



# HOW TO SUPPORT THE TEACHING OF MULTICULTURAL GROUPS IN FINLAND

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Ammatillisen opettajankoulutuksen  
kehittämishanke  
Maaliskuu 2014  
Ammatillinen opettajakorkeakoulu  
Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu

## ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu  
Ammatillinen opettajakorkeakoulu

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Opettajankoulutuksen kehittämishanke 38 sivua + 2 liitesivua  
Maaliskuu 2014

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Finnish vocational and polytechnic institutes have seen a rapid increase in foreign students during the past few years. International students studying in Finland have either an immigrant background or are participating in exchange programmes, both for short- or long term purposes.

Additionally, more and more degree courses are also offered in English, which attract and draw foreign students from all over the world, especially from Africa, China and middle Europe. In vocational, as well as polytechnic institutes foreign students with various background knowledge and skills are admitted, which often poses a problem for teachers to create a study environment which will further all students and create a learning environment in which all students will feel welcome and respected, as well as to establish and be able to enhance a common direction to learning.

To teach such groups requires special skills and a positive, as well as flexible attitude from and by the teacher. This work should point out good practices of how to operate successfully in a multicultural environment and how to support and enhance the integration of students into the learning community. It should further aid teachers to develop multicultural pedagogy and intercultural competence in order to encourage, mentor and guide multicultural students, as well as to advice and counsel students on personal, educational, and on matters of internship and employment offerings.

Not only teachers, but also the students themselves should be made aware of cultural differences and to develop an intercultural sensitivity to enable them to different ways of interpretations and implementations for problem solving. Learning opportunities should promote self-discovery and reflection of one's own heritage, so collaboration among students will be made easier and foreign students will find it easier to integrate. Teaching should not only be responsive to students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and language groups but also develop student's skills to interact positively with people from diverse groups. The aim is to transform these skills into effective classroom practice, so diverse cultural groups will experience equality and academic success.

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Keywords: multiculturalism, education, culture, language, ethnicity, immigrants

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Finnish vocational and polytechnic institutes have seen a rapid increase in foreign students during the past few years. International students studying in Finland have either an immigrant background or are participating in exchange programmes, both for short- or long term purposes. Additionally, more and more degree courses are also offered in English, which attract and draw foreign students from all over the world, especially from Africa, China and middle Europe. In vocational, as well as polytechnic institutes foreign students with various background knowledge and skills are admitted, which often poses a problem for teachers to create a study environment which will further all students and create a learning environment in which all students will feel welcome and respected, as well as to establish and be able to enhance a common direction to learning. To teach such groups requires special skills and a positive, as well as flexible attitude from and by the teacher. This work should point out good practices of how to operate successfully in a multicultural environment and how to support and enhance the integration of students into the learning community. It should further aid teachers to develop multicultural pedagogy and intercultural competence in order to encourage, mentor and guide multicultural students, as well as to advice and counsel students on personal, educational, and on matters of internship and employment offerings.

Not only teachers, but also the students themselves should be made aware of cultural differences and to develop an intercultural sensitivity to enable them to different ways of interpretations and implementations for problem solving. Learning opportunities should promote self-discovery and reflection of one's own heritage, so collaboration among students will be made easier and foreign students will find it easier to integrate. Ways are described through which education policy and practice related to diversity and the understanding of differences and commonalities can be improved, in order to help teachers of all types of schools to increase student's academic achievement and improve intergroup skills. The aim is to help teachers as well as schools to successfully meet the challenges of diversity and especially assist in teaching immigrant groups.

## 2 THE AIMS OF THE WORK

The work of a teacher is framed by the school and the students, by the curriculum and the overall resources available. Additional outside factors are the parents of the students, other teacher colleagues and school work related partners and last but not least all of society. In order to guarantee a high standard of teaching and to achieve equality between different language- and cultural groups, the special needs of these students need to be recognized and paid attention to first of all in the curriculum. School adaption can also be enhanced through study guidance and student counseling. This requires that enough time and attention is paid to define and detect the special needs of multicultural groups in the first place. Questions should be addressed like of what the curriculum, as well as the counseling should be comprised of, what additional demands multicultural students require from the teacher itself and the teaching and what would be the requirements from outside partners.

Teachers as well as students themselves often bring considerable prejudice against fellow-students from other cultures and have pre-formed attitudes towards culturally mixed student groups. Suggestions will be brought forward how to avoid such behavior and how to motivate the students to a better understanding. Teachers should find a way to deal with such prejudice and how to create a learning environment in which all students will feel welcome and respected.

Another problem poses that foreign students who are admitted to Finnish schools have various background knowledge and skills, and therefore a common study environment has to be established, which will further and satisfy all students and enhance a common direction to learning. This work should also investigate what influences motivation of such groups and how teachers could use this information in a classroom environment.

In Finland, predominantly research on this topic has been done by Finnish teachers and researchers and papers written in Finnish language. This work should examine if their findings and suggestions are also relevant from a foreign

teacher's perspective, teaching in Finland as well as offering this review in English.

The purpose of this 'review paper' is to examine and review the recent progress in Finnish schools regarding intercultural teaching competence and general guidance for teaching multicultural groups. Overall, this work summarizes the current state of knowledge on this topic and discusses its relativity and appropriateness, as well as creating a basis for discussion on the findings presented from recent research. It synthesizes the results from several literature papers and media to produce a coherent argument about this topic.

### 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Multiculturalism

Since the last 15 - 20 years the term 'immigrant ('maahanmuuttaja') has become an overall description of foreigners living permanently or indefinitely in Finland, without regard of their actual nationality (Soilamo, 2008; Badvinezhad, 2009). Especially from a foreigners point of view the meaning of the word itself triggers an instant derogative association, with the immediate association of a person coming to Finland in order for a better life. Due to increased worldwide globalization in recent years and its overall impact on Finnish society, this term has to be addressed before we can speak about multiculturalism, as it is the basis for immediate prejudice.

Multiculturalism basically means different cultures and cultural identities within a group or society. The group then can also be seen as cosmopolitan or cultural diverse. After Bloor (2010) multiculturalism stands for a society at ease with the manifoldness of human life's and the desire amongst people to express their own identity in a way they prefer, giving equal respect to various cultures and promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism can also be seen as an opportunity for communication and interaction between cultures, despite cultural differences.

Culture not only affects and forms a person's self-image, values and attitudes but also has an overall influence on people's behaviour, ideology and outlook on life (Soilamo, 2008) and therefore shapes the identity of a person. After Soilamo (2008) education is always connected to culture, as well as the person's affiliation and ethnicity to a certain culture. Different cultures should be seen as equals, but individuals from the same culture can be seen dissimilar due to different experiences in their life's and their individual development (Liebkind, 1994).

