For the 66th Annual Meeting in November 2022, FERA invited Dilys Schoorman to offer a keynote address grounded in her scholarly and practitioner expertise in critical multicultural education, global education, and immigrant education informed by her 25+ years of professional practice and research in Florida. Her address was well received and facilitated multiple strands of inquiry among participants as they considered the pedagogical, research, and leadership implications of her message to FERA members. The following article is a synopsis of her comments, modified to address the ongoing and shifting professional challenges of educators in Florida (as of final submission in March 2023). As the FERA President, I am pleased that FERA conference attendees had the opportunity to listen to her, and as the Executive Editor I am thrilled that our FJER readers will have access to the central ideas of her keynote address.

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Embracing our Moral Responsibility as Educators and Researchers

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Abstract

This reflection on a multicultural educator's 25 years of experience as a teacher and a researcher in Florida explores a re-visioning of education that exhorts FERA to embrace (a) our state's diversity as an asset for excellence, (b) multiple levels and dimensions of pedagogical practice, (c) research as a catalyst for equity, and (d) our collective responsibility for community building.

Keywords: multicultural education, equitable research, diversity, Florida, levels and dimensions of multicultural education, professional association, moral responsibility

Dilys Schoorman, Ph.D., is a Professor in the College of Education at Florida Atlantic University. As a teacher educator specializing in multicultural education, her scholarship is informed by her collaborations with historically marginalized populations and their teachers in the struggles for equitable education. She is grateful to such communities of practice that foster her continued education as a university professor. In a world where inequities are growing rather than shrinking, she challenges herself and her students to move beyond teaching and learning as compliance, toward experiencing education as joyful, rigorous, and transformative.

Introduction

What should it mean to be the Florida Educational Research Association (FERA) in 2022–23? Reflecting on my experiences as a multicultural educator and researcher in Florida for the past 25 years, I offer insights around four conceptual questions, with the hope that as educators we can collectively consider our next steps as we build toward the next 25 years with those who will form the next generation of Florida's educators and researchers.

- Who is **Florida**?
- What does it mean to engage in **Education** that is multicultural?
- How do we conduct equitable **Research** among our diverse communities?
- How might this **Association** facilitate community building for public education?

Who is Florida?

Florida is home to five of the ten largest school districts in the nation and in 2019 ranked third among states as a host of immigrants in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). As of 2021–22 Florida's population was 51% White, 26.8% Latino/a/x, 14.6% Black, and 2.8% Asian while its K–12 student population was 36.5% White, 35.5% Latino, 21% Black, 4% Biracial, and 2.8% Asian (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). Florida's rich cultural diversity has been an ideal place to authentically ground one's professional work. Extending the relevance of our professional practice to diverse populations enhances the credibility and robustness of our teaching and research and offers the state the opportunity to be a national leader in multiculturalism.

However, as the lexical triplets of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) enter our institutional discourse, it is important to remember that diversity is just a starting point. Our nation and our state have always been diverse; unfortunately, we have not always been inclusive or equitable. Too frequently, while "celebrating" diversity in institutional rhetoric, we have failed to include hitherto underrepresented voices in institutional decision making, resulting in decisions involving the wellbeing of culturally diverse people being made by and for the benefit of those who are culturally homogenous. Rather than embracing diversity and striving to be equals across our differences, the history of U.S. education reveals how difference often has been used as the basis of marginalization and stratification, proving that the presence of diversity does not guarantee inclusion or equity. Florida's history reveals similar patterns. For instance, the Johns Committee, formed in 1956 to resist racial integration, drew on the energies of McCarthyism to simultaneously target the LGBTQ+ community, liberal professors, students advocating for peace, and civil rights groups in Florida (Braukman, 2012). These tactics are mirrored in contemporary policies toward diversity in alarming ways, serving as a backlash against the modest gains toward inclusivity and educational equity. Urgently required are inclusion efforts that are conscious of and counteract these cruel historical legacies. Equity is an aspirational outcome achieved when barriers to access and opportunity for the historically marginalized have been dismantled.

