

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Multicultural Education in Middle Grade Settings

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Multicultural education has a long history in the United States which was stemmed from the civil rights movements of 1960s. The discussion on race and ethnicity had originally focused on the African American population, and was spearheaded by African American scholars including James Banks, Geneva Gay, and Carl Grant in 1970s (Ramsey, 2008). However, the discussion on race and ethnicity in the beginning of multicultural education gradually broadened its topic by including class, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities. Currently, due to the large influx of immigrant students in the United States, the issue of language diversity increasingly became an important topic in multicultural education. Whichever topic multicultural education has dealt with, its main focus has always been to redress systemic inequities, ensuring individuals' educational equities based on social justice.

In this special-themed issue—*multicultural education in middle grade settings*—we aim to address these equity issues through four selective scholarly articles. All of these articles are

based on the studies that were conducted in classroom or school settings. Although multicultural education became a pressing topic in the educational field, it has not been widely discussed in middle grade settings. Therefore, as editors of this special issue, we are pleased to offer this opportunity to middle school educators and researchers to critically examine the issues of multicultural education. More specifically, the first article, “Storylines: Listening to Immigrant Students, Teachers, and Cultural-Bridge Persons Making Sense of Classroom Interactions” by Martha Strickland, follows the caring and nurturing efforts of teachers and cultural-bridge persons as they interact with newly arrived middle-level students. The implications of these storylines are important for middle-grade educators to further understand multicultural education in schools. The second article, “Critical Pedagogy With the Oppressed and the Oppressors: Middle School Students Discuss Racism and White Privilege” by Jill Flynn, examines the conversations between White students and students of color as they engaged in a unit of study on cultural

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conflict and resolution. Their comments and those of their White teachers provide insight into multicultural education approaches. In the third article by Ellis Hurd, the topic of mixed heritage is investigated through a case study of the in- and out-of-school experiences of one middle level student and his close-in-age siblings. Hurd considers the contradictory relationship between assimilation and achievement for these students in “A Framework for Understanding Multicultural Identities: An Investigation of a Middle Level Student’s French-Canadian Honduran-American (Mestizo) Identity.” Finally, Mikel Cole, Kelly Puzio, Christopher Keyes, Robert Jiménez, Lisa Pray, and Samuel David document and describe the results of an intervention study focused on English language learners and the plurality of language orientations that influence policy. In their research article titled, “Contesting Language Orientations: A Critical Multicultural Perspective on Local Language Policy in Two Middle Schools,” the authors discuss the implications for students and educators in school classrooms.

As editors, we anticipate the featured research articles play important roles for educators to reflect on current practice and research and act to “liberate” middle school students from the constraint of inequities through facilitation of educational equality and equity. According to Paolo Freire (1970), social actions are necessary for implementing critical multicultural education. As the current multicultural education which was influenced

by the work of Freire takes a more critical stance, we believe that these four articles reflect that stance. Rather than following the concept of “banking” education (Freire, 1970) which focuses on the teacher’s role as a knowledge transmitter by positioning the student as a knowledge receiver, the four articles suggest an important message that educators play a role to liberate students by respecting their multiple identities.

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