

Chapter 12

When Worlds Collide: Culturally Responsive Practices for Multiracial Students and Families

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will equip any person with culturally responsive practices to engage with a multiracial student or family. Relevant literature and research on the multiracial population will be provided, including multiracial identity development models and common microaggressions that often occur within this population. Using fictitious case examples, common culturally insensitive mistakes will be reviewed. Through these case examples and follow-up questions to support critical thinking, the reader will clearly see the culturally insensitive practices that often occur with the multiracial population and ways to change language, interactions, and even documentation to support cultural responsiveness and interventions. The conclusion of the chapter summarizes key points and reminders when working with the multiracial population and serves as a “call to action” for readers to act as agents of change in educational settings by supporting and advocating for inclusivity and research-based, culturally responsive practices.

INTRODUCTION

Given the recent growth of individuals who identify as Biracial or Multiracial, it is evident that their unique experiences need to be better understood, especially within the education system where there is heavy interaction with teachers, counselors, and administrators (Charmaraman, Woo, Quach, & Erkut, 2014; Jackson, Yoo, Guevarra, & Harrington, 2012; Tran, Miyake, Martinez-Morales, & Csizmadia, 2016). Estimates of Multiracial population growth state that one in five individuals will identify as Multiracial by the year 2050 (Tran et al., 2016). With this in mind, it is imperative that the educational system work to build intentional and inclusive communities that acknowledge the unique experiences of Multiracial students and families while working to achieve the goals of each student within the education system.

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Background

Before one can seek to practice cultural responsiveness with the Multiracial population, it is important to define what is meant by this complex term (Lou & Lalonde, 2015). Broadly defined, *Multiracial* describes anyone who identifies as non-monoracial where *monoracial* describes anyone with one racial identity (i.e., Black/African American) (Franco & O'Brien, 2018; Tran et al., 2016). Oftentimes, further terminology such as *Biracial* is used to describe the quantity of racial identities in a person, where *Bi* quantifies two racial identities within a person, (i.e., Native American and White). However, *Multiracial* is often used as an umbrella term for non-monoracial identity where *Biracial* is included. Though the terms can be synonymous in that they both mean non-monoracial, for many people, the distinguishing factor is *how* many racial identities form their identity. Sometimes individuals use *Multiracial* as an indicator of three or more racial identities. Additional terminology that could be used to describe a non-monoracial individual include: *Mixed-race*, *Multiple Heritage*, and *Interracial*. What is important to remember is to use the terminology that the individual or family uses to describe their identity, while not assuming identity based on preconceived notions of racial make-up. This will be discussed in more detail later on in the chapter.

Multiracial Identity Development Models and Constructs

In 1990, Poston developed the Biracial Identity Development Model that addresses the unique developmental pieces of being a Biracial individual. The stages of development in this model include: (1) Personal Identity, (2) Choice of Group Categorization, (3) Enmeshment/Denial, (4) Appreciation, and (5) Integration. This model is helpful as a starting point in understanding development for non-monoracial individuals and especially attends to unique factors of development for Biracial individuals. For example, the model recognizes the possible feelings of guilt that could arise in Stage 2, Choice of Group Categorization, when identifying with one racial identity over another, a unique conflict that arises in the development of Multiracial individuals, given that monoracial people only have one categorization to which they ascribe. However, one criticism of this model falls within the general research regarding racial identity for Multiracial people, specifically the assumption that one's outward appearance matches the social constructions of race in what it means to *be* or *look* Biracial. Many people who identify as Biracial or Multiracial may be perceived by others as a singular race. For example, this author identifies as Native American and White but is often perceived by non-Native American people solely as White. The impact(s) of what it is like to be racially mislabeled by others is not within the scope of Poston's model. Furthermore, given the previous discussion of the many terms used to describe non-monoracial people, Poston's use of the term *Biracial* could be limited in application for anyone who is non-monoracial but does not describe themselves as Biracial.

Another model developed to aid in the understanding of the unique experiences of Multiracial identity development is Root's Ecological Framework (Root, 2001). Root's Ecological Framework for understanding Multiracial identity development has laid exceptional groundwork in the understanding of the fluidity and nuances of Multiracial identity. Her Ecological Framework explores the intersectionality of concepts such as: community attitudes and racial socialization, ethnicities, and symbolic race within identities, and family functioning, to name a few. Root also developed the Resolutions of Biracial Identity Tensions Model. Within this model she specifies four stages that include: Acceptance of the identity society, identification with both racial groups, identification with a single racial group, and identification as a

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