A Vision for Multicultural Education in Florida

The formal field of multicultural education emerged in the aftermath of school desegregation when educators recognized that integration needed to extend beyond student demographics to include the curriculum, instructional practices, school climate, and access to knowledgeable educators to ensure that all students experienced educational success. This aspiration remains true today. While initial concerns about matters of race, ethnicity, class, and language persist, the field has grown to include a wider range of systemic biases including sexism, homophobia, religious discrimination (such as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia), and ableism. Two foundational contributions—the levels and dimensions of multicultural education proposed by Banks (2004)—offer a useful conceptual roadmap to consider what it means to engage in multicultural education today and in the years ahead.

Levels of Multicultural Education

Banks's typology of content integration (see Table 1) urges us to move beyond teaching about diversity through the contributions approach, celebrating heroes and holidays in isolated social events at schools. While helpful for community building, such celebratory events in isolation from the formal curriculum offer superficial and tokenistic cultural knowledge. Banks's second level, the additive approach, is perhaps what was most frequently evident in school practice prior to the pandemic, with efforts largely organized around the state mandates during Black History Month and other designated periods of the year. This approach exemplifies efforts to "add" multicultural units to an otherwise unchanged Eurocentric curriculum. Multicultural scholars advocate the third and fourth levels. Notably, the transformational approach calls for the integration of multiple perspectives, a clear antidote to the contemporary fear about indoctrination, which is intolerant of alternate viewpoints. This means that any topic or course will entail intellectually valid content representative of divergent cultural perspectives, whether it is a literature or history curriculum or a more specific topic such as the American Civil War. Banks's final level reminds us of the broader purpose of curriculum: decision making and social action. At this level Banks calls for curricula that generate knowledge that is not just confined to the classroom or to test taking but forges the crucial connection between classroom and society. It is curricula that are mindful that we are developing future leaders and decision makers who will be shaping the wellbeing of our communities.

Table 1. *Banks's Levels of Integration of Multicultural Content*

Level 1	Contributions Approach	Focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements
Level 2	Additive Approach	Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure
Level 3	Transformation Approach	The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups
Level 4	Social Action Approach	Students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them

Multiple scholars have offered similar typologies (Gorski, 2009; Nieto, 1994; Schoorman, 2017; Sleeter & Grant, 2009). They all caution against assimilationist approaches to diversity and advocate for culture-centered and eventually, equity-oriented curriculum (Schoorman & Bogotch, 2010). Notably, they all condemn the purposes for which education has been historically weaponized against minoritized groups, whether as a tool of cultural genocide, miseducation, intellectual colonization, or the denial of access to education or curricular representation (Au et al., 2016; Spring, 2016; Woodson, 1933). They reject education predicated on the assimilation of minoritized groups through one-size-fits-all, monocultural, standardized curricula and pedagogy that typically espouse a "color-blind" perspective, where culture is rendered irrelevant, deficient, or useful solely as a bridge to mainstream culture. Instead, culture-centered approaches value students' cultures as relevant to effective teaching and learning, and recognize cross-cultural knowledge as central for thriving in a culturally pluralistic society. Curricula representative of diverse perspectives (parallel to Banks's transformation approach) are viewed as foundational to multicultural capacity building and positive bicultural identity development. While endorsing this approach, critical multicultural educators (e.g., May & Sleeter,

2010) urge educators to move beyond a sole focus on culture to integrate an equity-orientation that addresses institutional structures (policies and practices related to curricula and pedagogy) that systematically marginalize vs. privilege the knowledge, perspectives, and epistemologies of certain groups. For these educators, the questions of whose knowledge for whose purpose are central in building critical consciousness about the power dynamics underlying educational decision making.

