

Chapter 4

Multiculturalism in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

The concept of multiculturalism has been the subject of many different disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, and educational science with its various dimensions. Considering the distinctive features of the 21st century society, it is seen that global life, multicultural citizenship understanding, and individuals' interaction with different cultural groups and development of positive attitudes are emphasized. In this context, it is thought that teachers play an effective role in developing individuals' attitudes and behaviors regarding multiculturalism from an early age. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to gain the awareness of multiculturalism and to strengthen this awareness in the pre-service education process. Within the scope of this chapter, primarily the concept of multiculturalism will be emphasized. Then, the concept of multicultural education and all aspects of this concept and teacher training approaches that are sensitive to multicultural education will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Technology, which rapidly develops and becomes cheaper in the globalization process, has made the interaction between societies inevitable. As a reflection of this situation, commercial and individual relations based on mutual communication and interaction enabled people of different languages, religions and ethnic origins to be in the same environment, to act together or to work together. In order to live and act together in the same social structure, it is important for the future of the world society to stay away from the forms of thought and behavior that will create conflict and to respect the “other’s” difference. This point of view has brought the concept of multiculturalism to the fore.

Doytcheva (2009, p.15) states that the concepts of multicultural and multiculturalism were first used in English in 1941 to describe “a cosmopolitan society where old nationalisms did not make sense, and consisted of individuals without prejudice and independent”. Doytcheva (2009) states that this concept was

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used in Australia and Canada in the early 1970s, two countries receiving immigration, for state policies that encourage cultural diversity, which is a characteristic of these societies. The concept has been the subject of both scientific and political debates in Western societies since the early 1980s (Sezal, 2002). Multiculturalism is based on the individuals and groups that make up a society coming from different origins in terms of language, religion, race, history and geography. It is in question in societies living as a single political unit and within common boundaries (Kongar, 2009).

This concept is at the center of attention of different disciplines and it is included in education programs by developing strategies and policies related to multiculturalism in education within these disciplines. With the reflection of multiculturalism in educational environments, the understanding of multicultural education has become evident. The most effective practitioner of multicultural education in the classroom is the “teacher”. This situation reveals the necessity of training teachers within the framework of a training program sensitive to multiculturalism in the pre-service education process. The perspective examining multiculturalism in teacher training programs enables teacher candidates to internalize multicultural education processes. As it is known, teachers direct the attitudes and behaviors of children at all other levels of education starting from early childhood. They play an effective role in forming their first perceptions on many issues. Teachers’ perspectives and attitudes on any subject are reflected in the education and training practices planned to increase children’s awareness. Reiter and Davis (2011) state that in an increasingly diverse classroom environment, student-teacher cultural incompatibility leads to cultural and ethnic ignorance. This situation poses a potential danger in terms of class climate. Therefore, first of all, those who cleanse themselves from racist thoughts; can stand at an equal distance to everyone without discrimination of language, religion or race; It is increasingly important to train teachers who know their own culture and try to get to know students’ culture. It is believed that this understanding can be achieved by the teachers gaining multicultural competencies. Therefore, a teacher who graduated from a teacher training program sensitive to multiculturalism is expected to enrich the child’s perspective on this issue and create a positive classroom climate on this issue.

Within the framework of this chapter, firstly, the basic components of the concept of multiculturalism will be introduced. Then, theoretical perspectives on multiculturalism will be discussed. Multicultural education, features and dimensions of multicultural education will create a background for multiculturalism in teacher training. The chapter also includes teacher training approaches sensitive to multicultural education and a conclusion part presenting a holistic evaluation of the chapter.

The Concept of Multiculturalism

Culture is one of the most comprehensive concepts in social sciences. Because of this feature, it is one of the concepts that is difficult to define in social sciences. Giddens and Sutton (2014, p. 259) defines culture as a way of life that characterizes a particular society or social group and whose content is formed by knowledge, traditions, norms, law and beliefs. Culture has been described as the embodiment of a worldview through learned and transmitted beliefs, values, and practices, including religious and spiritual traditions. It also encompasses a way of living informed by the historical, economic, ecological, and political forces on a group (APA, 2002, pp.9-10). According to Kongar (1994), the most general and objective definition of culture is that it is “all that people create”. This definition includes all kinds of tools, equipment, technology, beliefs, values and attitudes made by human beings and constitute the components of culture. He emphasizes not to forget that culture is “a whole”.

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