

Review

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Review

Multicultural Education in Teacher Preparation: A Review of Culturally Responsive, Critical, and Democratic Approaches

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Abstract

Multicultural education remains a foundational yet contested area of teacher preparation in increasingly diverse, unequal, and politically polarized educational contexts. This article offers a conceptual review of multicultural education in teacher preparation, focusing on culturally responsive, critical, and democratic approaches. Drawing on foundational and contemporary scholarship, including examples from research on culturally responsive pedagogy, critical curriculum analysis, intercultural competence, Indigenous education, and democratic teaching, the review synthesizes major conceptual traditions, pedagogical applications, and ongoing implementation challenges. The article argues that multicultural education is most effective when positioned as a foundational and integrative orientation across teacher preparation rather than as a stand-alone course or symbolic diversity requirement. It proposes a conceptual framework organized around three interrelated pedagogical orientations: culturally responsive, critical, and democratic, enacted through reflective practice, curriculum transformation, community and contextual engagement, and pedagogical translation. The review concludes by highlighting persistent tensions related to institutionalization, faculty preparedness, policy climates, and assessment, while identifying future directions for research and program development in diverse national, sociocultural, and decolonizing educational contexts. Overall, the article positions multicultural education as an ongoing project of pedagogical, curricular, and democratic renewal in teacher preparation.

Keywords: multicultural education; teacher preparation; teacher education; culturally responsive pedagogy; critical pedagogy; democratic education; intercultural competence; decolonizing education; indigenous education; social justice; curriculum transformation

Introduction

Multicultural education has remained one of the most influential and enduring frameworks for rethinking teacher preparation in culturally, linguistically, racially, and socially diverse societies. Initially advanced through scholarship on equity, representation, prejudice reduction, and curriculum reform, the field has expanded over several decades to include questions of power, identity, belonging, language, citizenship, decolonization, and the public purposes of schooling. In contemporary teacher preparation, multicultural education is increasingly discussed not only as a matter of inclusion, but also as a question of how teachers are prepared to respond to structural inequality, cultural complexity, contested knowledge, and democratic fragility.

Despite its long-standing presence in teacher education, multicultural education is still unevenly understood and implemented. In some programs, it is treated as a stand-alone course or a diversity requirement disconnected from methods, assessment, and clinical experiences. In others, it functions more substantively as a program-wide orientation that shapes how future teachers interpret curriculum, engage communities, design instruction, and understand their ethical responsibilities. This unevenness reflects both the breadth of the field and the ongoing tensions that accompany efforts

to institutionalize equity-oriented teacher preparation within systems historically shaped by dominant cultural norms and standardized expectations.

The present review examines multicultural education in teacher preparation through three interrelated traditions that have become especially significant in recent scholarship and practice: culturally responsive, critical, and democratic approaches. These traditions are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent overlapping but analytically distinct ways of conceptualizing what teacher candidates should know, value, and be able to do in diverse educational contexts. Culturally responsive approaches emphasize relational pedagogy, cultural competence, and the affirmation of learners' identities and community knowledge. Critical approaches foreground power, ideology, hidden curriculum, and the need to interrogate dominant and deficit-oriented assumptions embedded in schooling. Democratic approaches connect multicultural education to civic dialogue, pluralism, participation, and justice-oriented teaching in diverse societies.

This review synthesizes existing literature and established knowledge rather than presenting new empirical findings. It provides a concise but analytically grounded overview of the field, with attention to historical development, conceptual foundations, major pedagogical approaches, global and comparative relevance, and continuing challenges. It also incorporates illustrative examples from recent teacher education scholarship, including work on intercultural competence, culturally responsive teaching, Indigenous education, and democratic citizenship education, to show how the field continues to evolve in response to new social, political, and educational conditions.

The central argument advanced here is that multicultural education in teacher preparation is most meaningful when it is treated as a foundational and integrative orientation, rather than as an additive or symbolic component of teacher education. To support this argument, the review next introduces a conceptual framework that organizes the field through culturally responsive, critical, and democratic approaches and highlights the processes through which these orientations become pedagogically consequential.