While the levels of multicultural education offer a useful conceptualization of desired approaches, they also highlight the impact of regressive policies on professional practice. For instance, while scholars frame curricula solely limited to Black History Month as necessary but insufficient, in post-2021 educational practice in Florida—where discussions of Black history are still mandated yet paradoxically, if deliberately, under fire as being "Woke" or inexplicably prohibited under the guise of a blanket ban on "critical race theory"—such curricula may well need to be re-framed from being "tokenistic" in 2019 to being courageous in 2023. Furthermore, if educators and leaders have been educated only on/through efforts that scholars deem tokenistic and lacking in critical depth, it seems less likely that such professionals will be able to withstand the current political assaults on curricula and/or to defend multicultural education as a matter of moral principle.

Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Banks (2004) also identified five dimensions of multicultural education highlighting the multifaceted nature of efforts required: content integration, the knowledge construction process, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture. Building on Banks's ideas, I have added a sixth dimension (community engagement) and modified their spatial depiction to represent the embedded relationships between dimensions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Six Dimensions of Multicultural Education*

Empowering School Culture

| Content Integration | Equity Pedagogy |
| Knowledge Construction | Prejudice Reduction |

School–Community Partnerships
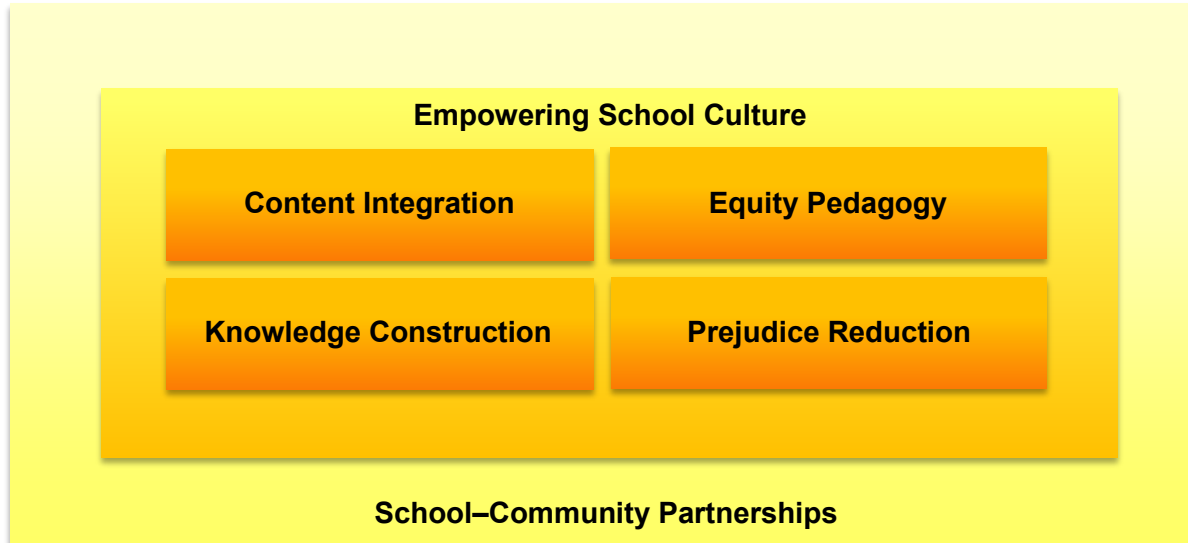
Content Integration. Multicultural scholars note that curricula should serve as a "mirror," "window," and "doorway" for diverse students who are able to see themselves as well as those who are different from them, representing worlds and experiences that are both strange and familiar (Bishop, 1990; Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). While we have fallen far short of ensuring that all students have access to a multiculturally representative and inclusive curriculum, contemporary curriculum bans have made this aspiration more challenging. According to PEN America (2022), in 2021–22 Florida had the second highest number of books banned among all states in the nation, that largely targeted LGBTQ+ content (41%) and books by and about people of color (40%). These bans are

spearheaded by well-funded, organized groups of parents whose voices are shaping curricula for all families. In essence, they are taking down the curricular mirrors for LGBTQ+ students and students of color, and shutting the windows and doors for their own children.

