

Multicultural Education Survey:

A Comparison of Pre-college and College Education Experiences.



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Introduction

Multicultural education is a relatively new outlook on education which developed out of the civil rights movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's. The purpose of introducing multicultural education was to help students of marginalized groups start to catch up to white students who have been given a 300 year head start in the U.S. through institutional racism. Since the civil rights era the idea of multicultural education has expanded to include issues such as gender in education, bilingual education and special needs education.

As the demographic diversity of the United States grows, so too does the need for multicultural education. If we are to expect our children to function in our increasingly multicultural society, they will need the knowledge and skills provided by multicultural education. Most colleges and universities offer an array of multicultural courses. Most educators would agree that teaching people diversity and tolerance can allow for a more accepting and less violent society. The question is, shouldn't something so important to the future of our society be part of an ongoing curriculum that begins as a young child?

With this in mind, we decided to study the differences between what students have learned about race and ethnicity in their pre-college schools and what students learn about the same topic in their college experiences. With the help of some of the materials we included in our literature review, we operationalized the terms "race", "ethnicity", and "racial and ethnic awareness". We wanted to determine whether or not students felt their public school educators did a sufficient job of creating awareness of different races and

ethnicities. We also studied what students have learned about race and ethnicity at Humboldt State University. This helped us to determine any differences in multicultural education between these two school systems. One issue we focused on was how students have obtained the knowledge that they currently have about racial and ethnic awareness and whether or not that knowledge (or lack thereof) influenced personal feelings about people of different races and ethnicities.

When researching multicultural education we came across many books and journals with information on ideas for incorporating multicultural education in the classroom, the goals of multicultural education, and its advantages and disadvantages. The fact that there is no one definition of multicultural education created a problem because we wanted to focus on educating about race and ethnicity while the research materials presented information on a wide variety of topics within multicultural education. There is very little information available on studies done on the effectiveness of multicultural education compared to public school and college. While conducting our literature review we searched for the goals of multicultural education in order to determine whether or not educators met those goals.

We decided to do an exploratory study to attempt to measure the effectiveness of multicultural education in public schools as compared to college level coursework. After reviewing previous studies and books on the topic of multicultural education we have synthesized information on the history of multicultural education, goals and importance of multicultural education, examples of curriculum used in a multicultural classroom, and required multicultural coursework at Humboldt State University.

For the purpose of our study we wanted to look at race and ethnicity in education and the importance of learning about the advantages and disadvantages that ethnic and racial minorities face in the U.S. It is necessary for multicultural education to continually adapt to our ever changing society. Though multicultural education is constantly changing, the underlying goal has always been to affect social change. All other goals which multicultural educators have set out to achieve should ultimately lead to social change.

One goal of multicultural education is to create positive images of minority groups for students. This is important for both minority students as well as white students. Minority group people are too often misrepresented in the media. Studies have shown that misrepresentations tend to reinforce negative stereotypes and lead to negative group images of minorities. Luisa Araujo and Janis Strasser (2003) said, "By age three or four, children have already begun to construct their gender and racial identity. Stereotypes, prejudices, and practices in homes, communities, and the media can negatively affect children's feelings about themselves and others". Offering positive images of minority groups provides students with an opportunity to unlearn some of these negative images and can help them develop a more positive view of themselves and of their group. According to Paul Gorski (2000), "It is equally critical that the children recognize and appreciate their own ethnicity and learn to appreciate those of the other children in the class".

Another goal of multicultural education is to teach children to stop seeing people who differ from themselves as the "Other". This kind of thinking comes out of fear of the

unknown. We tend to put people into categories when we do not understand them. Members of the dominant culture learn to see their norms as correct and others as incorrect. It becomes easy to say "we are normal, they are not". According to Emma Buffington Duren (2000), "White western culture becomes the center, the cultural norm, by which all other (non-white) cultures were measured".

It is important to teach children that the norms of the dominant group (which are usually the norms represented in mainstream media) do not reflect all of society. In presenting this information white children can learn that, if someone differs from what they perceive to be normal, they are still to be respected. This will also teach minority children that what society tells them is normal may not be what their group considers normal. By allowing "white western culture" to become the norm in a racially diverse society such as ours we have alienated many different groups of people. According to Joy L. Lei (2003), "This discursive system perpetuates the positioning of people of color as the other, and the white, European American culture as the mainstream and the norm. These regulative representations serve as effective tools for maintaining the power and status of the dominant group". Multicultural educators are working to change this by teaching students that all cultures are relevant, should be considered normal, and deserve respect.