2. Conceptual Framework for Multicultural Education in Teacher Preparation

This review is guided by a conceptual framework that positions multicultural education in teacher preparation as a foundational and integrative orientation rather than a discrete topic or additive diversity component. Within this framework, multicultural education is understood as a broad field concerned with equity, cultural and linguistic diversity, curriculum transformation, democratic inclusion, and the preparation of educators who can teach in historically and socially unequal contexts. Rather than treating multicultural education as a single method or course requirement, the framework conceptualizes it as an organizing lens that shapes how teacher candidates learn to interpret learners, curriculum, pedagogy, and professional responsibility.

The framework is organized around three interrelated pedagogical orientations: culturally responsive, critical, and democratic approaches (see Figure 1).

These orientations are analytically distinct but highly interconnected. Culturally responsive approaches emphasize relational pedagogy, cultural affirmation, community and family knowledge, and the use of learners' lived experiences as assets in teaching and learning. This dimension highlights the importance of culturally responsive caring, identity-affirming instruction, and pedagogical relevance. Critical approaches focus on the analysis of power, ideology, structural inequality, and the ways curriculum and schooling may reproduce exclusionary or deficit-oriented assumptions. This dimension includes critical curriculum analysis, attention to hidden bias, engagement with controversial issues, and decolonizing perspectives that challenge Eurocentric and colonial knowledge structures. Democratic approaches emphasize dialogue, participation, pluralism, ethical engagement, and the role of education in preparing learners to live and act in diverse societies. This dimension connects multicultural education to civic reasoning, global mindedness, and justice-oriented conceptions of citizenship.

Within the framework, these three pedagogical orientations are enacted through four mediating processes that explain how multicultural education becomes meaningful in teacher preparation. The

first is reflective practice, which includes the examination of beliefs, assumptions, positionality, instructional decisions, and responsiveness to feedback