Knowledge Construction. The second dimension highlights how topics are framed and presented, and to what purpose, surfacing concerns about the hidden messages of curricula as identified by Kohl's (2011) analysis of the problematic depiction of Rosa Parks, Loewen's (2008) analysis of the distortions in history textbooks, and the identification of curricular biases by Sadker and Sadker (2001). This dimension moves beyond questions of what knowledge is included, but also whose knowledge is centered, by what processes and by whom curricular inclusion and exclusion decisions are made. The knowledge construction process is particularly well-highlighted in the current tensions about curriculum bans vis-à-vis commitments toward racial equity and gender inclusivity. Ninety years later, Woodson's (1933) searing observation that "There would be no lynching, if it did not start in the school room" (p. 3) demands our continued attention to the macro structural concerns between school curricula and social wellbeing, raising questions about how, why, and in whose interests school knowledge is constructed.

Equity Pedagogy. Equity pedagogy refers to how we teach, emphasizing the importance of making learning encounters relevant and effective for all by attending to students' cultural knowledge and ways of knowing/learning, prior experiences and frames of reference, and the social dynamics of the instructional context (Gay, 2010). For Ladson-Billings (1995), equity pedagogy is humanizing, culturally relevant to the students, supports positive cultural identity development, academic success and, echoing Baldwin's (1963) call to teachers, facilitates critical consciousness and collective empowerment through their ability to question an inequitable status quo. Freire (2018) challenged educators to rethink their pedagogy by critiquing traditional practices summarized as "banking" that trained students to be passive recipients of unquestioned information with limited agency. This approach renders learners vulnerable to exploitation and propaganda not just as students but as future adults and citizens. "Banking" lays the groundwork for indoctrination. The antidote to this is pedagogy that ensures that students have the space to view content from multiple perspectives, ask questions, debate, and develop their own agency as inquirers.

Prejudice Reduction. Prejudice reduction was also an early concern of multicultural educators, in the days of desegregation. I have frequently asked students to consider what they would have done if they taught on the front lines of school desegregation, what they would have said to parents who opposed integration and how they would have supported Black students and their parents. Today, these questions are no longer hypothetical. Prejudice reduction, kindness, and caring are vital learning outcomes in schools that value diversity as they will translate into the types of leaders we will have in the future. Haim Ginott (1993) pinpointed this in a letter to teachers:

> Dear Teacher:
>
> I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:
>
>> Gas chambers built by learned engineers.
>> Children poisoned by educated physicians.
>> Infants killed by trained nurses.
>> Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.
>
> So, I am suspicious of education.
>
> My request is: Help your students to become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.
>
> Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.

In a system driven by standardized testing, it is easy for prejudice reduction to be sidelined as an outcome of education. However, as we contemplate the education of our leaders, this dimension is crucial for peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

Empowering School Culture. Banks's fifth dimension emphasizes the significance of institution-wide commitment where multicultural education, or contemporary institutional commitments to DEI, are not just a function of an individual teacher's class, but evident in all aspects of the institution at the micro and macro levels. An empowering school culture is even more crucial today with the challenges faced by teachers through curriculum censorship. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars raised concerns that schools were places of trauma, pressure, boredom, and disengagement—outcomes fueled by standardized testing regimes that few educators could endorse as pedagogically sound practice (Ahlquist et al., 2011; Love, 2019; Stovall, 2018). Today, those concerns have worsened. Talented teachers are leaving the profession (McGrath, 2022). Their exodus is not merely creating a teacher shortage, but a brain drain detrimental to our social and democratic wellbeing.

As a partial response, the editors of *Rethinking Schools* urge us to find joy in our work—joy as counter-hegemonic resistance to the challenges we face:

> The world is broken. But instead of giving up, instead of resigning, teachers need to pivot to make teaching an act of defiance, a declaration that the only way forward is through lessons that teach students to remember joy, to activate their muscles of imagination, kindness, laughter, playfulness, and solidarity.

