

# APPLYING WLODKOWSKI'S MOTIVATIONAL MODEL IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

by Joanna G., Erik K., Serita B., & Greg W.

## OUTLINE

- Who are multicultural learners and how can teachers best help them?
- Wlodkowski's model: a tool for fostering motivation in the multicultural classroom
- Learning Event: the model applied in an adult multicultural classroom

## Part 1

“America has always been a tale of people trying to be a People, a tale of diversity and plurality in search of unity. Cleavages among (diverse groups) . . . have irked and divided Americans from the start, making unity a civic imperative as well as an elusive challenge,” (Barber, B., 1992 in Gay). This quote eloquently shows that diversity is nothing new. A quick examination of history shows that we have not always been accepting of others’ beliefs and differences, and conflict, oppression, and suppression arose as a result. Our country is now more multicultural than ever<sup>1</sup>, and there is a growing trend for teachers to learn and welcome this. Success will not come without hard work, and it is an attempt to help teachers with this daunting task that we embrace this challenge.

A misconception about multicultural education is that is an “entitlement program,” (Banks, J.A., in Bennett, 1998, p. 69). Not everyone agrees with multiculturalism, but for our purposes here, we will not embrace the pros and cons. We are accepting that it is the best solution to create a motivating atmosphere within the classroom.

### Terms

To begin, it is important to explain what is meant by the term “culture?” “Culture is the deeply learned confluence of language values, beliefs, and behaviors that pervade every aspect of life, and it is continually undergoing changes” (Ginsberg, M. and Wlodkowski, R., 2009, p. 9). It is culture that determines what we think is acceptable, and right, and true. These values and beliefs influence are actions.

Now, let us look at the term “multicultural learner.” The term “multicultural” means, “peaceful coexistence of cultures . . . Above all, it means recognizing diversity and respecting it ‘as it is,’ without claiming to modify it,” (Portera, in Grant et. al., 2010, p. 19). There are theorists and researchers in multicultural education who “agree that the movement is designed to restructure educational institutions so that all students, including middle-class white males, will acquire the knowledge, skill, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world,” (Banks, J.A.,



---

<sup>1</sup> See US census 2010 is attached as a reference to this document.

1994, in Bennett, 1998, pp. 69-70). All participants in a multicultural classroom need to do this: teachers and students.

### The Need for Multicultural Classrooms

By understanding and accepting the different cultures that represent the students in our classroom we can try to create an ambiance where learning is promoted in a welcoming and accepting atmosphere. "Many ethnically diverse students do not find schooling exciting or inviting; they often feel unwelcome, insignificant, and alienated. Too much of what is taught has no immediate value to these students. It does not reflect who they are" (Gay).

Part of the reasons students may feel unwelcome and insignificant is because there are certain mainstream values that permeate our society and naturally find their way into the curriculum and literature of the classroom. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski say, "For many educators, it is not a stretch to think of these (white, European American, heterosexual males) attitudes and norms as universally valued and preferred" (Ginsberg, et. al., 2009, p. 6). The danger of accepting these mainstream values is illustrated in the following quote: "A dominant group can so successfully project its way of seeing social reality that its view is accepted as common sense, as part of the natural order, even by those who are disempowered or marginalized by it," (Foucault, 1980; Freire and Macedo, 1987, in Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2009, p. 6). As educators, our aim is obviously not to disempower or marginalize students, but we may unintentionally do so through ignorance. In the next section, we will examine how educators can learn how to be more culturally sensitive.

### The Necessary Response of Teachers

If it is true that many multicultural students feel unwelcome, uncomfortable or disengaged in current classrooms, then teachers need to make changes. "A pedagogy respectful of multiculturalism and ethics begins not with test scores but with questions," (Ginsberg, et. al., 2009, p. 22). This quote states the importance of being an observer and a learner first. Judith Lingenfelter, Ph. D, was the associate professor of intercultural education at Biola University and she taught cross-culturally on the island of Yap. In her experience working with different cultures she says, "To be an effective teacher across cultures, you must rethink the role you play in the classroom and add new dimensions to your identity and practice" (Lingenfelter, J. E., and Lingenfelter, S. G., 2003, p. 82). She goes on to give two steps about how to rethink your role as a teacher. The first step is to become "aware of the culture of others," and the second step is "self-awareness," (Lingenfelter, J. E., and Lingenfelter, S. G., 2003, pp. 82-83).