#### 3.2 Multiculturalism in Finnish education

Recent years have seen a rapid increase in foreigners moving to Finland partly for permanent residence, for employment- and long term study purposes but partly also for short term study-exchange periods. An increase has been seen especially in the immigration of families, which is reflected in school statistics in the number of foreigners' participation. According to statistics by the Finnish Immigration Service, 195 538 foreigners were permanently residing in Finland by the end of 2012.

In Helsinki, statistics on immigrants were created on the basis of nationality, country of birth and registered native language. The registered native language has been a stable statistical criterion taking into account that nationality, for most people, changes into that of Finland, and the country of birth has not been sufficient to describe the second generation immigrant population born in Finland (Helsingin kaupunki, henkilöstökeskus, 2014). Helsinki has been chosen as an example, as half of all foreign nationals, people born abroad and foreign language speakers of the whole country live in that area. By the end of 2012 the number of foreign language speakers in the Helsinki metropolitan area, aged 16-18 consisted of 2 269 and from the 19-24 age group 6 772. The languages consisted of at least 150 different ones, with Russian being the largest group, followed by Estonian, Somali and English. (Helsingin kaupunki/ henkilöstökeskus, 2014).

All over the country cultural manifoldness in schools is very common nowadays and is reflected in the work of the teacher. Foreign students and overall multiculturalism have brought changes to the educational plan, the curriculum, to teaching and to other areas related to educational institutions. Therefore teachers need special skills and know-how to teach such groups. They should be offered guidance how to operate successfully in a multicultural environment and how to support and enhance the integration of students into the learning community. Teachers should be helped to develop multicultural pedagogy and intercultural competence in order to encourage, mentor and guide multicultural students.

The term 'cross-cultural education' is often used in order to define multicultural education in a wider way, including social classification, gender, religion, as well as sexual orientation.



One important basis for education and learning constitutes of the understanding that there is a connection between culture, language and learning (Paavola, 2008). It needs to be understood that on one hand the student's native language and culture always have a positive influence on learning and on the other hand that the teacher's own teaching ability will have a great influence on the student's learning results. Therefore the teacher should preferably be aware of the foreign student's life outside the school, with special interest in his family background and culture.

### 3.3. Ethics and cultural knowledge

Ethics have always been seen of major importance for good teaching and also play a big role as an educational objective regarding mixed groups. Solutions should be found what these ethic objectives regarding students from different cultural backgrounds should be and what would be the means to reach that goal of a positive learning environment (Törmä, 1996). Teachers might have different ideas and perceptions when it comes to ethics and therefore the discussion of ethical values should be encouraged. Next to joint discussions, teachers themselves should also constantly reflect on their own personal values and ideas (Paavola, 2007).

When it comes to culture, the teacher's knowledge of Finnish culture should be proficient enough. The model for cultural education, Finnish schools are complying with, is, that one should first get to know Finland's own culture, then the neighbouring countries, the rest of Europe and last the whole world (Paavola, 2007). Nowadays this attitude and way of education could be disputable (Räsänen, 2005). Only by getting to know other cultures, students will be able to understand their own culture.

Education has to consist of two bases - a pedagogical and the cultural side. The pedagogical approach emphasizes education and should be critical towards different ways of life, thinking and practice of religion, attempting a cultural dialog. The cultural approach targets the understanding for different features and characteristics of different ways of life and thinking and their influence on

education. That also includes for teachers to broaden their pedagogical view of their own culture as well as about foreign cultures (Paavola, 2007).

The role of the school is based on the cultural heritage of its environment. Also its teachers and native students basically represent the culture of this environment. Foreign students have to make an effort to acquire such capital, sometimes to the extent of having to deny their own culture and values. There might be some marginalized groups whose cultures will not be discussed or taken into consideration. Students will quickly learn that what is not being taught and discussed is not worth of learning and therefore not important. Therefore the content of the curriculum will have an influence on how positively the student's self-image and cultural identity will be formed (Grant & Sleeter, 2007).

A negative influence will be created by only dealing with the perspective of the native country, which will give opportunity to prejudice and stereotype thinking. Equality should not be understood as similarity, because similarity does not necessarily lead to equality but instead can also increase inequality (Paavola, 2007). Even young students themselves are usually quite aware of race and ethnic differences, as their attitude often reflects the attitude of their community and their parents. And although no one is mentioning any racial differences in fear of being called racist, youngsters might still have these attitudes imbedded in themselves.

Usually stereotype thinking plays a big role in this matter and therefore it is not an issue of language-, cultural- and cognitive factors, but the attitude stems from historical and societal factors. After Paavola (2007) the different attitudes towards immigrant groups have shown a difference in time as well as group wise. The most negative attitude has been shown towards groups whose appearance and culture differ most from Finnish ones (like Somalis and Arabs) as well as groups seen in historical context like Russians.

Additionally attitudes are also based on educational standard, gender, age and location. Foremost teachers will have to contemplate on their own set of values. In order to connect better with the students and improve their interaction, the

teacher must know his own cultural roots, as well as to gain knowledge about foreign cultures.

The cultural knowledge and understanding of the teacher are vital instruments to achieve interaction with the students, knowledge not only of the teachers own but also of other cultures and the ability to distinguish between similarities as well as differences of these. For example would it be good to know, that for some ethnical groups who have moved to Finland, the importance of the family as such and the community is much more significant than in our western society. In such communities family always comes in importance before the individual member of it. The individual defines himself through the family and his identity is strongly bound to that community (Paavola, 2007). The immigrant might encounter situations, in which he will notice that his former learned behavior- and action models do not apply here. To be able to adapt to the new culture he needs the ability to learn new customs and culture through his new environment, as well as persons and teachers around him. Therefore the academic success of a student often also depends on how the family has adjusted to the new environment and conditions they have come to live in. If they have adapted badly it could have a significant influence on the success of their children (Paavola, 2007).

Integration is seen as a two sided process. Basically the majority of people in Finland is expected to honor the possible differences of immigrants and immigrants on the other hand are expected to adapt to the ways of their new environment. Therefore the main aspects of integration are equality, interaction and respect from both sides. These are also the objectives for multicultural education in the curriculum. The requirements for integration would be for immigrants to still maintain their original culture, but also adapt to the new culture and interact with the new surroundings. Consequently this will create a dual nationality, by preserving one's original culture but also accepting the norms and customs of the new country (Paavola, 2007).

Cultural identity can be seen through family, home, nationality, common values and history. The development of cultural identity is also connected to the development of ethnical awareness in a way that people will identify themselves

with an ethnical group. This cultural identity is subject to constant change due to different experiences and due to its own dynamic (Paavola, 2007).