> The fear that the world cannot be mended is a story told by those who benefit from today's distorted relationships of wealth and power, and thus have an interest in keeping us docile. So instead of surrendering to despair, let us choose to create a different path. ("Recommitting," 2022, p. 4)

School–Community Partnerships. Figure 1 depicts an additional dimension—school–community partnerships—underscoring the embedded and systemic nature of the dimensions. The dimension of school–community relationships aims to return the institution (pre-K–12 or higher education) to its role within the community, acknowledging that we are better learning with and from one another, rather than in isolation. This is not merely a nod to "community-based projects" for students, faculty, or institutions to gather their "service points" or "community engagement" designations, or for instrumental purposes like access to local sites for internships, field placement, or research. Instead, it is a call for institutions to welcome the community as a salient part of institutional learning, growth, commitment, and responsiveness. For schools, it means moving beyond a view of parents as adversaries to forge vibrant relationships with caregivers, particularly in predominantly re-segregated communities to ensure meaningful multicultural history and epistemology (not erasure, miseducation, or curricular violence) in school curricula. Dare we reclaim the excellence and vibrancy of the segregated schools that bell hooks (1994) describes?

> Teaching in segregated Black schools "was rooted in anti-racist struggle." … Teachers were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers—Black folks who used our minds. We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind was a counter-hegemonic act. (p. 2)

> … My teachers made sure they "knew" us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family. I went to school at a historical moment where I was being taught by the same teachers who had taught my mother, her sisters and brothers. (p. 3)

While there are multiple dimensions and levels at which education of Florida's diverse students might be undertaken, similar considerations apply to our research efforts in, with, and for diverse communities.

In Pursuit of Equitable Research

In an early effort to translate the principles of multicultural education from my pedagogy into my research practices, I offered the following on what it means to be a multicultural researcher (Schoorman, 2014). These ideas emerged from my experiences working in a Family Literacy Program among Guatemalan Maya immigrants.

- The rationale for the study is grounded in extant social injustices
- The goal/purpose of the study is to minimize/eliminate the injustices or the conditions that gave rise to them
- The research questions emerge from the interests of the researched who are marginalized by the injustices
- The underlying epistemological stance is one that reflects research *with* the researched not simply research *on* them
- Research design and methodologies reflect multiple loci of expertise (where the researchers are not perceived as the sole "experts," and where community members' value as co-researchers is recognized)
- Participation in the research process is viewed as beneficial or emancipatory by both the researcher and the researched
- The outcome of the research process is the alleviation, amelioration, or elimination of a facet of the injustice that gave rise to the study

Engaging in research that emerges from community interests, conducted in consultation with communities for their collective benefit is the antithesis of what Carter (2003) has called "hit and run" research where communities of color are seen as spaces for mining data that further pathologizes, exoticizes, commodifies, or colonizes the knowledge of underserved groups, to the academic benefit of the researcher or their institution. Not only should we move away from these patronizing, hierarchical relationships between "Ivory Tower" researchers and the community, but we need to recognize how such approaches have served hegemonic outcomes, per the observation of Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) that "Mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression" (p. 304). This was echoed more recently by the American Psychological Association (2021) that issued a statement of apology in recognition of a history of racist research.

> The American Psychological Association failed in its role leading the discipline of psychology, was complicit in contributing to systemic inequities, and hurt many through racism, racial discrimination, and denigration of people of color, thereby falling short on its mission to benefit society and improve lives (American Psychological Association, 2021).

These observations prompt us to turn the investigative lens on our own institutional practices to explore critically our own complicity in marginalizing and harming community groups through our research protocols, deficit-based theoretical frameworks, and methodologies that render our research participants passive objects rather than active agents in the research process. We must commit to disrupting these practices by entering research collaborations with cultural humility and a commitment to learning from and with our communities. However, building trusting relationships (including research and cultural capacity building) takes time, and is not conducive to those in thrall to a "publish or perish" mentality.

We also must pay critical attention to definitions of "research," who makes these decisions, and why. In my own institution, the term "research" was abruptly re-directed to pertain solely to activities that brought in external funding, while all other efforts were labeled "scholarship." The connection between research and funding not only signals the commodification of research (i.e., research as fiduciary), but also surfaces how special interests, through funded research grants, can shape research agendas and, consequently, the body of knowledge that emerges from those scholarly discussions.

