand their teaching methods, sharpen their awareness and sensitivity to the socio-cultural forces in class, and often use creative means, in order to ensure a pleasant learning environment that promotes the didactic goals.

INTRODUCTION

All individuals live in social, political, historical, and economic contexts, and psychologists are increasingly called upon to understand the influence of these contexts on the behavior of the individual. Interpersonal interactions are often based on attitudes steeped in preconceived views of the other. However, diversity as a concept can be introduced as early as childhood, where it is possible to demonstrate both the uniqueness and similarities among cultures, promoting their learning of acceptance of difference, and aiding in reduction of prejudice and racism. Cross-cultural and multicultural literature constantly point to the fact that all people are “multicultural beings,” that all interactions are cross-cultural, and that our life experiences are perceived and shaped from within our own cultural perspectives (Arredondo, et al., 1996; Brewer & Brown, 1998; Fiske, et al., 1998; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Pedersen, 2000; Sue, et al., 1992; Sue, et al., 1982; Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996).

As humans, we learn early how to differentiate individuals or groups. Race, ethnicity and culture are just some of the many modes of differentiation. Culture refers to traditions, rituals, beliefs, and values shared by a group of people. Each person is a part of at least one culture. Some individuals or groups

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identify with more than one culture. Multiculturalism advocates equal respect for various societies in a world of greater cultural diversity.

It is important to make the distinction between the concepts of “race” and “ethnicity,” two descriptors which cause significant confusion.

Race

Race is a socially meaningful group of people who share biologically transmitted traits which are observable and considered distinctive.

Race may be described as a “meaningful category of people.” Examples include “Caucasian,” “African American,” “Latino,” and “Asian.” The common denominator here is the geographic distinction.

Another part of the definition is “who share biologically transmitted traits.” The most observable factor here is skin color, often accompanied by additional distinctive traits such as type and color of hair; specific facial features such as eye color, or cheek bone structure; height, and so on.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to a shared cultural heritage. So ethnicity could be “Egyptian,” “Swedish,” “Mexican,” or “Jewish.” The ethnicity of “Jewish” is interesting because it refers to a particular group of people from a biological, genetic perspective, but it also refers to a religion and all of the cultural richness that comes from that religious tradition. Many other ethnicities share both genetic traits and, often, religious or cultural holidays or traditions that link the group together.

Table 1. Comparison between race and ethnicity

	Race	Ethnicity
Definition	The term race refers to the concept of distinct groups or populations on the basis of distinct physical characteristics (which usually result from genetic ancestry).	An ethnic group or ethnicity is a population group whose members identify with each other on the basis of common nationality or shared cultural traditions.
Significance	Race presumes shared biological or genetic traits, whether actual or asserted. In the early 19th century, racial differences were ascribed significance in areas of intelligence, health, and personality. There is no evidence validating these ideas.	Ethnicity connotes shared cultural traits and a shared group history. Some ethnic groups also share linguistic or religious traits, while others share a common group history but not a common language or religion.
Genealogy	Racial categories result from a shared genealogy due to geographical isolation. In the modern world this isolation has been broken down and racial groups have mixed.	Ethnicity is defined in terms of shared genealogy, whether actual or presumed. Typically, if people believe they descend from a particular group, and they want to be associated with that group, then they are in fact members of that group.
Distinguishing Factors	Races are assumed to be distinguished by skin color, facial features, etc. However, the scientific basis of racial distinctions is very weak. Scientific studies show that genetic racial differences are weak except in skin color.	Ethnic groups distinguish themselves differently from one time period to another as changes enter their cultures.
Nationalism & Legal System	In modern nationalism, from the time of the French Revolution and on (1789), the official ideology emphasized racial and ethnic equality and legal systems supported this by increasingly passing laws that prohibited all types of racial and ethnic discrimination and exclusion.	
Conflicts	Racial prejudice remains a continuing problem throughout the world, giving rise to many conflicts.	

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