Perhaps one of the most important goals of multicultural education is the promotion of social justice. In order to have social justice in this country we must begin by teaching white children to respect and validate all people; no matter how much they differ from what society says is normal. Children need to learn to appreciate the contributions of all

groups who have added something to our society. They need to realize that no one race, ethnicity, or culture is better than any other. This is just the beginning of promoting social justice. Children need to learn about the injustices that different minority groups have experienced and continue to experience in this society. White children need to know that they have privileges that other people do not. And all children need to be taught that they can stand up for what they believe in and make positive changes in the world. Luisa Araujo and Janis Strasser (2003) said, "Education in a democratic society should help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they will need to participate in civic action to make society more equitable and just".

By promoting social justice we can work towards ending the more than 300 years of racism that has persisted in this country. And through another important goal of multicultural education, making education more equitable for minority groups, we can work towards making up for the education gap between white children and minority children. According to the National Association for Multicultural Education (2003), multicultural education "prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups". There is little doubt that 300 plus years of institutional racism has had a negative effect on minority groups. Multicultural educators are actively working towards leveling the education playing field by taking into account the experiences of each individual child in the classroom thereby giving each child an equal opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.

New multicultural curriculum is being introduced into classrooms all the time. But

there is some argument that it "does not successfully address racism and ethnocentrism" (Pedelty 2001:1). Simply teaching about different cultures and experiences is not enough to teach children how to be allies. Children need to learn about white privilege, ethnocentrism and the history of racism in the U.S. in order to understand why it is important to fight for social justice.

Literature is the most widely used resource for multicultural education. From reading aloud to simply looking at pictures in a picture book, books seem to be the best way to get the intended message across. Emma Buffington Duren (2000) says, "Books, as written narratives, provide a way for us to conceptualize the word and locate our selves in context of the experience of others". She goes on to say that, "Reading aloud to students introduces them to books that they might read on their own and allows them to use their imaginations" (Duren 2000:2). Pictures are another good way to teach children about the experiences of other people. Luisa Araujo and Janis Strasser say, "The use of picture books, with discussions and related activities, can be a first step in creating within the early childhood classroom an anti-bias environment". Role-playing is an effective way to teach children what life is like for minority people. They can begin to see what it feels like to be discriminated against based on their outer appearance. No matter what resources teachers use to teach multicultural education; it is important to remember that teaching respect of other races, ethnicities, and cultures is not enough. We must also teach children that racism, ethnocentrism, and privilege still exist in our society. It is important to teach them that they can do something to fight to make it better.

Conceptualization

For the purpose of this study it was necessary to define some of the terms we used. Many of these definitions were included in our survey in order to make sure our respondents fully understood our questions.

- **Effective-** used to refer to multicultural education, defined by a high level of racial and ethnic awareness
- **Racial and ethnic awareness-** referred to as “awareness”, being mindful or cognizant of the advantages and disadvantages of being a certain race or ethnicity
- **Race-** defined for our study, a group of people distinguished by genetically transmitted physical characteristics
- **Ethnicity-** the condition of belonging to a particular group recognized as a class based on certain distinctive characteristics such as religion, language, ancestry, culture, norms and values, or nationality
- **Multicultural education-** education promoting the understanding of cultural differences built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity

Methodology

Respondents to our study on multicultural education needed to meet specific prerequisites before answering the questions asked. It was necessary to be selective because we wanted to focus on a specific population at Humboldt State University. Before completing the survey respondents read a short paragraph informing them of

voluntary consent to share information with the researchers and insuring anonymity.

Prerequisites for the Multicultural Education Survey included the year graduated from high school. As researchers, we wanted to focus on students who graduated between the years of 2000 and 2003. We thought the survey would reflect a change in opinions of other races and ethnicities as a result of the events on September 11, 2001. We ensured that respondents were Humboldt State University Students and that no person under the age of 18 completed the survey.