Research by Ollera et al. (2012) shows, that teachers' perceptions of ethnic and linguistic minorities have been widely researched in the past years, although the results have differed widely from country to country, as well as from minority to minority, probably due to the different standards and ways of handling multicultural groups in each country. As other cultures are often judged only by the values and standards of one's own culture, stereotypes and prejudices about linguistic and ethnic minorities therefore seem to arise from various sources. It would be naive to think that teachers do not have such feelings and consequently could act out their own stereotype thinking and prejudices towards cultural minorities (Ollera et al., 2012).

### 3.4 Language and identity

In order to establish a multicultural identity it is not only necessary to find an environment with a positive attitude and to have a strong opinion about one's own culture, but it also needs the person to be interested in the culture of his new surroundings and most of all the will to adapt to it. One key to understand and learn this new culture is its language.

The comprehension of the new language opens and improves the possibility to adapt to the new way of living and to take part in its community. But it is insufficient to see the language only as a means of communication, as it also stands for a person's ethnical and cultural heritage and belonging (Paavola, 2007). Culture is examined and portrayed by language and binds people to their cultural roots and personality. Cultural values, norms and attitudes, as well as non-verbal behavior all reflect through a person's language (Soilamo, 2008). Through language a person cannot only interact but also connect with a group and its culture and express ideas and values. Language helps to get to know ones roots from early on and enhances self-confidence and generates own identity.

When studying a new language it soon becomes evident that behind every word there is a special meaning and emotional expression. Therefore communication not only depends on language itself but also on the interaction that comes with the understanding of the meaning of the words that are spoken and the combination they are used for (Paavola, 2007). This is the reason why representatives of different cultures might react differently to the same thing. It has been shown that children of families who have used their native language at home have been more successful than children and families who have quickly changed into the language of the new country and away from their native one (Paavola, 2007).

On the other hand it does make sense to use the new language whenever possible, the more the better. Avoiding the use often means a hindrance in adapting to the new environment. Often it can be seen that immigrant parents speak Finnish very poorly whilst their children pick up the new language with ease due to the everyday use at school and through interaction with friends.

Most important are specially geared courses for immigrants with no prior knowledge of Finnish. In this case sufficient time has to be allocated to their educational guidance. Immigrants usually have the need for more detailed explanations regarding their courses and how to achieve these objectives. For this reason the planning and introductory part of the course will already take up more time. The continuous presence of the personal teacher is very important.

Some polytechnic colleges offer extra English language classes to support newcomers. Usually the way schools offer linguistic support, depends on the students' prior schooling, the length of their residence in Finland, the projects developed in the schools and the related activities of their teachers (Ollera et al., 2012).

Usually members of western society are individualists in contrast to collectivist cultures in which members view themselves as members of groups like family and tribes and this is expressed through a centered we-understanding and usually considers the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of individuals. Most Asian cultures, including China's, tend to be collectivist,

Finland and many other western countries are individualists. When it comes to education there is a big difference between the views of individual and collectivist cultures (Siimeksellä & Tarvainen, 2010). The individual culture tends to encourage its members to life-long learning whilst the collectivist culture is more geared to teach how to act and how to conduct oneself (Siimeksellä & Tarvainen, 2010).

Another challenge for teachers is the different concept of time that is determined by different cultures (Siimeksellä & Tarvainen, 2010). The concept of time can either be polychronic or monochronic. Whilst monochronic stands for doing one thing at a time, keeping with time schedules, being punctual for meetings (like in Finland), polychronic stands for working on multiple activities at the same time and for time schedules not being so important.

### 3.5 Stereotypes and attitudes

Students should learn and be made aware of stereotyping, which has a negative effect on racial and ethnic relations (Banks et al., 2001). People usually use categories in perceiving their environment, as categorization is a natural part of human information processing. This can result in stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination and thereby leads to behaviors influenced by those stereotypes.

Teachers should guide students to acquire the necessary social skills to interact successfully with students from another ethnic, cultural and language group, and also teach them how to identify, understand and respond to group differences (Banks et al., 2001). Students need to learn how to react to differences, how not to insult someone and to give offense and how not to be insulted and not take offence and accept also students who behave outside the norm. They not only need to learn to take pride in their own cultural heritage but also develop an understanding for the ideals and values of foreign cultures. Teachers should help students in developing awareness for the interdependency in sharing the world's resources and encourage them to gain intercultural competence (Wright & Tolan, 2009).

Banks et al. (2001) suggests that one of the primary causes for prejudice is fear. To counteract this, possibilities for students should be available to interact socially with diverse groups in order to reduce fear and anxiety. Students should learn that diversity does not necessarily mean inferiority or superiority and that the study of ethnic and cultural group differences does not need to lead to divergence (Banks, 2006b).

The forming of personal identity also plays an important part in multicultural education, as it influences behavior and signifies a vital part of interpersonal competence. Wright & Tolan (2009) report, that when the relationship between feelings of personal security and measures of prejudice were examined, the persons who felt secure had less prejudice. Therefore an existing self-awareness and positive self-acceptance seem to be essential to the capability of openly responding to others in a thoughtful and sensitive manner.

Another importance which lies in a person's cultural identity is that everyone understands oneself and others through the perspective of values that have been established as part of this heritage and it stands as a central element of a person's overall self-concept (Wright & Tolan, 2009). To deny values of one's heritage will lead to self-differentiation. Therefore it is important for a person to learn to understand and value one's unique cultural self, not only in relation to but also in the rejection of cultural norms (Wright & Tolan, 2009).

In their study on an experiential multicultural education class at a public university in the United States, Wing & Tolan (2009) present three causes for prejudice that can be mitigated when addressed the right way. The first one is 'interpersonal' prejudice, which derives from the lack of contact with diverse groups, secondly 'cognitive' prejudice, originating from mistaken thinking and perception of those who are different and last 'structural' prejudice which focuses on the systematic conditions that propagate domination and prejudice. As an example - reflection exercises and discussions about diversity topics would provide the thinking exercises that could initiate changes in attitudes toward other individuals and groups (Wing & Tolan, 2009).

In the study of Wing & Tolan (2009), the learning events with the highest meaning to the students were investigational framed activities compared to

traditional academic activities of reading and writing. These experiences created the most significant, positive group experience, as well as learning related to personal identity and particularly self-confidence. The learning events with the closest context and linkage to prejudice reduction were group dialogues about diversity topics. After Wing & Tolan (2009) the positive experience tied to the dialogues is due partly to an increased positive interpersonal climate of the group. Their study demonstrated that learning about diversity and prejudice reduction was not only strongly linked to group dialogue, but that the depth and quality of the discussions was tied to the significance of relationships that had developed in the group through shared experiences.

