

Multicultural Mindsets: Addressing Diversity in Public Schools in France

By

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## Abstract

Recent massive ways of transnational migration have presented a challenge for schools. Teachers, administrators, and education policy makers are responsible for educating children who are from a diverse set of backgrounds within the same classrooms. When immigrants come into a new school system they come with varying linguistic and educational needs. Some have not been in formal educational settings in their country of origin, some do not speak the language of the country they are immigrating into, yet when they arrive, teachers and administrators must determine the best way to accommodate these students in order to ensure their academic success. Traditionally, France has included immigrants into the classroom by labeling them “French” students and requiring that they drop their native language and outside cultural identities completely. However, due to recent data collected by international organizations and studies conducted by scholars, it is evident that these immigrant and immigrant origin students (specifically North African origin students) are underperforming in French public classrooms when compared with native French students. If education is to be “the great equalizer” in France, changes will need to be made within the education system to address its diverse populace.

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## **Personal Background:**

Education became my passion the day I realized the enormous discrepancy between my experience as a high school student (in an upper-middle class community in the U.S.) and that of the high school students I was teaching in Henderson, NC (a city located in an impoverished low-income community). Students growing up in low-income communities in the U.S. often do not receive an equal opportunity to achieve academic success. Their teachers are underprepared, their administrators are ineffectual, the resources at their schools are minimal, the content of their curriculum is usually irrelevant to their lives, and the examinations that measure their academic performance are often written for members of mainstream society. All of these factors create enormous barriers to academic achievement for students like those in my classroom.

Through the ten years I have spent studying the French language and culture and the six months I lived abroad in France, my eyes have become opened to the similarities that exist between the U.S. and France concerning minority discrimination and disadvantage within the school system. Even though the U.S. considers itself to be a multicultural society and France denies the multicultural label, both countries have low-income communities which are disproportionately comprised of individuals from minority groups. “In France, despite its great republican tradition of difference-blind integration through schooling, the problem of educational segregation persists because postmigrants are concentrated in particular city quarters. Careful studies have demonstrated the existence in the French labor market of severe discrimination against people with foreign names in general and Muslims in particular” (Ash, 2012, p.34). This same discrimination is continuously discussed in political debates in the U.S. concerning minority groups and so it would seem that approaches to counteract this discrimination here in the U.S. may in fact be worth considering in the context of France.

It seems pretentious and even oversimplified to suggest that the benefits of an American approach to educational reform would benefit French society, and rightly so considering this thesis is written from an American perspective. Keeping this in mind, my challenge will be in determining if there is a need for educational reform in France, and if a need is determined, to suggest ways that a multicultural approach to education may be beneficial for a defined group of underserved students.

My first hurdle will be convincing the reader that a multicultural perspective is in fact beneficial for any society in today's global world. This will be a challenge because as Ash (2012) illustrates: "The multicultural literature, with its tendency to pigeonhole people by culture, often fails to acknowledge the sheer diversity of this increasingly mixed-up world. More than ever, that must include the diversity to be found inside a single human skin, mind, and heart" (Ash 2012, p. 33). Through the words of Ash (2012), we begin to understand that no one human being's experience is exactly like another. We are shaped by our experiences and the circumstances of our existence, and these form us into unique individuals. We are unique even when located within similar cultural categories. This is the failure that Ash (2012) and many other scholars see with Multiculturalism as a concept.

While I appreciate these criticisms, I still argue that citizens need to be informed about diversity within society in order to alleviate the discrimination that continues to occur. Concepts such as essentializing a population can be taught and discussed in school settings. We must have a foundation to begin these conversations however, and I believe the foundation is first formed by acknowledging that every society is made up of individuals who have varying cultural backgrounds. Acknowledging that a society is multicultural in nature does not mean that it must adopt multiculturalism as a national policy.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

“The story of globalization is the story of the unintended collective consequences of individual choices freely made. There are many such consequences, but immigration is the one that poses the biggest challenge to democracies (and perhaps to democracy). It means importing not just factors of production but factors of social change.” (Christopher Caldwell, 2009, p.329).

The social, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences between North African immigrants from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria in France and French natives form a complex dynamic within French society. Nowhere are these differences seen more vividly than in the education system. North African immigrant students in France face many adversities in schools; they are often seen as “outsiders” because of the way they look and speak, they have difficulty communicating with teachers and other peers, and they are required to acclimate immediately into a culture that is “foreign” to them by relinquishing their religious and cultural identity as Muslims. All of these challenges result in lower academic performance, as will be shown with comparative standardized test results, reduced academic opportunities, due to lower track placement, and reduced career opportunities for these students, proven by the large percentage of unemployed North Africans (Laqueur, 2007).

The education system in France, while similar to the U.S. system in structure, has variation at the secondary level. There are four levels of education which correspond to the four levels in the U.S. The *l'école maternelle* is the first level. It is similar to preschool and Kindergarten in the U.S., lasting three years total. The second level is *l'école primaire*, which lasts a total of five years (ages 6-11) and corresponds to U.S. elementary school. After this begins secondary schooling which consists of two categories, *Collège* and *Lycée*. *Collège* is similar to U.S. middle school and lasts four years (ages 11-15) while *Lycée* is the final part of

secondary education (like U.S. high school) and lasts three years. The final level is post-secondary schooling just as in the U.S, where in both countries post-secondary schooling options are available in both University and non-University settings. The largest differences between the two systems are the critical examinations that are taken by French students at two different times within their secondary educational careers and the tracking orientation that is present. The first exam, le *brevet des collèges*, is taken after the final year of *collège* and is used to determine which track the students will follow for the remainder of secondary schooling. It also guides the orientation of the student to the specific Baccalauréat examination they will be qualified to take at the end of their secondary schooling (education.gouv.fr: See Appendix 1 &2).