What happens if/when what is not funded is also not researched? How might responsible researchers interrupt the link between money and knowledge, even when grant funding integrates diversity? For instance, the designation of "Hispanic Serving Institution" is frequently associated with opportunities for funding rather than the obligation to serve the previously underserved. Too often, student diversity demographics on grant proposals serve to establish diversity consciousness in problem statements and rationales of grant applications, while remaining diversity blind in the benefits and outcomes, which accrue to predominantly White institutional priorities.

Research among diverse and underserved communities also requires us to interrogate our research methodologies to surface the politics of what is accepted as research, and who is accepted as a researcher. For instance, despite their relevance to the field of education, participatory action research, autoethnography, critical textual and discourse analysis, narrative and photovoice, and related democratizing methodologies are still marginalized as "not real research" in many graduate programs and institutions, and barely acknowledged in syllabi of required research methods courses. As an organization committed to research in a culturally diverse state, it behooves FERA members to consider how the goals/outcomes and processes of our research benefit or hurt historically marginalized communities and how we might better prepare the next generation of educational researchers for equitable practice.

An Association for Community Wellbeing

Throughout my time as a scholar in Florida, I have been supported by my professional organizations' clear and unambiguous commitment to moral responsibility, equity, and excellence in education. As an association committed to education and research, FERA has to consider its professional obligations to its membership and to the communities that it serves. It is important for FERA to be intentional and unambiguous in its commitment to excellence and equity in the education of Florida's diverse students and their educators, while laying the groundwork for the next 25 years of education and research for community wellbeing in Florida. Might it come in the form of scholarship that informs policy and legislative decisions, or amicus briefs that support legal action for equity? Should we prioritize research that (a) supports hardworking and courageous teachers, leaders, and staff members; (b) informs concerned parents; (c) provides our youth with a sense of their agency; and/or (d) speaks back to cruelty and injustice? How might the research we support build bridges among the state's diverse communities, and face up to our difficult histories and leadership failures? How might FERA make good on our rhetorical commitments of "never again" to violence and fascism, as we re-imagine curricula, policy, pedagogy, and assessments that re-commit to courageous and collective leadership that holds one another accountable?

What might this mean for FERA conference themes, accepted sessions, published papers, awards, and recognitions? How and why would our association matter to students, parents, teachers, principals, community members, and/or historically marginalized populations among these groups? Will FERA's activities offer more than a vita hit for participants? If so, who will take on this work? What is the historical landscape on which we wish to reminisce as educators and researchers in 25 years? My hope is that this association will be an unambiguous and unwavering voice for all of us in achieving the following imperatives:

1. That we embrace our state's diversity as an asset to be preserved and fought for. That we will have the experiences, knowledge, and the research to show how diversity, inclusion, and equity in all aspects of our education strengthen both our education and our democracy.

2. That we do not take our democracy for granted but instead educate all our students for responsible and caring leadership through the embrace of joy as justice-oriented pedagogy. Joyful learners are more likely to be engaged, lifelong inquirers (not merely programmed test takers). They are more apt to question, be comfortable with difference, recognize their

agency, and be impervious to indoctrination, propaganda, and disinformation. It is these students who will need to serve as our future leaders and decisionmakers in an inclusive democracy.

3. That we embrace the crucial role of research in our pursuit of equity, and the crucial role of equity in our pursuit of research. As Ladson Billings (2005) noted:

    > The work we have to do must be done in the public interest. … The questions we pursue, the projects we choose, the agenda we champion have to be about more than career advancement. If educational research is going to matter, then we have to make it matter in the lives of people around real issues. (p. 10)

4. That we accept our individual and collective responsibility and agency in creating a better tomorrow for all. We must recognize and resist the efforts to divide us and work intentionally toward the visions of transformation, healing, and community as urgent matters of our collective wellbeing.

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