### 3.6 Intergroup relations

After Banks et al. (2001) teachers should create significant cross-cutting student groups with the aim of improving intergroup relations. The purpose would be that students should identify with these groups in a certain situation, because through being a part of a certain group, other group differences become less important. These kinds of groups stimulate friendship and solidarity within the group and through that can mitigate preexisting animosities. Therefore intergroup contact can counteract stereotype thinking.

A study by Ollera et al. (2012) has shown that the perception of peer relations of teachers and students between immigrant and Catalan students were similar. In their study African and Asian students preferred to be with their equals, but the rest of the students did not show differences. Students were clearly categorized into Western and non-Western students. Asian students and African students had more problems relating to other students than students from other language groups. It has also been shown (Ollera et al., 2012) that students' opinion on their educational involvement and school satisfaction differ among ethnic, cultural and language groups.

Several studies (Banks, 2006c; Ollera et al., 2012) show that students have a higher tendency to make cross-racial friendships after participating in interracial group work, providing that the equal status between groups in interracial situations has been thoughtfully structured by teachers. If students from various



racial, ethnic and language groups are mixed without structured interventions that generate equal-status conditions, racial and ethnic conflict and stereotyping might easily increase. Students from both privileged and marginalized groups are likely to respond in ways that will reinforce the status of the higher-status group. Therefore it can be seen that contact among different groups without deliberate interventions to increase equal-status and positive interactions among them will increase rather than reduce intergroup tensions (Banks, 2006c; Ollera et al., 2012). It is required that the situation and topic have equal status among members of the group, generate meaningful encounters, involve interdependence and cooperation to reach common goals, disconfirm prevailing stereotyped beliefs and demonstrate normative support for group equality (Ollera et al., 2012). Group work learning is therefore based on positive interdependence, face-to-face interactions, individual accountability and personal responsibility, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing.

### 3.7 Students educational background

An important role in a multicultural classroom environment plays the different educational background of students. Not only the difference in the achieved academic standard up until then is important, but also the way they are used to acquire knowledge and in which manner they have been taught before.

Schematic study techniques can hinder the way of thinking in order to find solutions for difficult problems (Hämäläinen et al., 2013). Students who have had experiences with learning methods based on memorization and repetition could have difficulties in adapting when being confronted with teaching based on group work and discovery learning (Ollera et al., 2012). Currently the trend in Finnish schools is towards 'self-guided'- learning, with the teacher playing more the role of an adviser and mentor (Siimekselä & Tarvainen, 2010). This might be an unfamiliar approach for foreign students, who have had a teacher-oriented education before.

The core competence of teacher's lies in their pedagogical expertise, despite the special challenges posed by the possibly uncommon learning process, curriculum and evaluation process when educating a multicultural group. Most of the immigrant students who have had their prior schooling in their country of origin, are used to a teacher-dominating education and not familiar with self-guidance and discovery-learning. Therefore they might have problems with the timing of assignments and group working (Metsänen & Kämäräinen, 2011).

Another problem poses students who have had irregular previous schooling or no schooling at all. This lack of schooling and learning skills leads to learning difficulties, which in turn may influence the negative perceptions of teachers (Ollera et al., 2012). In contrary to this group, some European students might come from families with medium to high educational and socio-professional levels and in their countries of origin, they were schooled in institutions where the proportion of foreign students was low (Ollera et al., 2012) and they have had no previous experience with diverse groups.

Usually teachers have high educational expectations of Chinese, as Asian students often seem to appreciate education more because of its high cultural value in their Confucian heritage. After Ollera et al. (2012) this appreciation may be restrained in a mixed-race class and they can seem shy and quiet, making teachers unaware of their actual perceptions. This shows that teaching strategies need to be adapted to the diversity of students (Ollera et al., 2012). Ollera et al. (2012) further suggest that there is no single way to teach well, especially in different situations and contexts with a mixture of interactions. Human and material resources are to be adjusted to the different characteristics, expectations and beliefs of diverse groups.

### 3.8 Motivation

Low study motivation can lead to dropping out of school and study programme and through that further on to social exclusion. Educational institutions have to discuss and plan solutions how to raise student-motivation. According to this

necessity schools need to develop teaching materials which will interest students and therefore enhance their study motivation.

The reason for low motivation is often found in previous negative study experiences, either of not having had sufficient acknowledgement or through having set expectations too high. Additionally low self-esteem can also disrupt motivation, as well as underdeveloped study-strategies and techniques (Hämäläinen et al., 2013). A positive motivation on the other hand originates through a balance of a student's own abilities and given challenges. Studying is one of the most purposeful processes of change a person can control, using different senses to process obtained information consciously and unconsciously. Studying is always a creative and individual process, as every student has his own abilities and enthusiasm and motivation is one of the incentives that drive him on (Hämäläinen et al., 2013).

The students need a learning environment in which they can easily access knowledge and where they can concentrate better, as well as positive stimuli which encourage them to study (Hämäläinen et al., 2013). To support motivation students should always be briefed on the objective and aim of the assignment. As motivation always generates a feeling of the possibility of succeeding, in order to keep up motivation the aims and objectives of assignments should be divided into smaller sections, so the students can recognize the aims easier and structure studies better. It is also important to find fun in studying, as a positive attitude towards studying always enhances motivation and is always accompanied by experiences of success (Hämäläinen et al., 2013).

Motivation can be divided into outside and inside motivation, but both cannot be seen as totally separate, rather more as complementary. Positive feedback enhances inside motivation and self-esteem. This feedback should always come at the right time otherwise it will lose its impact. It should also be aimed at enhancing the self-esteem of students while being constructive and with precise tools (Hämäläinen et al., 2013).

In order to generate the student's own initiative to study, the student must be genuinely interested in the taught subject. This interest will lead to motivation,

which can be short or long term. Social motivation can be found in group work. The interaction in a group is generally seen as very rewarding and motivating for the students. Banks (2006c) reports that research has shown that student's participation in group work and other cooperative learning activities enhances their motivation and self-esteem.

Friends and study colleagues usually also encourage motivation to study (Hämäläinen et al., 2013). Hämäläinen et al. (2013) showed that a teacher's enthusiasm and desire to develop professionally will have a positive effect on the students view, as these teachers appear to be more supportive. An inspired teacher, who puts an effort into teaching, will always enhance student-motivation (Hämäläinen et al., 2013).

### 3.9 Curriculum

The demographic changes and global migration that are taking place around the world require from teachers to restructure their curriculum and teaching so that students from different ethnic and language groups have equal opportunities to study (Banks, 2006c). A successful multicultural curriculum must expand beyond classroom walls (Banks, 2006b).