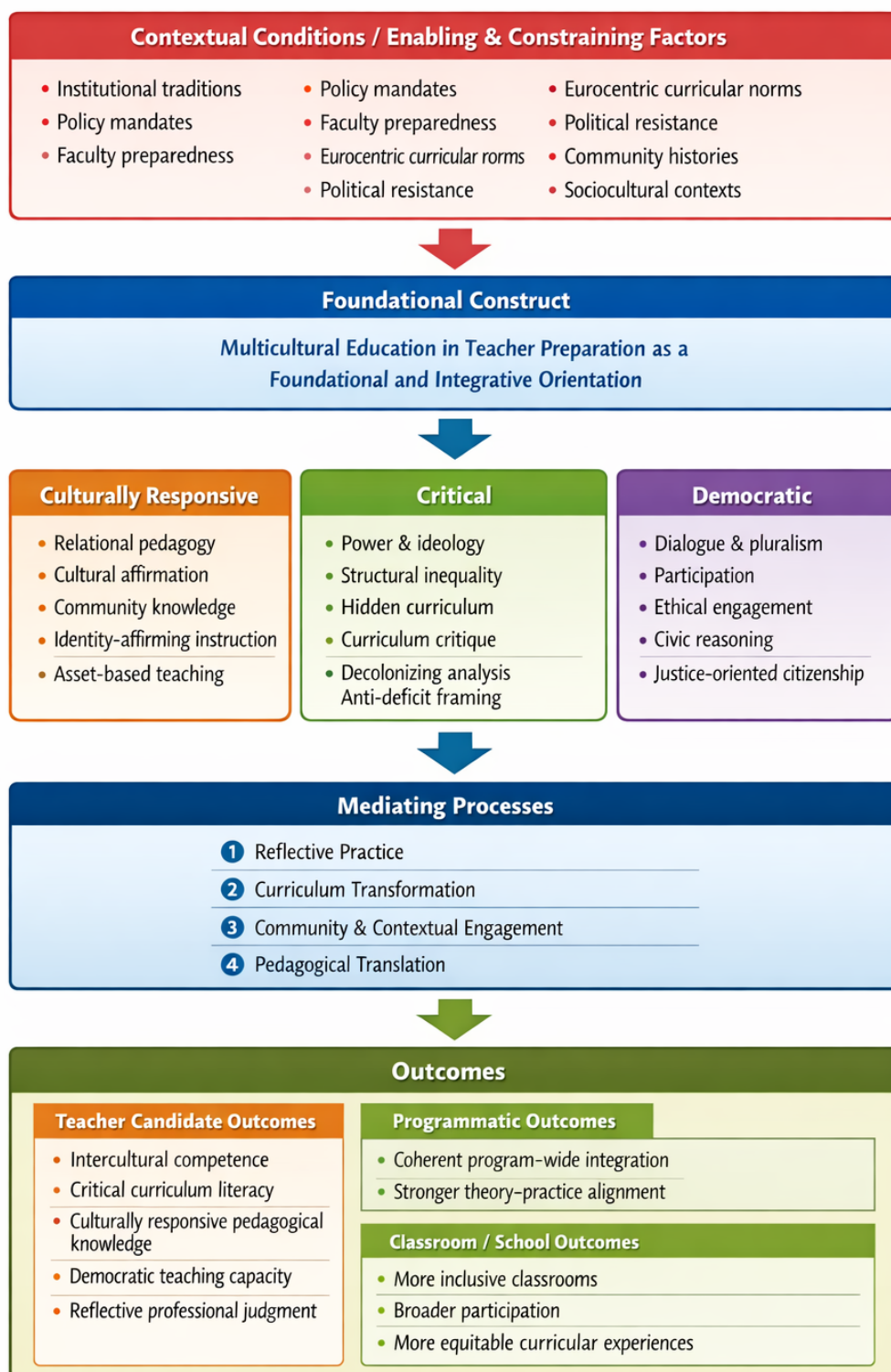


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Multicultural Education in Teacher Preparation.

The second is curriculum transformation, which refers to the analysis, critique, and redesign of texts, assignments, lessons, and broader curricular structures to better reflect multiple perspectives and equitable aims. The third is community and contextual engagement, which emphasizes the importance of local knowledge, Indigenous and community-based perspectives, intercultural

learning, and sensitivity to the historical and sociocultural contexts in which teaching occurs. The fourth is pedagogical translation, or the movement from conceptual understanding to classroom enactment through lesson design, discussion facilitation, communication, assessment, and instructional decision making.

The framework also recognizes that multicultural teacher preparation is shaped by broader contextual conditions that may enable or constrain implementation. These conditions include institutional traditions, policy mandates, faculty preparedness, Eurocentric curricular norms, political resistance to equity-oriented teaching, and local community histories. Such conditions are important because they influence whether multicultural education remains symbolic or becomes transformative. In this sense, the framework assumes that teacher preparation is not neutral or context-free; it is embedded within social, political, and historical structures that shape what forms of diversity, critique, and democratic engagement are considered legitimate.

Finally, the framework identifies several anticipated outcomes of multicultural education in teacher preparation. At the level of teacher candidates, these outcomes include stronger intercultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogical knowledge, critical curriculum literacy, democratic teaching capacity, and reflective professional judgment. At the programmatic level, the framework suggests stronger integration of equity-oriented perspectives across coursework, more coherent connections between theory and practice, and greater attention to community-responsive and decolonizing approaches. At the level of classroom and school practice, the framework is intended to support more inclusive learning environments, broader participation, and more equitable curricular experiences for diverse learners.

This conceptual framework is useful for the present review because it provides an integrative structure for organizing scholarship across multiple traditions that are often discussed separately. It also reflects a central argument of the literature reviewed here: multicultural education in teacher preparation is most effective when it is treated as a foundational orientation enacted through culturally responsive, critical, and democratic approaches, rather than as a marginal or supplemental component of teacher education (see Table 1).

Table 1. A Conceptual Framework for Multicultural Teacher Preparation: Core Components and Illustrative Applications.

