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Educ 210
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9/16/10

2010 Texas State Board Decision

In May of this year, 2010, the Texas State Board of Education approved controversial alterations to the social studies standards of Texas that will affect students from kindergarten to twelfth grade for the next ten years. The alterations that were implemented are now eligible for public comment for a period of time. In May 2011 the board will meet again to vote on the final recommendations and changes to Texas' social studies standards. This standards decision will influence curriculum taught nationwide because Texas is the market leader for textbooks nationwide. The Texas State Board, according to *Education Week*, is made of up mainly staunch conservatives who want to promote a conservative political ideology in curriculum. This reflects on the most significant changes that are brought to question, such as the philosophical foundation for the separation of church and state and the debate on which significant historical figures should be included in textbooks. The 2010 Texas State Board of Education should not alter the content of high school social studies textbooks because the changes made would inhibit the goal of achieving multicultural education. The changes in the social studies textbook should not be pursued because the board expressed limited political views, teachers and students were not included in the voting process, curriculum changes did not present all sides of history, and votes did not take demographics into account; all these factors inhibit the achievement of a multicultural education.

(transition?) The board should accurately represent various political views and religious backgrounds. Since, the Texas State Board were mainly conservative the changes reflect that, which is not fair for the moderates and democrats. Also the teachers

and students should be involved in the voting process and any other curriculum decisions. This not only gives the ones who teach off of the standards to have a say but also the people that learn from the standards to state their opinion in how this specific knowledge should be obtained. Given the board and their narrow view the changes in curriculum did not accurately express all sides of history. To reach our goal of multicultural education it is necessary for the students to learn all different sides of history and have them use critical thinking to decide for themselves, which view they can most relate to. Lastly, curriculum decisions should take into account various demographics of the areas affected. It is necessary to learn about the history surrounding you, especially in elementary school where thinking outside of the surrounding area is found difficult.

There are multiple cases in our history that can relate directly to this specific textbook controversial case. However, the Scopes Trial of 1925 and the Texas textbook controversy of 1982 relate closely to the May 2010 Texas State Board decision. The Scopes trial, whose full case name was *The State of Tennessee vs. Scopes*, was a case in which John Scopes, a high school biology teacher, was accused of violating Tennessee's Butler Act which made it illegal to teach evolution. In the chapter of evolution Darwin's findings and ideology was cleanly laid out for Scopes to teach. Him teaching this specific theory led him into court to discuss the never-ending debate of evolution vs. creationism. While Scopes was charged guilty, it was over turned by a technicality. The separation between church and state has been debated for centuries and it always includes education and what should be taught. According to multicultural education both sides should be discussed so that the students can come to their own conclusions. Later, in 1982 is when the Texas textbook controversy occurred. The background to this case was that the

Gablers who were fixtures of the Texas textbook selection “conducted an ideological screening and sought to remove any material that offended their religious beliefs and their right wing political views”(Adler, 1988). The key word in this excerpt is *their*, no they were not thinking about the students or the millions of people that do not hold the same views as them rather they wanted everyone to share their conservative views on history and science. Again they wanted to solely have creationism and not evolution, they wanted sociology textbooks to teach “moral absolutes,” and they did not agree with home economics books teaching about “situational ethics”(Adler, 1988). The organization People For the American Way (PFAW) tried to stop these textbooks from brainwashing students to solely think of history through the conservative lens. PFAW did win in this case by substantially restricting the Gablers’ ability to make changes to textbooks.

We see with this decision made by the Texas State Board last May that history repeats itself. Once again a very strong conservative group is trying to force their opinions on how history should be rather than the actual way history happened. Everyone has their opinions on history and what is important and what is not; however, on a committee that is making decisions that will effect the rest of the nation their should be someone to represent each side. Just like in curriculum decision-making teachers must work with other teachers to discuss and negotiate certain aspects of curriculum so that the teachers see views on all sides of the argument (Armstrong). There is always another side to history that someone will fight so why not introduce multiple views on subject areas and let the students think abstractly and form their own opinions and views.

Who are these curriculum decisions effecting most? The answer to that would be the students and teachers; however, both students and teachers had no say in the changes

that were made to *their* textbooks. A highlighted point of multicultural education is to get outside the classroom and look at different cultures and areas that students might not usually be exposed to. This discussion of what changes should be made in their curriculum could have been an outside classroom experience where students could do research about curriculum and figure out how they have been taught in comparison to other schools around their areas. The curriculum that is being taught is for the students and if the students find a problem with what is being taught our graduation rates will just become lower and lower. Our push as educators is to get as many students into the path of higher learning as possible and if they are only hearing a one-sided view that they do not agree with they might as well just push education under the rug.

In the dimensions of multicultural education Banks and Banks discuss the knowledge construction process, which is how “teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it.” This excerpt from Banks and Banks on Multicultural Education relates to the decision by saying that the board should not create this one-sided view on history but rather present both sides and let the students form their own opinions. Banks and Banks actually give the example of how racism has been perpetuated in science by the different theories of intelligence, Darwinism, and eugenics, and instead of only teaching one of them teachers can teach all three and discuss how scientific racism has developed through these theories. John Dewey believed that students are critical thinkers and when they step foot in the classroom they have something to offer. So, if we present students with

facts with yes or no questions there is no room for the students to develop the skill of critical thinking.

Our country is made up of many different micro and macro cultures that should be discussed in relation to the demographics of the students. By limiting the standards to what Texas wants to have in their textbooks it limits what the teachers are able to teach. Multicultural education emphasizes the microcultures the students come from, which include racial, ethnic, religious, and gender related. All the microcultures make the student who they are and how they are different from the student sitting a desk away. “A major goal of multicultural education is to help students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function within their own microcultures, the U.S. macro culture, other microcultures, and the global community”(Banks, 2010), this is limited by the changes that the Texas board has made because it does not give the students the freedom to think outside of what is presented in front of them.

In multicultural education, schools are looking to give the students more say in their education and a bigger chance to participate. With the new standards presented by the Texas Board of Education it will slow us down from reaching our goal of equity and excellence in the classroom. By not presenting all sides of history we take the equality out of education and by not letting the students critically think we are taking the high standards out of the word excellence. It is necessary for students to bring their own opinions from their microcultures and the teachers to present a wide range of perspectives on a given subject to the classroom. Just like curriculum, multicultural education is a continuing process that can succeed if done with care and thought.