Although the curriculum varies from school to school, the basics should be that a good school maximizes the learning experiences of its students. Overall it is thought that interracial contact in childhood will have a lasting positive influence on racial attitudes and behavior of adults (Banks, 2006c).

The content that students are taught influences the level of student achievement and their ability and extent of critical thinking. After Banks (2001), students who are taught curricula that are more rigorous learn more than their peers with similar prior knowledge and backgrounds who are taught less-demanding curricula.

School policies and practices reflect on the school's educational philosophy, as well as the values of the school staff (Figure 1). Therefore the school's beliefs

and attitudes have a direct influence on the student's ability to operate and study within a multicultural environment. Only a well formed curriculum will influence students in their racial attitudes and behaviors and should provide them with the experiences and material that will enhance positive attitudes (Banks, 2006c). Also the use of multicultural teaching material and textbooks will further positive interaction and perceptions.

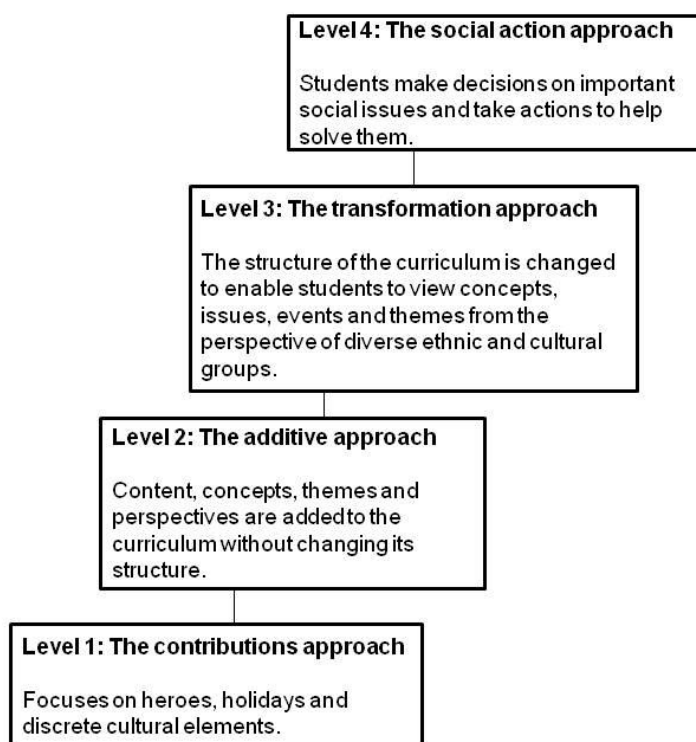


Figure 1. Banks' (2006a) four levels of integration of multicultural content.

When teaching a multicultural group one should not only follow the curriculum, but also take into account the groups background as well as their basis and origin of study. First things, like the students native language, his cultural background, his duration of stay in Finland and former school background, as well as the ability to speak Finnish should be established and looked into. Individual studying possibilities should be explored and necessary supportive actions considered. Multicultural students should also be allowed flexible arrangements for example like for exams. Preliminary and preparing teaching before starting vocational training, as well as extra language classes should be considered (Opetushallitus, 2011).

After Paavola (2007) the curriculum should be comprised in a way that reflects the cultures and views of all the ethnic groups and genders involved. The students own language should not only be appreciated but also be supported and possibly taught. Own views of the different cultures should also be taken into account when choosing teaching material, as well as the different cultures and possible language barriers taken into consideration at exams. Teachers and other personnel of the school should receive additional training (Figure 2).

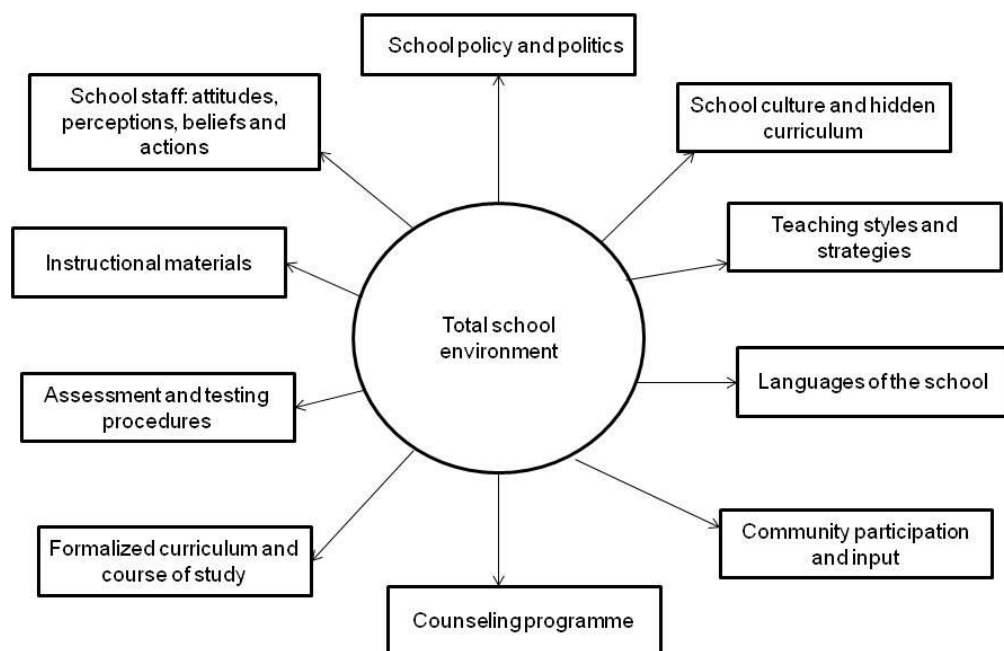


Figure 2. The total school environment (Banks, 2006a)

If teachers are to increase learning opportunities for all students, they must be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning as well as to be aware of some distinctive cultural behaviors that are associated with ethnic groups (Banks et al., 2001). Teachers should also be able to translate that knowledge into effective instruction and an enriched curriculum.

### 3.10 Approaches for multicultural education

There is no overall right way or approach in teaching a multicultural group. Research by Grant & Sleeter (2007) has shown that there are five different models to approach multicultural education theoretically and in its implementation. These five models work either entirely separately or they partly overlay. The objective of the approaches might differ from one another, but also is sometimes convergent (Grant & Sleeter, 2007).

One would be that the student quickly adapts to the new country's customs and culture. This is done by providing them with special courses in order for them to quickly obtain the new norms so they can go on to study with the mainstream students. A problem observed when applying this model, was that the students might have had bad learning results and needed additional tutoring not because of basic learning difficulties but due to their weak knowledge of the new language (Grant & Sleeter, 2007). Nevertheless, after Paavola (2007), this has been a preferred model in Finland.