Framework Component	Description	Illustrative Elements in Teacher Preparation
Foundation-al Construct	Multicultural education in teacher preparation is conceptualized as a foundational and integrative orientation that informs how teacher candidates understand diversity, curriculum, pedagogy, equity, and professional responsibility.	Equity-oriented coursework; diversity as a program-wide framework; integration across methods, field experiences, and reflective practice.
Culturally Responsive Orientation	Emphasizes relational pedagogy, cultural affirmation, culturally responsive caring, and the use of learners' lived experiences, linguistic resources, and community knowledge as assets for learning.	Identity-affirming teaching; culturally responsive lesson design; family/community knowledge; culturally meaningful communication and assessment.
Critical Orientation	Focuses on power, ideology, structural inequality, hidden bias, and the role of curriculum in reproducing or challenging exclusion-ary norms. Includes decolonizing and antideficit perspectives.	Critical analysis of textbooks and children's literature; teaching controversial issues; curriculum critique; anti-bias and decolonizing pedagogies.
Democratic Orientation	Highlights dialogue, participation, pluralism, ethical engagement, and	Discussion-based pedagogy; perspective taking; democratic classroom participation; global

	preparation for teaching in diverse and democratic societies.	mindedness; justice-oriented citizenship education.
Mediating Processes	Reflective practice, curriculum transformation, community and contextual engagement, and pedagogical translation.	Reflective journals; redesigned lessons; community-based learning; pedagogical applications in methods and field settings.
Contextual Conditions	Institutional, political, and historical factors that shape implementation.	Policy mandates; faculty preparedness; Eurocentric curricula norms; local histories; political resistance.
Outcomes	Teacher candidate, programmatic, and class-room-level outcomes.	Intercultural competence; critical curriculum literacy; culturally responsive pedagogy; democratic teaching capacity; more inclusive classrooms.

3. Historical and Conceptual Foundations of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education emerged as both an intellectual and political response to exclusionary curricular traditions, assimilationist schooling practices, and persistent inequities in educational opportunity. In the United States, the field developed in conversation with civil rights movements, ethnic studies, bilingual education, feminist scholarship, and broader struggles over representation and access. Over time, scholars such as Banks, Nieto, Sleeter, Gay, and Ladson-Billings and Tate helped establish multicultural education as a field concerned not only with curriculum inclusion, but also with institutional transformation, pedagogical reform, identity development, and democratic participation (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 2015; Sleeter, 2008;2018).

A recurring insight in the literature is that multicultural education should not be reduced to celebratory or superficial treatments of diversity. Additive approaches that merely incorporate holidays, heroes, or isolated cultural content have long been criticized for leaving dominant knowledge structures intact. Instead, mature formulations of multicultural education emphasize the need to examine how knowledge is constructed, whose histories and experiences are centered, how inequality is normalized, and how schools may both reproduce and challenge broader social hierarchies. This distinction remains essential in teacher preparation because teacher candidates often enter programs with limited opportunities to critically analyze curriculum, power, and representation.

The field has also become more conceptually expansive. In addition to classic multicultural education frameworks, contemporary scholarship increasingly engages culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy, anti-bias education, critical race theory, decolonial thought, global citizenship education, and Indigenous and community-based epistemologies. These shifts reflect a growing recognition that teacher preparation must address not only interpersonal diversity, but also structural inequity, historical erasure, and the contested politics of knowledge. Such developments have also expanded the international relevance of multicultural education, particularly in contexts marked by colonial legacies, migration, ethnic and linguistic pluralism, and debates over national identity and democratic belonging.

Within teacher education, this historical evolution has generated an enduring challenge: whether multicultural education is framed as a foundational commitment or as a marginal supplement. Programs that isolate multicultural education into a single course may expose candidates to important concepts, but they often fail to support the pedagogical transfer necessary for sustained practice. By contrast, programs that embed multicultural perspectives across coursework, clinical experiences, curriculum analysis, and professional reflection are more likely to

help teacher candidates connect theory with instructional decision making and community engagement.