One hundred surveys were administered at various sites on the Humboldt State University campus including the quad, dorms, library, arts quad, the “J”, and in one political science class because of convenience. We chose to administer at the dorms and school cafeteria, otherwise known as the “J”, because of the influx of freshman present who met the prerequisites. We used candy as an incentive to fill out our survey. Respondents were given the candy after surveys were completed. Out of the one hundred surveys only 83 were usable.

Results

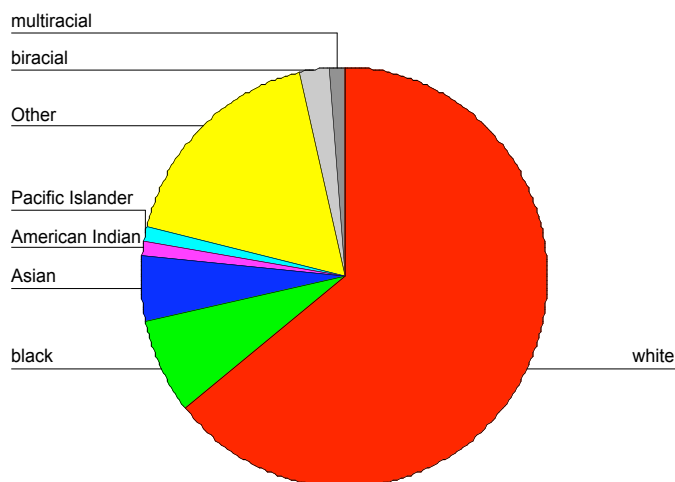
Demographics

After administering one hundred surveys we determined that eighty three of our respondents had met the prerequisites and their surveys were valid. The mean age of our respondents was nineteen years. Ages at high school graduation were, as expected, eighteen years. This meant that a majority of our respondents, fifty four, were in their first year of college. Forty four of our respondents graduated from the public school

system in 2003 and most expected to graduate from Humboldt State University in the year 2007 (twenty seven respondents).

Respondents were asked to write in their ethnicity in the survey. We were not able to code ethnicity because we received a wide array of answers ranging from as many as seven different ethnicities represented in one person to the simple reply of “earthling”. We also asked respondents to choose a racial category that best suited them. Figure 1.1 is a pie chart that represents the percentages of races included in our survey. The majority of respondents were white.

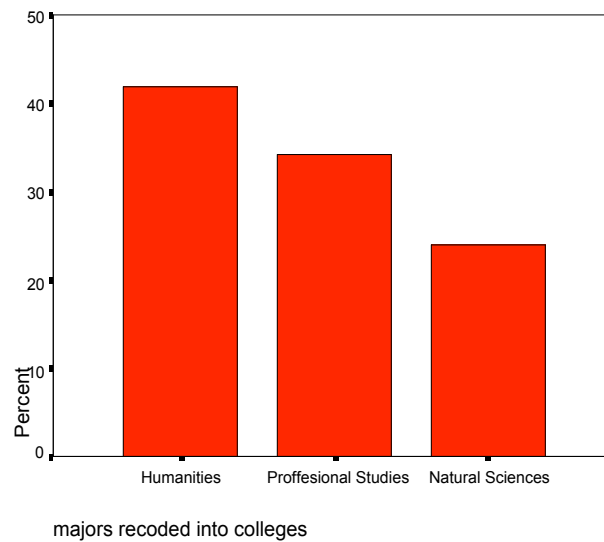
Race of Respondents (1.1)



A wide range of majors were represented in our survey. The highest frequency of respondents in one major was eight. The two majors that had a frequency of eight were psychology and undeclared. It was surprising to see more psychology majors represented

than any others. After entering the information into SPSS we recoded the majors into three separate colleges; College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Professional Studies, and College of Natural Sciences. Figure 1.2 is a bar chart that depicts the percentage of respondents in each category.