Let us look closely into the first step: being aware of other cultures. Culturally responsive teaching is the goal for a multicultural classroom teacher, but if this is to happen teachers are responsible to be observers so they can watch how their students interact with the world around them. Teachers need to observe the needs, interests and orientations of their students as well as respect the backgrounds of the students represented in their classrooms (Ginsberg, et. al., 2009, p. 24). As the teacher makes observations, the differences between cultures will become apparent, and only then can the teacher begin to

bridge the cultural gap. "To accomplish this (bridging cultural differences), the teacher must resist using power and begin as a learner," (Lingenfelter, J. E., and Lingenfelter, S. G., 2003, p. 52). Beginning as a learner for a professionally trained teacher is humbling, but if true growth happens it will only occur through a desire to learn about each other.

With this foundation, the second step is self-awareness. Since teachers are human it is inevitable to come into a classroom and have presuppositions about the students in the room based on appearance. Stereotypes are hard to get away from, but they can damage a welcoming environment that we are seeking to create. "Stereotypes arise when we act as if all members of a culture or group share the same characteristics. Stereotypes can be attached to any assumed indicator of group membership, such as race religion, ethnicity, age, or gender, as well as national culture," (Bennett, M., 1998). Further, author Laray M. Barner calls stereotypes stumbling blocks because they "interfere with objective viewing of stimuli-the sensitive search for cues to guide the imagination toward the other person's reality" (Barna in Bennett, 1998, p. 181). We need to examine our prejudices, and biases prior to trying to make any changes with our students or the atmosphere we are seeking to create.

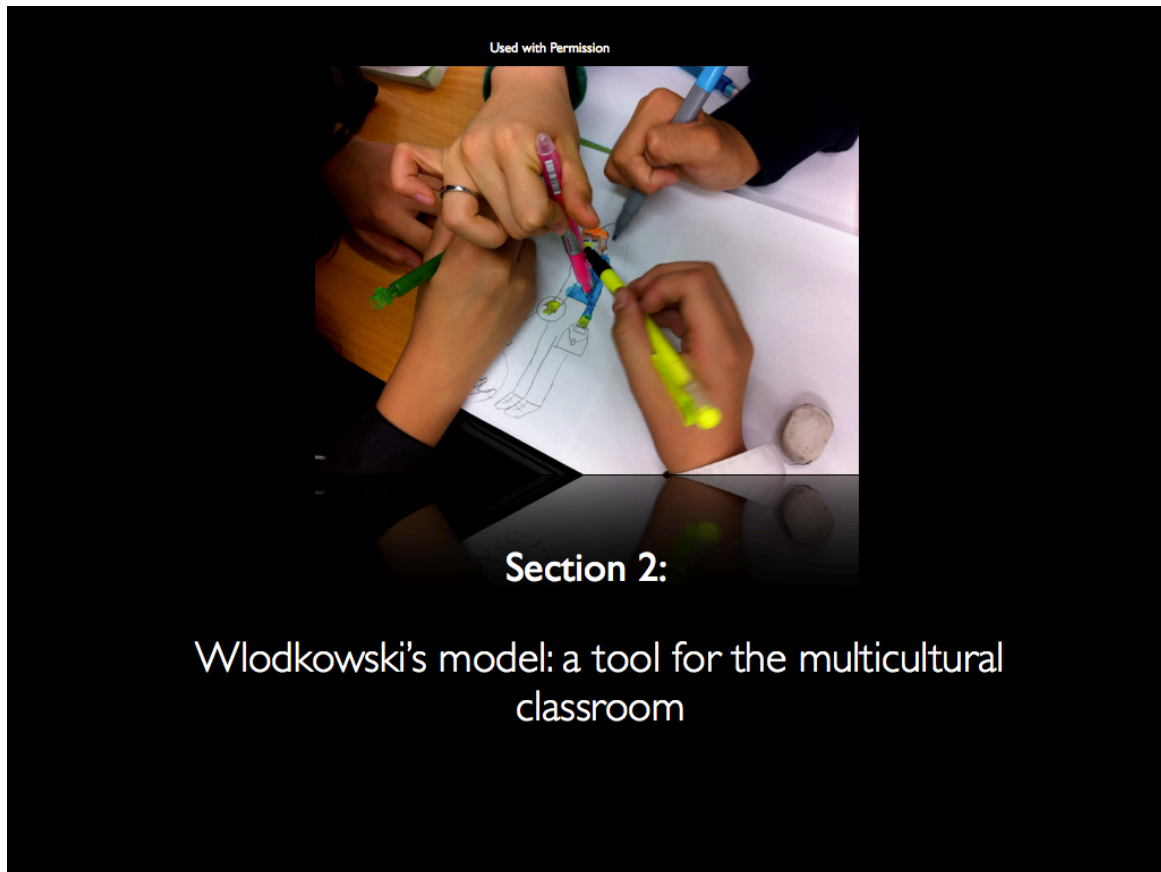
### Barriers to Multicultural Classrooms