4. Culturally Responsive Approaches in Teacher Preparation

Culturally responsive approaches have become one of the most widely adopted and influential strands within multicultural teacher preparation. Broadly defined, culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the use of students' cultural identities, linguistic resources, prior experiences, and community knowledge as assets for learning rather than as barriers to overcome. It also foregrounds the relational dimensions of teaching, including trust, belonging, respect, and culturally responsive caring.

In teacher preparation, culturally responsive approaches are often operationalized through coursework on diversity and inclusion, lesson design that connects academic content to learners' lived realities, analysis of classroom interactions, family and community engagement, and reflection on teachers' own assumptions and positionalities. However, the literature consistently shows that the effectiveness of such preparation depends on depth and coherence. Surface-level invocations of "knowing students" or "celebrating diversity" are insufficient if they are not linked to deeper questions about curriculum, power, language, and the structural conditions shaping educational opportunity.

Research on teacher candidates and in-service teachers has demonstrated that intentional multicultural coursework can support shifts in pedagogical awareness and professional identity. For example, studies have shown that teacher candidates exposed to culturally responsive and anti-bias learning experiences often report greater awareness of hidden bias in curriculum materials, stronger commitments to inclusive teaching, and increased willingness to adapt instruction for diverse learners (Nganga, 2015, 2020). Similarly, scholarship on caring schools and the voices of learners of color has highlighted that students often interpret meaningful teaching not only through instructional techniques, but also through relationships, recognition, and a sense that educators understand their experiences and communities (Nganga, et al., 2025).

Recent work has also extended culturally responsive teacher preparation beyond classroom methods to professional development and collaborative learning. Community-based professional development models, particularly in Native-serving contexts, have illustrated the importance of engaging local knowledge, community partners, and culturally grounded understandings of well-being and success (Nganga, 2024). Such work suggests that culturally responsive teacher preparation is strengthened when it moves beyond generic diversity discourse and becomes accountable to local communities, histories, and forms of knowledge that may be marginalized in dominant schooling structures.

At the same time, culturally responsive approaches remain vulnerable to dilution. Without sustained faculty commitment, clinical modeling, and opportunities for enactment, teacher candidates may learn the language of responsiveness without developing the pedagogical judgment needed to apply it. For this reason, literature increasingly emphasizes coherence across methods courses, field experiences, and reflective assignments, as well as the need to integrate culturally responsive approaches with critical and democratic aims.

5. Critical Approaches and Curriculum Transformation

Critical approaches to multicultural education build on the insight that diversity alone is not an adequate frame for teacher preparation. Rather than focusing solely on representation or interpersonal understanding, critical traditions direct attention to power, ideology, structural inequality, and the ways educational systems normalize dominant perspectives while marginalizing others. In teacher preparation, this orientation is especially important because future teachers often inherit curricular materials and institutional routines that appear neutral but are historically and politically shaped.

Freire's (2020) critical pedagogy has long influenced multicultural education by encouraging educators to examine how schools reproduce social hierarchies and how teaching can create opportunities for questioning, dialogue, and transformation. In practice, this means helping teacher candidates learn to analyze the hidden curriculum, interrogate whose voices are present or absent in texts, identify deficit narratives, and consider how race, class, gender, language, nation, and colonial histories shape classroom life. It also means preparing them to teach controversial issues and to navigate the discomfort that often accompanies critical inquiry.

One of the most concrete ways this work appears in teacher preparation is through curriculum transformation. Teacher candidates may be asked to analyze textbooks, children's literature, media, and other instructional materials for omissions, stereotypes, and implicit hierarchies. Research has shown that such experiences can help candidates develop more nuanced understandings of how curriculum communicates social meanings and can open possibilities for more intentional and equitable lesson design (Nganga, 2020). Critical multicultural education thus involves not only recognizing bias, but also developing pedagogical alternatives.

Critical approaches also intersect productively with scholarship on controversial issues, democratic discourse, and social studies education. Studies of preservice teachers' preparedness to teach controversial topics have found that candidates often recognize the importance of such issues but feel underprepared to facilitate them, particularly when the topics are politically charged or locally sensitive (Nganga, 2020). This finding underscores the importance of preparing teachers not only to value inclusion, but also to navigate conflict, competing narratives, and the ethical demands of public education in polarized environments.