Another approach would be by developing a positive relationship between fellow students. Here a balance is sought between racial, social class, gender, sexual orientation or possible disability differences. The aim here is to create communalities, tolerance and acceptance between the students. This model emphasizes the application of intercultural activities, group work and cooperative learning overall. With this approach some of the problems are dealt with through constructive communication, as well as accepting and appreciating one another. This model also enhances students' awareness of minority groups in their community and of cultural and social differences (Grant & Sleeter, 2007). Here, the aim is to get to know a minority and increase their status in order to create a combined view for example when working in a group (Paavola, 2007).

In a so called multicultural-education approach the aim is to create social fairness and cultural pluralism and with it the coexistence of different interests and ways of life in our society. Here the objective is to individually offer the necessary and appropriate education for each student. This model should enhance the students self identity, but also support group work and aid in

paying attention to others and respecting them (Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Paavola, 2007).

The last model desires to create future members of society who would even more serve the common good and the needs of different groups. It aims for an equal and just society (Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Paavola, 2007).

Overall it can be said that multicultural education cannot be achieved by only arranging a few days that would for example introduce one culture or country or through one study module, but it has to happen continuously and be present in all teaching.

### 3.11 Teaching competence

Metsänen & Kämäräinen (2011), report that in their study teachers of multicultural groups mostly obtained their experience through practice. After Siimekselä & Tarvainen (2010) teaching competence for multicultural groups is first of all based on the teacher's own interest towards and the respect of other cultures. Additionally it is based on the teacher's knowledge and understanding of foreign customs and the perception of other cultures, as well as his own and the ability to see things from the other cultures point of view. Another important part is the functional competence, which is the ability to organize the teaching in a flexible way that suits various diverse groups and is always specially geared towards the current group, and also to interact and react effectively in critical situations.

Teachers should have the opportunity to attend development and guidance courses to make it easier for them to understand the multifaceted characteristics of ethnic groups within society and the ways in which race, background, language and social class interact to influence student-behavior. Such programmes would help teachers to discover and identify their personal attitudes towards different racial, language and cultural groups, but also acquire information on the histories and cultures of diverse racial, cultural and language groups within their schools (Banks et al., 2001). Additionally they may gain



further knowledge and understanding on the different perspectives existing within various ethnic and cultural communities, as well as how institutionalized knowledge within schools and popular culture can be responsible for creating stereotypes about ethnic groups (Banks et al., 2001). Such advanced training should give teachers the skills to understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups and how such variables as religion, social class and gender strongly influence cultural behavior. After Banks et al. (2001) these variables affect groups individually and interactively. Banks et al. (2001), reports that for example in the United States class is becoming increasingly important in the lives of African Americans and it can be seen that the increasing significance of class surpasses the declining significance of race.

It is also important that teachers enhance and develop their understanding and knowledge of their own culture and related views to it. When teaching a diverse group they will represent basically being Finnish. In such a situation the teachers possibly will have to explain to the students, that although being a Finnish teacher, it not necessarily means that they are representing the Finnish people as such and are not responsible for the behaviour of Finnish people on the whole (Metsänen & Kämäräinen, 2011).

Teachers should also apply various culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills (Figure 3). The differences in language, learning styles and cultures of students from diverse racial and ethnic groups and social classes often complicate the evaluation of their progress. Therefore to use only one method of assessment can disadvantage students from a particular social class and ethnic group (Banks et al., 2001). Banks et al. (2001) suggests that the best way to counteract this would be for teachers to adopt a range of formative and comprehensive assessment strategies. This approach could include among others, observations and oral examinations, as well as performances and standardized assessments. This way the students will have the possibility to show their skills despite any cultural and language hindrances.

Teacher- or student oriented education play an important role in teacher's or student's roles and in the teaching methods applied. Hämäläinen et al. (2013) suggest in their studies that Finnish teacher's interaction with students can be

sometimes too little and sparsely. Students might get the opinion that a teacher whom the students can call by his first name and who allows critical questions does lack authority and therefore does not have to be respected and honored. This example shows that cultural schemes and prejudice can influence the educational process greatly.

The adaption to a new culture is a process involving several stages. These stages are bound to the individual background and experiences. The first stage is the fascination with the new, after which might follow the confrontation of the new and the student's own culture. If a student starts his studies in this confrontation period, his motivation to study the Finnish language for example will be minimal. Therefore teachers should be aware of these process stages (Hämäläinen et al., 2013).

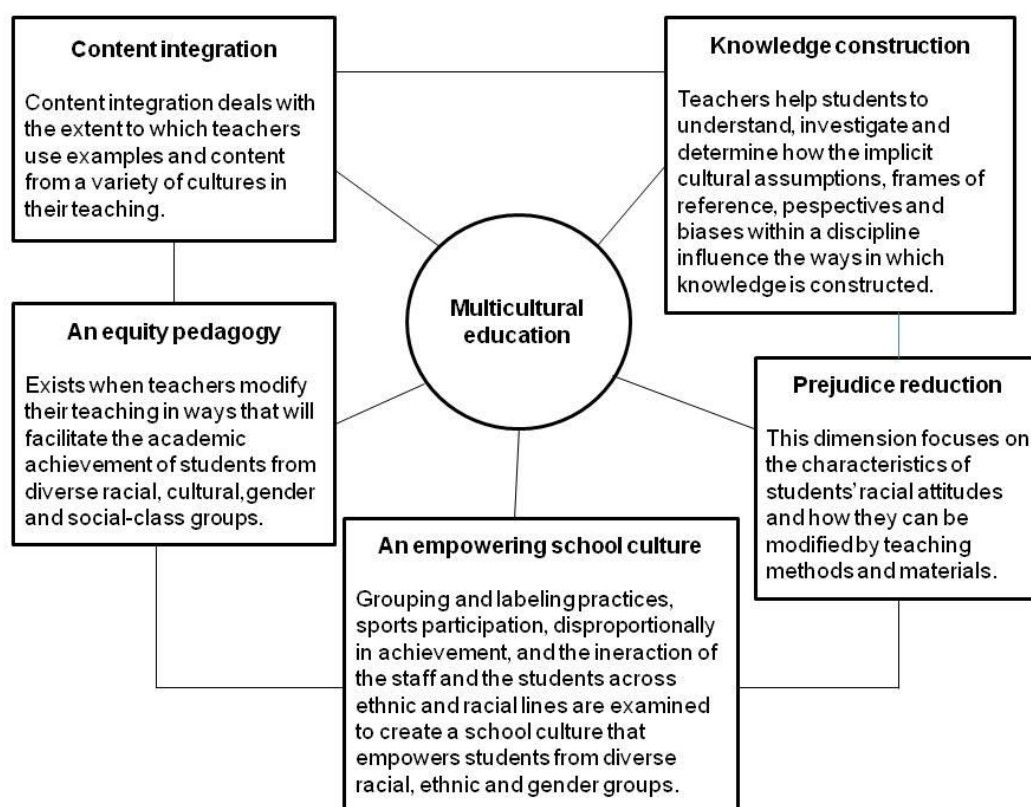


Figure 3. The dimension of multicultural education (Banks, 2006a)

Interaction- and communication skills are vital for a teacher's profession. In a multicultural group the mastery of these skills gains even more importance. If

the teaching is conducted in Finnish, the Finnish itself should consist of easily understandable and comprehensible expressions. Additionally various non-verbal expressions should be used to enhance the interaction (Hämäläinen et al., 2013).