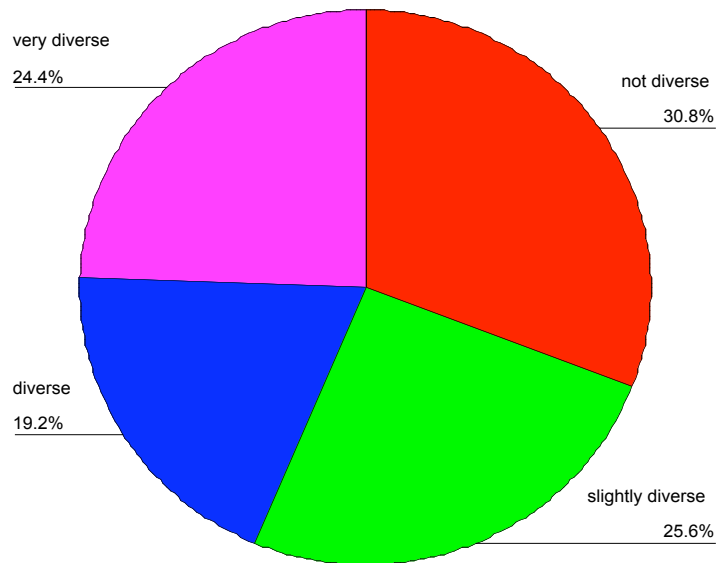
Colleges of all Respondents (Fig. 1.2)



In the survey, we asked respondents to rate the racial and ethnic diversity of all of the pre-college schools that they had attended. Figure 1.3 shows that the majority of our respondents went to schools that they felt were not diverse. However, we felt that the respondents provided a wide range of backgrounds from schools that were very diverse, diverse, slightly diverse and not diverse.

Diversity Rating of Pre-college Schools

(Fig. 1.3)



Trends

A majority of our respondents agreed that their pre-college educators met six out of the nine goals of multicultural education defined in our study. The six goals that seem to have been met by a majority of the respondent's pre-college educators were, 1) creating positive images of minority groups (63.8% agreed), 2) taught students that the cultures of all groups are relevant in our society (66.3% agreed), 3) taught students that all cultures deserve respect (83.2% agreed), 4) promoted student concern for the rights of all people (66.7% agreed), 5) taught about the injustices that different minority groups have experienced in society (ex. Slavery) (83.2% agreed), and 6) prepared students to live in an increasingly multicultural society (54.9% agreed).

The three goals which seem to have not been met by a majority of the respondent's pre-college educators were, 1) taught about the injustices minority groups continue to face in our society (ex. police profiling), 2) provided students with skills they would need in order to help with the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups, and 3) taught about the world from a minority perspective.

The percentage of respondents who felt their pre-college educators did not teach them about the injustices minority groups continue to face in our society was 53.7%. The percentage who felt their pre-college educators did not provide them with the skills needed in order to help with the redistribution of power and income was 71.6%. And the percentage of respondents who felt their pre-college educators did not teach them about the world from a minority perspective was 66.2%. Not surprisingly, only about half of our respondents felt that their pre-college educators did a sufficient job of creating awareness of different races and ethnicities. In contrast with their pre-college experiences, however, a majority of our respondents agreed that their college education has met all nine of the goals of multicultural education.

Although a majority of our respondents reported that all nine goals of multicultural education had been met by their college educators, two out of the three goals that the respondents reported not being met by their pre-college educators had the lowest percentage of agreement when asked about their college experience(s). These two goals were 1) provided students with the skills needed for the redistribution of power and

income among diverse groups and 2) taught about the world from the minority perspective. Only 57.3% (a small majority of respondents) agreed that their college educators have provided them with the skills needed for the redistribution of power and income. And just over half (56.1%) of the respondents agreed that their college educators have taught them about the world from the minority perspective.

Regardless of what our respondents learned from their pre-college and college educators, an overwhelming majority of them proved to have a high racial awareness when it came to our questions about their personal feelings of race and racism in our society. When we asked them to agree or disagree to statements such as, 1) “Minorities are treated fairly in this society”, 2) “There is no difference between the way white people and minority people are treated in this society”, 3) “Racial stereotypes are justified because they are based on real observations”, 4) “The dominant culture in society represents all people”, and 5) “Immigrants to the U.S. should adopt our customs”. The percentage of respondents who disagreed with these statements ranged from 80.7% to 95.2%. Also, 95.2% of our respondents agreed with the statement, “All cultures deserve respect”.

Significant Findings

Some of our findings from this survey were statistically significant. We found that the respondents who felt their pre-college educators did a sufficient job of teaching about other cultures also agreed that their pre-college educators met the goals of multicultural education ($p < .05$). As expected, there is a positive correlation between these two questions. It follows that if respondents felt their pre-college educators did a

sufficient job of educating them on race and ethnicity, they would agree that these educators met the goals of multicultural education.