We all have a lot to learn about each other in this diverse world, and sadly there will always be barriers to this process. Barna presents a chapter called, "Six Stumbling Blocks in Intercultural Communication," (Bennett, 1998, pp.173-188). In his conclusion he states that global understanding is necessary in order to make progress (p. 187). Previously in the chapter he explains the six stumbling blocks that can hinder global understanding. "Assumptions of similarity" was the first stumbling block he mentioned. These assumptions of similarity are the way people adapt to common needs, which are influenced by values, beliefs, and attitudes that surround each individual culture. He also says that it is easier to treat people within the confines of your own culture, commonly understood as ethnocentricity. "The native inhabitants are likely to be lulled into the expectation that since the foreign person is dressed appropriately and speaks some of the native language, he or she will also have similar nonverbal codes, thoughts, and feelings," (Barna in Bennett, 1998, pp.174-175). When we assume that the students are just like us, we will be completely shocked or perhaps even offended when the student acts outside of the expectations we have for him or her. We cannot let ourselves be fooled by appearances because we will place expectations on someone that he or she has no intention of fulfilling.

Communication is a major barrier in multicultural classrooms. Often, if we see someone wearing western clothes, using English to communicate we assume that actual communication is happening. However, just speaking English alone is not enough to ensure smooth communication. There are different styles of language, and they can lead to "wrong interpretations of intent and evaluations of insincerity, aggressiveness, deviousness, or arrogance, among others," (Barna in Bennett, 1998, p. 180). Being aware of these differences is a step in the right direction to creating a multicultural environment, but it will take time to learn how different groups of people communicate.

Along with communication barriers there are nonverbal communication barriers. "People from different cultures inhabit different sensory realities. They see, hear, feel, and smell only that which has some meaning or importance for them. They abstract whatever fits into their personal world of recognition and then interpret it through the frame of reference of their own culture," (Barna in Bennett, 1998, p. 180). When I lived in Cambodia I learned that it is considered truly offensive to show the bottom of one's foot. I could have created a great offense if I was careless with following the norms in Cambodia. In another Asian country, South Korea, people often smile or laugh when they are embarrassed; it is a way for them to save face. In America smiling when you do something wrong is probably one of the rudest things a person could do instead of asking for an apology. Without understanding, Koreans and Americans will often clash because of this nonverbal communication. However, being aware of this difference will help both cultures rationalize the "odd" behavior as we seek to understand each other.