After Hämäläinen et al. (2013) many researchers of interaction have found that communication between people should be open and honest and that in their own research they found that students value mostly a teacher who is relaxed, fair and encouraging. They also appreciate teachers' professional skills and someone who will apply different teaching techniques (Hämäläinen et al., 2013).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Finnish vocational and polytechnic institutes have seen a rapid increase of foreign students during the past few years. International students studying in Finland have either an immigrant background or are participating in exchange programmes, both for short- or long term purposes.

Additionally, more and more degree courses are also offered in English, which attract and draw foreign students from all over the world, especially from Africa, China and middle Europe. In vocational, as well as polytechnic institutes foreign students with various background knowledge and skills are admitted, which often poses a problem for teachers to create a study environment which will further all students and create a learning environment in which all students will feel welcome and respected, as well as to establish and be able to enhance a common direction to learning.

Teaching a multicultural group will generate situations which usually differ significantly from situations encountered with standard students who are representing the same culture. This multicultural expertise can be seen from the teacher's as the educational institution's point of view.

Based on several papers, most Finnish researchers are of the opinion that the teaching of multicultural groups and the multicultural competence of teachers has been studied widely in Finland. In my opinion the basis for teaching multicultural groups, the explanations for the reasons why foreigners and immigrants might react differently to Finnish culture and its education system have been processed sufficiently, but 'hands on', practical examples how to conduct teaching and how to behave in problem situations have not been addressed sufficiently. Siimekselä & Tarvainen (2010) also found that the teaching and teacher's competence especially for academic groups is lacking information. Teachers in cities with high population density might be more confronted with immigrant and other multicultural groups, and therefore supposedly more competent, although basically all teachers throughout the country should possess such skills. Overall people usually use categories in perceiving their environment, as categorization is a natural part of human

information processing, which can then result in stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination and further on lead to behaviors influenced by those stereotypes.

The purpose of this study was to examine the problems that might arise when teaching a multicultural group, as well as to see which competences are required of the teachers of multicultural groups overall. This was done by studying relevant literature and previous research as well as through personal observations. Being a foreigner myself gave me a different insight into this issue.

Although Finland has been basically multicultural for a long time, regarding its Swedish, Same and Romanian speaking minorities and their educational needs have partly been answered, they still overall had Finnish nationality. Compared to some middle European countries Finland has nowadays actually only a tiny amount of foreigners and immigrants to deal with. After Paavola (2007) multicultural education was seen earlier as remote and separate from the overall educational philosophy and as something meant for immigrants, only with the aim of rapid integration of the immigrant with the majority population. Only gradually a new approach emerged where multicultural education is now seen as an approach for everyone with the aim to decrease prejudice and racism.

The requirements for integration would be for immigrants to still maintain their original culture, but also adapt to the new culture and interact with the new surroundings. Consequently this will create a dual nationality, by preserving one's original culture but also accepting the norms and customs of the new country (Paavola, 2007). This is easier said than done and a very optimistic outlook. From my own experience I can say that the result can also be a torn feeling between two cultures and a kind of emptiness and feeling of not belonging to either. Regarding language teaching many foreigners and immigrants have been pondering on the fact that in Finnish schools the Finnish language classes always run under the term of 'äidinkieli'. The other languages are then English, German, French etc. Now for a native English speaker for example, English would be his 'äidinkieli'. The question arises of why the

subject of Finnish language cannot be under that name? In no other European country one will find the country's language as a subject called 'äidinkieli'.

Overall it seems that the challenges of teaching multicultural groups are not only linked to the cultural, interaction and communicative skills, expertise and teaching methods, but also to other challenges involved when encountering multicultural groups. First of all there has to be made a difference of the level of multicultural education. There are differences in university, polytechnic and vocational education or introductory courses for immigrants – levels. A certain intellectual background also for foreign students is required for attending university studies, compared to vocational studies, where you might find the most diverse students, not only cultural wise but also background wise.

University level seems to demand the least of adaption for teachers. Students are either Erasmus exchange students, who stay in Finland only for a short period of time, master's degree students and doctoral students. Basically Master's degree courses are held in English, with the professor lecturing about his topic and a written exam at the end of the course. Most courses also include group work, which usually consists of the presentation and discussion of a scientific paper relevant to the topic. Personal interaction between the lecturer and course participants is kept to a minimum, except if the student has questions regarding the assignment or wants to discuss an issue of the topic deeper. Grades, or pass and fail evaluations are given on the basis of the presentation and the exam.

The biggest problem can be found in either an English language deficit of the lecturer or of the students. Secondly the time concept of some foreign students might be different (see chapter 3.4), which can also pose a problem. Although students learn quickly that timetables have to be kept, otherwise they will not pass a course and receive credits. In group work it can be seen that usually Finnish students will form a group together, while foreign students firstly seem to choose their group partners independently of race or culture, being probably bound in their mind just by the fact that they are foreigners. It has to be said that in a master's degree study usually the same students attend the same courses, so after a while a kind of multicultural community will be formed mostly bound

together by the interest in their studies. In the beginning of such master studies it can be seen that for group work, if possible, Finns will choose Finnish colleagues, Africans will choose African colleagues, European Europeans etc. After getting to know each other better and getting to know the academic level and determination of each participant, groups will change. Students will try to form the best possible group to enhance their own personal progress. Therefore groups will be totally mixed with no noticeable cultural problems, except for a possible struggle in keeping deadlines and being on time for group work meetings.

When looking at polytechnic institutes the education emphasis lies more on 'hands on' assignments than at universities, also predominantly involving group work. The teachers seem somehow more involved with the students and the curriculum seems more influenced by the structure of the students participating in that particular course. Courses are also taught in English. The same language problem as at universities can be applied here. Therefore teachers who are teaching their subject in English should not only be proficient in their subject, but also language wise. It should not be enough to just be able to explain their subject sufficiently in English, as many conclude in their research papers, but the English language proficiency should be adequate to the institution they are teaching at and to the high standards that are normally set for all other educational matters in Finland.