(fig. 1.4)

hsposim recoded * pre-college educators did a sufficient job of educating about race and ethnicity

Crosstabulation

		pre-college educators did a sufficient job of educating about race and ethnicity		Total
		disagree	agree	
hsposim recoded	disagree	Expected Count 14.6 % within pre-college educators did a sufficient job of educating about race and ethnicity 60.0%	15.4 14.3%	30.0 36.6%
	agree	Expected Count 25.4 % within pre-college educators did a sufficient job of educating about race and ethnicity 40.0%	26.6 85.7%	52.0 63.4%
Total		Expected Count 40.0 % within pre-college educators did a sufficient job of educating about race and ethnicity 100.0%	42.0 100.0%	82.0 100.0%

(fig.1.4 cont'.)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.455(b)	1	.000		
Continuity Correction(a)	16.537	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	19.410	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.229	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	82				

Chi-Square Tests

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

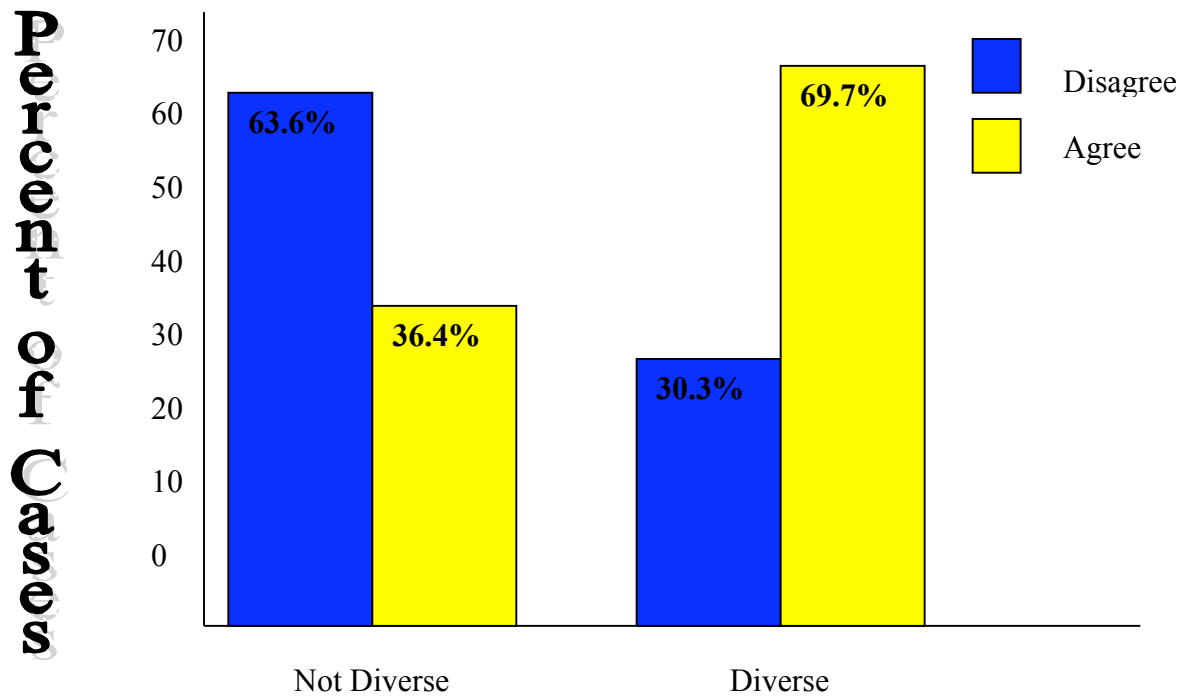
b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.63.

Respondents who felt that their schools were not diverse were more likely to disagree with the statement “Overall, my pre-college educators did a sufficient job of creating awareness of different races and ethnicities”. Conversely, respondents who felt that their schools were diverse were more likely to agree to the same statement. ($P < .05$) An explanation for this may be that the actual experience of being among a diverse group of races and ethnicities has more to do with creating awareness than actual curriculum. Life experiences, in this case, may be responsible for creating awareness of different races and ethnicities. Another explanation may be that teachers in schools that are not

diverse feel that multicultural education is not a necessity. Figure 1.5 shows this statistically significant finding.