More recently, critical approaches in teacher preparation have increasingly incorporated decolonizing perspectives. These perspectives challenge the assumption that dominant curricular traditions are universal or neutral and call attention to the colonial legacies embedded in educational policies, standards, and knowledge hierarchies. Such work is especially significant in Indigenous, postcolonial, and transnational contexts, where curriculum may systematically marginalize community histories, languages, and epistemologies. The incorporation of decolonizing perspectives has broadened the field of multicultural education by insisting that inclusion is insufficient without epistemic and structural transformation.

6. Democratic Education, Citizenship, and Pluralism

Democratic approaches to multicultural education emphasize the civic and public purposes of teacher preparation. While multicultural education has often been associated primarily with diversity and equity, a substantial body of scholarship also situates it within broader concerns about democracy, pluralism, dialogue, and the preparation of students for participation in diverse societies. In this sense, multicultural education is not only about recognizing difference; it is also about cultivating the capacities required to live with difference ethically and critically.

Within teacher preparation, democratic approaches often involve preparing candidates to facilitate discussion across perspectives, engage controversial public issues, foster deliberative classroom cultures, and support students' development as thoughtful and socially responsible participants in civic life. These aims are particularly salient in social studies, language arts, and interdisciplinary teacher education contexts, but they also have broader relevance wherever classrooms serve as public spaces of encounter, disagreement, and meaning making.

Scholarship on global mindedness, social justice, and democratic teaching has shown that teacher candidates can benefit from explicit opportunities to examine citizenship, power, and public responsibility in relation to diversity. For example, research on teaching for global mindedness and social justice has suggested that preservice teachers often develop stronger commitments to collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and ethical awareness when these capacities are framed as part of democratic and multicultural education rather than as generic skills (Nganga, 2019). Similarly, work on democratic and multicultural social studies has emphasized that teaching for citizenship in diverse societies requires more than patriotic inclusion; it requires space for critique,

empathy, historical analysis, and the consideration of multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives.

The democratic dimension of multicultural education has become even more urgent in contexts marked by misinformation, political polarization, curricular censorship, and declining trust in institutions. Under such conditions, teacher preparation must help future educators navigate tensions between neutrality and responsibility, inclusion and conflict, and institutional mandates and democratic commitments. This makes democratic approaches especially relevant to contemporary multicultural teacher preparation because they foreground the question of what it means to teach for belonging, critique, and participation simultaneously.

7. Intercultural Competence and Global Perspectives

As teacher education increasingly responds to globalization, migration, transnational mobility, and diverse classroom populations, multicultural education has also expanded through scholarship on intercultural competence and global perspectives. These strands do not replace multicultural education; rather, they broaden its scope by emphasizing cross-cultural understanding, reflexivity, comparative awareness, and the ability to teach in contexts shaped by both local and global interdependence.

Research on intercultural competence in teacher preparation has shown that structured cross-cultural experiences, reflective coursework, and intentional comparative inquiry can deepen candidates' understanding of cultural context and challenge assumptions formed in monocultural or dominant-group environments. Earlier work on planned international experiences, for example, demonstrated that carefully designed study abroad and international immersion opportunities can support educators' growth in cultural awareness, appreciation, and professional reflection when these experiences are accompanied by guided analysis rather than treated as travel (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Later studies similarly found that preservice teachers participating in international experiences in Kenya and Nepal developed more complex understandings of contextually appropriate practice, intercultural competence, and the limits of exporting dominant educational assumptions across contexts (Madrid Akpovo et al., 2018. Cherng, & Davis, 2019).

These findings are especially relevant for a global reading of multicultural education because they show that teacher preparation benefits when candidates are asked to move beyond domestic diversity frameworks and consider how culture, policy, curriculum, and pedagogy are shaped by local histories and global inequities. Comparative and international perspectives can help destabilize deficit thinking, highlight the contingency of dominant educational norms, and strengthen candidates' ability to interpret practice contextually rather than universally.