In closing, it is the impression of this author that multicultural students have the same needs as other mainstream students. They have a need to feel welcome and accepted in their classroom. They need to know that their opinion matters even if it is different. If teachers can make the necessary changes required to promote an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued then perhaps some of these students who view learning as boring and uninviting will change their minds. One danger is to think that we are capable of addressing all of the needs within our classroom. This would be a feat no one could accomplish. Lingenfelter says, "Teachers cannot possibly teach to all the potential differences, but they can become more culturally sensitive to the diversity of their students" (Lingenfelter, J. E., et. al, 2003, p. 57). It also will not be easy because of the tensions and conflicts that arise due to these differences. "Teaching in a culturally responsive way may require considerable transformation. Being skilled, prepared, and willing to deal with some of the tensions and difficulties that accompany this pedagogy is an essential part of the experience," (Ginsberg, et. al., 2009, p. 331). By becoming more sensitive to the diversity of our students we hope to make a difference in the cultural divide that separates us, but the first step towards this change must begin with the teachers. As we will show later, teachers are not left empty-handed. There are significant tools and models to aid in this endeavor. Wlodkowski's motivational model is one such approach.



## Part 2

The best way to encourage a student's learning is to find out their motivation, the reason why they do what they do? (Ginsberg, Wlodkowski 2000). However, since it's hard to see or correctly measure or observe a person's motivation, educators are left with studying a students' behavior, effort, actions as well as other visible characteristics. This task is compounded given the fact that according to Ginsberg & Wlodkowski (2000) "When students have different patterns of socialization, histories, and worldviews, interpreting their will and purpose is even more difficult and misconceptions are common" (Chapter 1, para 1).

Furthermore, another problem educators face deals with extrinsic motivations (learning for external rewards) and intrinsic motivations (learning because a person wants to) (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski 2000). Extrinsic motivations, grades, grade point averages, etc., increase as a student goes through school, but these factors only motivate a few. Whereas, intrinsic motivation is the type of motivation that respects the influence of culture on learning, so what is culturally and socially significant to a person creates intrinsic motivation (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski 2000).

With all this in mind, it's evident that if a student's cultural norms, beliefs and values differ from the school values, then that student may feel excluded and may not be successful. In order for all students to have a chance for success in school, it's vital to create a culturally responsive pedagogy based on intrinsic motivation (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski 2000). One way to accomplish this is by using Ginsberg & Wlodkowski's (2000) motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching.

The motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching takes a macro cultural approach towards motivating people (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski 2000). This means that instead of exhaustively comparing and contrasting groups of people according to their culture, it uses criteria that is meaningful across cultures and is relevant to students of families that have historically not been successful in school systems (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski 2000). The purpose of this model is to create teaching practices and learning experiences that will lead to the success for all students. Furthermore, the major premise underlying this model is that humans are naturally curious, thoughtful, and want to make meaning from experience (Lambert and McCombs 1998, Ginsberg & Wlodkowski 2000).

This framework is made up of four conditions (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski 2000):

1. Establishing inclusion: making students feel connected and respected towards one another.
2. Developing a positive attitude: using principles and practices that contribute to a general liking towards learning.
3. Enhancing meaning: bringing about challenging and engaging learning activities that matter to students and have social worth.
4. Engendering competence: helping students identify that what they are learning has practical value.

Using this model, and incorporating the tips that follow, is the best way to ensure that educators are being respectful of all cultures as well as creating a common school culture that teachers and students can agree with. The next factor to consider is how to use these four conditions during class.

### Part 3

The students in this LE are 25 new members of a citizenship class who come from several different ethnic backgrounds including the Pacific Rim, Latin America, and the

Middle East. Educating students with this degree of diversity would usually be a major roadblock for an instructor of a citizenship class because these students not only have different cultural, language, and value norms but the instructor realizes they bring their own set of cultural norms that come from an upbringing in white, working class, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Middle-America. Wlodkowski's model is beneficial in that it not only sidesteps these

cultural differences, it also creates a pedagogical alignment of meaning the instructor then turns each person's unique situation into a learning advantage.