Do Pre-College Educators do a Sufficient Job of Creating Awareness?

(Fig. 1.5)



$P < .05$

We also found that respondents who attended pre-college schools that were diverse were more likely to choose a major from the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Students who attended pre-college schools that were not diverse were more likely to choose a major from the College of Professional Studies. Possible reasons

for these findings may include the fact that many teachers in the United States are Caucasian and tend to come from racially segregated areas, whereas students who attended diverse pre-college schools may be more interested in pursuing careers that explore racial and ethnic theories, cultures, studies, and ideas. Figures 1.6 and 1.7 display these findings.

Fig. 1.6

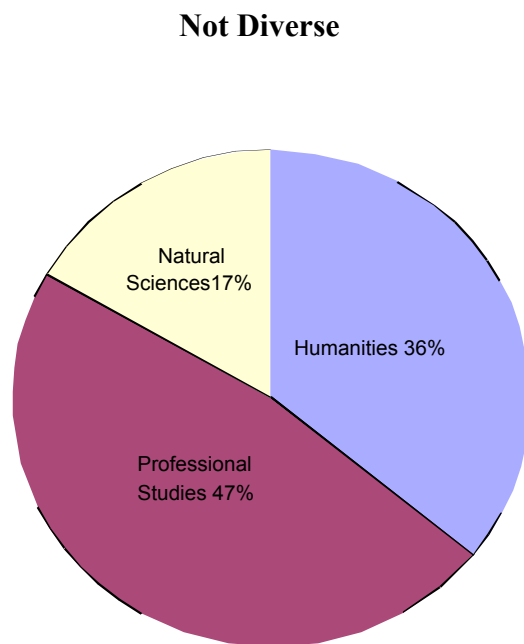
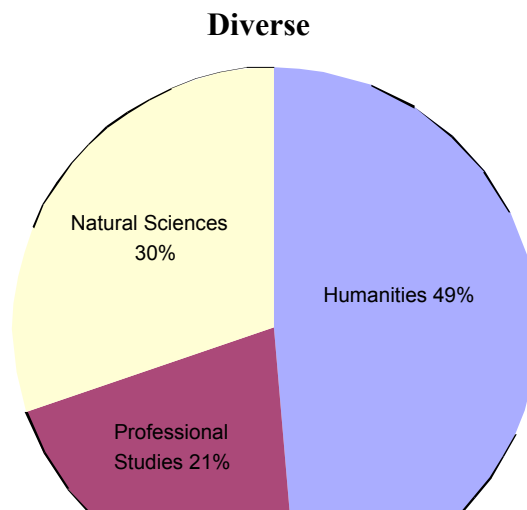


Fig. 1.7



Conclusions

A majority of our respondents agreed that their pre-college educators met six out of the nine goals of multicultural education, however, more than half of the respondents reported that their pre-college educators did not; 1) teach them about the injustices minority groups continue to face in our society every day, 2) provide them with the skills needed to help with the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups in our society, or 3) teach them about the world from the perspective of a minority group person. Only about half of our respondents felt that their pre-college educators did a sufficient job of creating awareness of different races and ethnicities. Contrary to their pre-college experiences, a majority of our respondents agreed that their college education has met all nine of the goals of multicultural education.

These results lead us to conclude that students feel their pre-college educators did an average job of including multicultural education within their curriculum. Public school educators taught respondents that all cultures are relevant and deserve respect, but they did not teach respondents enough about what life is like in our society for the people of those cultures. Public school educators taught about past injustices inflicted upon minority groups, but they did not teach that minority group people are still being oppressed on a daily basis in our society. They also did not teach respondents how these past (and present) injustices have created an un-level playing field or how the students themselves can be part of leveling it.

If we expect to send our children out into a multicultural society well prepared and able to interact well with others we need to provide them with the knowledge and skills needed to become fair, compassionate, and understanding human beings. In order to make multicultural education work for all students our public education system needs to create a multicultural education program that is inclusive, has a strong working definition, and is a requirement for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, learning ability, socio-economic class, or sexual orientation.