At the same time, global approaches require caution. Without critical framing, internationalization efforts may reproduce saviorism, extractive comparison, or superficial cosmopolitanism. For this reason, the strongest scholarship in this area emphasizes humility, reciprocity, community accountability, and the recognition that intercultural competence involves not only exposure to difference, but also reflexive engagement with one's own positionality and assumptions.

8. Decolonizing and Indigenous Perspectives in Multicultural Teacher Preparation

One of the most significant developments in contemporary multicultural teacher preparation is the increased attention to decolonizing and Indigenous perspectives. While multicultural education has long challenged exclusionary curricula, decolonizing approaches deepen this challenge by questioning the epistemic authority of Eurocentric knowledge systems, examining the colonial roots of schooling, and centering Indigenous and community-based understandings of teaching, learning, and well-being.

In teacher preparation, this shift is especially important because many candidates are still prepared within curricular and policy environments that treat dominant Western knowledge as universal while positioning Indigenous and other marginalized knowledges as supplementary, local, or optional. Decolonizing approaches insist that such arrangements are not merely incomplete but structurally unjust. They therefore call for a more fundamental rethinking of curriculum, pedagogy, teacher identity, and the relationships between schools and communities.

Recent scholarship has illustrated how this work can be enacted in both teacher education and professional development. Research on Indigenous teachers' understandings of meaningful educational practices has shown that Native-serving educational contexts often require approaches to success, care, and social-emotional development that differ substantially from standardized or Eurocentric models (Nganga et al., 2025). Similarly, community-based collaborative professional development for teacher educators working with Native communities has highlighted the importance of relational accountability, local knowledge, and culturally grounded understandings of educational purpose (Nganga & Kambutu, 2024). Such findings suggest that multicultural education in teacher preparation is strengthened when it is not only inclusive of Indigenous content, but also transformed by Indigenous ways of knowing and community-defined educational priorities.

Decolonizing perspectives also resonate beyond U.S. Indigenous contexts. Comparative work in Kenya, Nepal, Israel and Argentina, and other settings has shown that educational policies often privilege imported or dominant curricular models at the expense of contextually appropriate and culturally grounded practice (Adamson, 2012; Trumper, Raviolo, & Shnersch, 2000). This broadens the relevance of decolonizing multicultural education for international audiences by underscoring that curriculum and teacher preparation are often shaped by global hierarchies of knowledge, language, and legitimacy. For teacher preparation, the implication is clear: multicultural education must move beyond representation toward epistemic pluralism, community accountability, and critical engagement with the historical conditions under which curriculum is produced and authorized.

9. Persistent Challenges and Contemporary Tensions

Despite its long history and conceptual richness, multicultural education in teacher preparation continues to face significant implementation challenges. One of the most common problems is fragmentation. Many programs still locate multicultural education in a single course, leaving methods, assessment, clinical practice, and program evaluation largely untouched by equity-oriented commitments. This weakens pedagogical transfer and often leads candidates to perceive multicultural education as peripheral rather than central.

A second challenge is faculty preparedness and coherence. Effective multicultural teacher preparation requires more than individual enthusiasm; it depends on faculty capacity to model culturally responsive, critical, and democratic teaching across courses and field experiences. When faculty members vary widely in their commitments or conceptual understandings, candidates may receive inconsistent messages about the role of multicultural education in professional practice.

A third challenge concerns the political climate. In many national contexts, equity-oriented teaching is increasingly entangled in broader cultural and political struggles over curriculum, national identity, history, and public authority. Terms such as diversity, equity, critical race theory, decolonization, and anti-bias education may be contested or restricted. Under such conditions, teacher preparation programs may face pressure to dilute or depoliticize multicultural education, even as social conditions make such preparation more necessary.