Before admission, foreign students usually have to provide an official certificate that they are proficient in English. It is very difficult to always prove that these certificates are genuine. That can lead to problems with the student's language ability, as their English can be very basic and render them not qualified to study academically.

Cooperative, group work learning experiences have been shown to promote positive interpersonal relationships between culturally diverse students and to reduce prejudice. Placing students of different cultures into contact with one another leads to improved attitudes and relations, provided that the equal status between groups in interracial situations has been thoughtfully structured by teachers. The overall goals are always to increase understanding of personal

identity and cultural diversity and to reduce prejudice. A positive group climate will also generate a meaningful and honest dialogue about issues of diversity and prejudice and enable changes in students' thinking about others.

It seems that many teachers, as well as school communities, would like to have additional training to gain better multicultural competence. I think that training alone and getting to know the facts does not automatically increase that competence, but that the teacher's own interest towards and respect of other cultures has to come from within first. The functional competence will only be achieved through practice, in order to be able to interact with the students and react effectively in critical situations. Teachers will have to broaden their view of their own culture as well as about foreign cultures. They should also apply various culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills of diverse groups.

Overall it can be said that multicultural education cannot be achieved by only arranging a few days that would for example introduce one culture or country or through one study module, but it has to happen continuously and be present in all teaching.



## 5. SUMMERY

Finnish vocational and polytechnic institutes have seen a rapid increase in foreign students during the past few years. Additionally, more and more degree courses are also offered in English, which attract and draw foreign students from all over the world. To teach such groups requires special skills and a positive, as well as flexible attitude from and by the teacher. The teaching of multicultural groups and multicultural competence of teachers has been studied widely in Finland, but it seems that teachers are lacking 'hands on', practical examples how to conduct teaching and how to behave in problem situations emerging when teaching diverse groups.

In vocational, as well as polytechnic institutes foreign students with various background knowledge and skills are admitted, which often poses a problem for teachers to create a study environment which will further all students and create a learning environment in which all students will feel welcome and respected, as well as to establish and be able to enhance a common direction to learning.

In Finland, predominantly research on this topic has been done by Finnish teachers and researchers and papers written in Finnish language. Being a foreigner myself and having lived and studied here in Finland for quite some time, I thought it to be interesting to examine the relevancy of previous findings and suggestions from a foreign teacher's perspective teaching in Finland and to offer this review in English.

This 'review paper' examines the recent progress in Finnish schools regarding intercultural teaching competence and general guidance for teaching multicultural groups. Overall, this work summarizes the current state of knowledge on this topic and discusses its relativity and appropriateness, as well as creates a basis for discussion on the findings presented from recent research. Synthesizing the results from several literature papers and media it produces a coherent argument about this topic.

Ethnic and cultural diversity should filter through the total school environment. (Banks, 2006b). Teachers and schools, also through the curriculum, should receive the opportunity to gain further training and through that develop an

improved multicultural pedagogical approach and intercultural competence in order to encourage, mentor and guide multicultural students, operate successfully in a multicultural environment and be able to support and enhance the integration of students into the learning community. Only a well formed curriculum will influence students in their racial attitudes and behaviors and should provide them with the experiences and material that will enhance positive attitudes (Banks, 2006c).

The cultural knowledge and understanding of the teacher are vital instruments to achieve interaction with the students, knowledge not only of the teacher's own but also of other cultures and the ability to distinguish between similarities as well as differences of these. Teachers might have different ideas and perceptions when it comes to ethics and therefore the discussion of ethical values should be encouraged. Next to joint discussions, teachers themselves should also constantly reflect on their own personal values and ideas (Paavola, 2007). That also includes for teachers to broaden their pedagogical view of their own culture as well as about foreign cultures (Paavola, 2007). Foremost teachers will have to contemplate on their own set of values. In order to connect better with the students and improve their interaction, the teacher must know his own cultural roots, as well as to gain knowledge about foreign cultures.

Teaching strategies should be adapted to the diversity of students (Ollera et al., 2012), as there is no single way to teach well, especially in different situations and contexts with a mixture of interactions. Human and material resources are to be adjusted to the different characteristics, expectations and beliefs of diverse groups.

Not only teachers, but also the students themselves should be made aware of cultural differences and to develop an intercultural sensitivity to enable them to different ways of interpretations and implementations for problem solving. Learning opportunities should promote self-discovery and reflection of one's own heritage, so collaboration among students will be made easier and foreign students will find it easier to integrate. Teaching should not only be responsive to students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and language groups but also develop student's skills to interact positively with people from diverse groups.

The aim is to transform these skills into effective classroom practice, so diverse cultural groups will experience equality and academic success.

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**'MUST KNOW' FOR TEACHERS OF MULTICULTURAL GROUPS:**

- Ethnic and cultural diversity should be reflected by the entire school environment.
- Ethnic content and perspectives should be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum.
- The curriculum should be designed in a way that helps students to learn how to function effectively and comfortably in various cultural environments and to explore different learning approaches.
- Learning objectives, materials and strategies should reflect the cultures and cognitive styles of various ethnic and cultural groups within the school environment.
- Ethnicity and culture should be integrated into teaching material and not be seen as something additional and occasionally appropriate.
- Schools as well as teachers should provide a variety of instruments and techniques for teaching students of various ethnic and cultural groups.
- Teachers should have the opportunity to attend development courses that offer them to explore their own attitudes and feelings about their own culture and others and help them to develop adequate intercultural competence.
- Teachers should be knowledgeable about their own culture, have a flexible attitude and be open-minded towards new foreign influences.
- Teachers should create a classroom atmosphere that reflects acceptance and respect for ethnic and cultural differences in order to

offer a learning environment in which all students will feel welcome and respected.

- Human and material resources are to be adjusted to the different characteristics, expectations and beliefs of diverse groups.
- Teachers should adopt a range of formative and comprehensive assessment strategies, which reflect ethnic and cultural diversity of students.
- Students should be guided and helped towards developing a better self-understanding and improving their self-acceptance and gaining a better understanding of their own ethnic and cultural heritage.
- Teachers should create significant cross-cutting student groups with the aim to improve intergroup relations, as these kinds of groups stimulate friendship and solidarity within the group and through that can mitigate preexisting animosities as well as counteract stereotype thinking.
- Students' learning about diversity and prejudice reduction is not only strongly linked to a group dialogue, but the depth and quality of it are mostly tied to the significance of relationships that develop in a group through shared experiences.
- Students should be helped to develop the necessary skills in order to effectively interact and participate in diverse groups in order to acquire intercultural competence.