History teaches us to learn from our mistakes. Understanding what is still happening today, as a result of that history, is central to creating social justice. In order to make people aware that racism is an ongoing problem in our society it is necessary to teach about the racism and oppression of people that still occurs on a daily basis. It is important for our future population to empathize with the role of the “other”. To create this effect, educators need to teach about the world from the minority perspective. As we envision a more equal future, children need to learn the skills needed for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups.

Limitations

As researchers we attempted to conduct our research in an ethical manner. However, there were some limitations to our study. The major limitation to our study is that we are inexperienced sociologists. Also Humboldt State University is considered a liberal campus on which students tend to be more open to ideas about race and ethnicity. This could result in a more liberal survey that is not representative of most college campuses. Higher learning in general is considered to be indicative of being aware of

racial and ethnic issues in our society. Due to time constraints, we obtained a small sample for this survey of only 83 respondents.

Appendix A

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Appendix B

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for taking time out of your day to complete this questionnaire. This survey was developed for a senior project in the Department of Sociology. My partner and I are interested in studying your attitudes on multicultural education. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. Our study is focused on Humboldt State University students who attended and graduated from public school between the years of 2000 and 2003. If you are under 18 years old, or do not meet the prerequisites, please do not complete the questionnaire. To protect your anonymity, please do not write your name anywhere on the survey or tell any of the student researchers your name. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, you may contact my instructor, Dr. Mary Virnoche, at 826-4569

Thank you!

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Miriam Bartlett mb23@humboldt.edu

Please rate, to the best of your ability, the cumulative success of the pre-college schools you have attended in meeting each of these goals set out by multicultural education. (Please circle one response for each goal)

My public education prior to college:

14) Created positive images of minority groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

15) Taught students that the cultures of all groups are relevant in our society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

16) Taught students that all cultures deserve respect.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

17) Promoted student concern for the rights of all people(s).

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

18) Taught about the injustices that different minority groups experience in this society.

(ex. Slavery)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

19) Taught about the injustices that different minority groups continue to experience in this society. (ex. Police profiling)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

20) Prepared students to live in an increasingly multicultural society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

21) Provided students with the skills needed for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

22) Taught about the world from the minority perspective.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

23) We define racial diversity as representatives of a variety of races in one place, for example, public school. If you have attended more than one public school please combine your knowledge of the diversity at these schools and circle one rating. Please rate the racial diversity of the public school(s) you attended.

Not Diverse	Slightly Diverse	Diverse	Very Diverse
1	2	3	4

24) Has your pre-college education increased your knowledge of racial discrimination?
(Circle one) Yes/No

25) Has your pre-college education decreased your knowledge of racial discrimination?
(Circle one) Yes/No

26) Has your pre-college education increased your knowledge of racial stereotypes?
(Circle one) Yes/No

27) Has your pre-college education decreased your knowledge of racial stereotypes?
(Circle one) Yes/No

28) Can you recall a particular pre-college class or experience that influenced your attitudes and awareness surrounding race and ethnicity? Please Explain.

29) Overall, my pre-college educators did a sufficient job of creating awareness of different races and ethnicities. (Circle one)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

Please rate, to the best of your ability, the cumulative success of the college(s) you have attended in meeting each of these goals set out by multicultural education. (Please circle one response for each goal)

My college education:

30) Creates positive images of minority groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

31) Teaches students that the cultures of all groups are relevant in our society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

32) Teaches students that all cultures deserve respect.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

33) Promotes student concern for the rights of all people(s).

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

34) Teaches about the injustices that different minority groups experienced in this society. (Ex. Slavery)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

35) Teaches about the injustices that different minority groups continue to experience in this society.

(Ex. Police profiling)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

36) Prepares students to live in an increasingly multicultural society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

37) Provides students with the skills needed for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

38) Teaches about the world from the minority perspective.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

39) Did 9/11 affect your views of other races? Please explain.

The following statements pertain to your personal opinions regarding racial and ethnic minorities. (Please circle one for each statement)

40) Minorities are treated fairly in this society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

41) There is no difference between the way white people and minority people are treated in this society.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

42) Racial stereotypes are justified because they are based on real observations.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

43) The dominant culture in society represents all people(s).

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

44) Immigrants to the U.S. should adopt our customs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

45) All cultures deserve equal respect.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree
Strongly Agree