A fourth challenge involves assessment and evidence of impact. Programs often struggle to determine how multicultural teacher preparation should be assessed. Disposition surveys, reflective assignments, lesson plans, and candidate self-reports may offer useful information, but they do not always capture the complexity of pedagogical judgment or the durability of learning over time. This challenge has led scholars to call for more robust and longitudinal approaches that examine how

candidates enact multicultural commitments in clinical placements, early career teaching, and community engagement.

Finally, there is an ongoing tension between institutionalization and transformation. As multicultural education becomes embedded in standards, accreditation language, or diversity statements, it may gain legitimacy but lose critical edge. The challenge for teacher preparation is to institutionalize multicultural education without reducing it to compliance, terminology, or symbolic inclusion.

10. Discussion

The literature reviewed here suggests that multicultural education in teacher preparation remains both indispensable and unfinished. Its endurance as a field reflects the continuing need for teacher education that takes diversity, equity, and justice seriously. Its unfinished nature reflects the fact that the educational problems it addresses structural inequality, cultural marginalization, democratic exclusion, epistemic hierarchy, and contested curriculum are themselves persistent and evolving.

One of the clearest conclusions from the literature is that multicultural education is most effective when it is integrated across teacher preparation, not confined to isolated coursework. Teacher candidates need repeated opportunities to encounter, analyze, practice, and reflect on culturally responsive, critical, and democratic teaching across methods courses, field experiences, assessments, and professional reflection. This is especially important because multicultural education is not only about acquiring concepts; it is about developing pedagogical judgment in contexts shaped by complexity, conflict, and uneven power.

A second conclusion is that the field benefits from conceptual integration. Culturally responsive, critical, and democratic approaches are often discussed separately, yet the strongest teacher preparation efforts tend to draw on all three. Culturally responsive approaches without critical analysis risk becoming celebratory or technicist. Critical approaches without relational and pedagogical grounding may remain abstract or inaccessible. Democratic approaches without attention to structural inequality may reproduce superficial pluralism. Together, however, these traditions offer a more robust foundation for teacher preparation in diverse societies.

A third conclusion concerns the importance of context. Multicultural education cannot be meaningfully theorized or enacted as a one-size-fits-all model. Indigenous communities, rural schools, postcolonial settings, immigrant-serving classrooms, linguistically diverse programs, and politically polarized environments all shape what culturally responsive, critical, and democratic teaching requires. This makes comparative and global perspectives especially valuable, provided they are approached with humility and reciprocity rather than universalism.

11. Conclusions and Future Directions

Multicultural education in teacher preparation remains a central framework for preparing educators to teach in diverse, unequal, and democratically contested contexts. As this review has shown, the field has developed from early concerns about inclusion and representation into a broader and more sophisticated body of scholarship concerned with culturally responsive pedagogy, critical curriculum transformation, democratic participation, intercultural competence, and decolonizing educational practice.

The review has argued that multicultural education should be understood not as an isolated course topic, but as a foundational and integrative orientation across teacher preparation. The proposed conceptual framework helps clarify this claim by showing how multicultural education can be organized through three interrelated pedagogical orientations culturally responsive, critical, and democratic and enacted through reflective practice, curriculum transformation, community and contextual engagement, and pedagogical translation.

Several future directions are especially important. First, teacher education programs need stronger models for program-wide integration, including clearer links among coursework, field experiences, and evidence of pedagogical enactment. Second, the field would benefit from more research on faculty development, since the institutionalization of multicultural education depends in part on the preparedness and coherence of teacher educators themselves. Third, there is a need for more longitudinal and practice-based studies that examine how teacher candidates carry multicultural commitments into early career teaching. Fourth, scholarship should continue to expand through global, comparative, and decolonizing perspectives that challenge universalist assumptions and attend to community-defined meanings of educational success. Finally, the field must continue to engage the democratic stakes of teacher preparation in an era marked by polarization, misinformation, and renewed struggles over curriculum and public life.

In this sense, multicultural education remains not only a field of educational inquiry, but also a continuing project of curricular, pedagogical, and democratic renewal. Table 1 summarizes the major components of the proposed conceptual framework and illustrates how these dimensions can be translated into teacher preparation contexts.

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