The instructor is aware that the class population believes that this class is nothing more than something that has to be endured in order to gain the benefits of being a U.S. citizen. The instructor, however, realizes that by increasing the understanding and retention of this material, the students will realize more of the benefits and responsibilities of being a U.S. citizen. The instructor has a goal for the first class session which is 'students will collaborate with one another to realize their own positive perspectives regarding the roles and responsibilities of being a citizen.'

Towards this goal the instructor randomly picks class members and assigns them to five groups of five members each. These members are to first discuss the events that brought them to this country and any concerns and expectations they may have about this course amongst themselves. Each group will choose one person to describe the group's background and concerns/expectations to the instructor who will record all of this information on one giant blackboard, which will invariably show common themes from all the groups. The purpose of this exercise is to establish rapport among the members of the classroom with the instructor as a facilitator. By establishing this rapport members begin to see themselves as members of a cohort who despite any differences, share common goals and concerns. In this way Wlodkowski's (2009) goal of establishing inclusion, which

## Learning Event

- Applying the Wlodkowski Motivational Model in a multicultural citizenship class



Used with Permission



is step one in his model, among group members is created. This goal specifies that inclusion is one of the factors that will increase motivation among group members.

Next, the instructor will have each subgroup of five discuss among themselves things that a citizen can do which they cannot do now, i.e. vote in elections, run for office, be eligible for student loans and grants, bring in family members from outside the country, etc. The classroom as a whole will select their favorite new right or privilege. By allowing the group members to function as adults by picking the subject they would like to learn more about, the instructor creates an environment where students have favorable feelings towards the material because the material has personal significance to them. Developing attitude towards learning is Step 2 in Wlodkowski's model.

Moving on, the groups will discuss how knowing more about this topic could be helpful for them or their family in the future. For instance, the subject of being able to vote is picked. The groups could then be asked to describe what issues are most relevant to the class and how their voting could have an impact on the outcome. Making the subject personally meaningful to the students is step 3 in Wlodkowski's model for students of any culture.

After this discussion the students will write on a 3x5 card and share three statements about how learning about citizenship will positively affect their future as a U.S. citizen. This is Step 4 in Wlodkowski's model- engendering competence. By self-assessing, the student is able to solidify the concepts and derive meanings that are relevant for them which lead to an increase in the intrinsic motivation to learn. The climate has been created to allow learning in a way that is appropriate and personally significant to a diverse group of learners.

# References

- Banks, J.A. (1998). Multicultural Education: Development, Dimensions, and Challenges. In Bennett, M. (Ed.), *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication*, Maine: Intercultural Press, p. 69.
- Barna, L.M. (1998). Six Stumbling Blocks in Intercultural Education. In Bennett, M. (Ed.), *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication*, Maine: Intercultural Press, pp. 173-188.
- Gay, G., (December 2003-January 2004). The Importance of Multicultural Education. *Educational Leadership*.  
[www.achievementseminars.com/seminar\\_series\\_2008\\_2009/readings/importance\\_multicultural\\_education.pdf](http://www.achievementseminars.com/seminar_series_2008_2009/readings/importance_multicultural_education.pdf)
- Ginsberg, M.B., & Wlodkowski, R. J., (2000). *Creating Highly Motivating Classrooms For All Students: A School Wide Approach*. (Kindle Reader Version) Retrieved from: Amazon.com
- Lambert, N.M., and McCombs, B. L. (1998). Introduction: Learner Centered Schools and Classrooms as a Direction for School Reform. In N.M. Lambert and B.L. McCombs (Eds.) *How Students Learn: Reforming Schools Through Learner-Centered Education*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association
- Ginsberg, M.G., and Wlodowski, R.J. (2009). *Diversity & Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), San Francisco: Joley-Bass.
- Portera, A. (2010). Intercultural and Multicultural Education: Epistemological and Semantic Aspects. In Grant C.A., and Portera, A. (Eds.) *Intercultural and Multicultural Education: Enhancing Global Interconnectedness*. New York: Routledge.
- Lingenfelter, J.E., and Lingenfelter, S.G. 2003). *Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching*, Michigan: Baker Academic.