The importance of examinations in the French education system cannot be overstated. Because the tracking system places students on a trajectory that informs their schooling and eventually their career opportunities, students often see their performance on these exams as a reflection of their success or failure (Capelle, 1967, p. 124). The *Brevet* examination will inform the placement of the student onto a certain track (either general/technological or vocational) and when the student follows this certain track, he/she will be qualified to take the corresponding *Baccalauréat* examination. The *Baccalauréat* (or *Bac* as commonly referred to in France) and the score a student receives on it, determine what type of job or further education a student is qualified to pursue (education.cicic.ca). In this regard, it is understandable why the *Bac* would be referred to as the “passport to a student’s future” and is the single most important aspect of a student’s academic career. All that is learned throughout schooling is in preparation for this exam (Capelle, 1967).

The makeup of French society has been dramatically altered by the arrival of immigrants from North Africa and this has left many French citizens fearful. Caldwell (2009) estimates that



at one point in 1962, Algerian immigrants were fleeing violence during the Algerian revolution and were coming to France “at a rate of 70,000 a week” (p. 29). In 2006, Laqueur (2007) estimated that the Muslim population in France (5.5 million) had doubled since 1980. Other estimates are lower, between four to five million, but either way, France is home to the largest Muslim population in Europe (Viorst, 1996). French citizens fear that the cultural ties that members of this group hold are not compatible with what it means to be “French.” The mindset French natives have toward this group is explicated vividly by Farid Aïtisselmi: “The term ‘immigrant’ has become synonymous with “Arab” in the minds of many French persons, connoting Muslims of North African origin...Even their children who were born in France and have French nationality are not yet considered as legitimate French citizens” (p. 136). To be a “legitimate” French citizen one must hold firmly to the ideals of the French Republic; a strict interpretation of secularism being the most blatant incompatibility.

I begin my study by providing an in-depth look at North African immigrants in France, addressing who they are, their historical relationship with France and their current position in the national context in France. By understanding the identities of this group of people and where they come from it will be possible to understand why French natives view their arrival as a threat. My focus on North African immigrants is purposeful and not meant to disregard other large immigrant groups in France, including those from Sub-Saharan Africa and the French West Indies, among others. By concentrating on North African immigrants I am able to focus on a specific group within France who share cultural and religious identities that will be meaningful in my research.

The French do not value cultural plurality and believe their citizens should assimilate wholly into “French” citizens in order to maintain a homogeneous society (Laqueur, 2007).

Therefore, they believe multiculturalism to be a concept ill-suited for their society and one more appropriate in the U.S. context. Fear of the loss of a cohesive national identity has kept France from labeling itself a “multicultural society.”

There are differing opinions as to the true meaning and interpretation of the concept of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism as expressed by Wieviorka (2010) and taken from the Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology (1991) is “the acknowledgement and promotion of cultural pluralism as a feature of many societies(...) multiculturalism celebrates and seeks to protect cultural variety, for example, minority languages.” This definition presents multiculturalism in a positive light, though some scholars do not see it in this way. There are differing viewpoints on multiculturalism which need to be discussed including those who find it an unfit concept for today’s society, those who support it and see value in its implementation in multicultural societies, and those who feel it is a well-grounded concept but reinterpretations are needed.

The first view is that multiculturalism as a political ideal is unfit for multicultural societies. A proponent of this viewpoint, Barry (2002) believes that from a political point of view multiculturalism stands in opposition to true liberty and equality, encouraging groups to base their commonalities on cultural characteristics rather than the economic disparities they face. In this light, multiculturalism works as a divider that hurts minority cultural groups more than it helps them because they are unable to unite on issues that negatively impact them (Barry 2002).

Supporters of multiculturalism, such as Taylor (2011), believe that multiculturalism benefits all members of a multicultural society when a specific set of virtues are exercised. Mutual respect is at the center of these virtues and in this context means that all citizens have “a

widespread willingness and ability to articulate [their] disagreements, to defend them before people with whom [they] disagree, to discern the difference between respectable and disrespectful disagreement, and to be open to changing [their] own minds when faced with well-reasoned criticism” (Taylor, 2011, p.24). These virtues, he acknowledges, should be at the heart of any democratic society.

A final perspective on multiculturalism that needs to be illuminated is that of Hollinger (1995). According to him, multiculturalism has “outgrown itself.” However, there are some valuable characteristics of multiculturalism that should be preserved. Taking these characteristics and combining them with some characteristics of cosmopolitanism, a new “postethnic” perspective is formed that will best serve multicultural societies. This perspective is better able to meet the needs of multicultural societies because it adds ideals of cosmopolitanism, that do not place individuals into historically defined “boxes” but rather “promot[e] multiple identities, emphasiz[e] the dynamic changing character of many groups, and [are] responsive to the potential for creating new cultural combinations” (Hollinger, 1995, p. 3). The “postethnic” perspective departs from the tendency of multiculturalism to essentialize and misrepresent cultural groups.

Within his article, Ash (2012) presents a very critical argument against a push for France to adopt multiculturalism as a national policy. According to him, “multiculturalism” results in the formation of parallel societies which end up isolating minority populations from the opportunities awarded to the majority. Additionally, the multiculturalist celebration of cultural diversity leads to an “endorsement of cultural and moral relativism” (Ash, 2012, p.33). Moral relativism is a frightening notion when considering its potential to impede on human rights. In the context of Muslims in France, many French citizens fear that Islamic culture does not place

the same high value on the rights of human beings; therefore, adopting multiculturalism as a national policy would directly impinge upon these sacred values (Caldwell, 2009). Because the French see multiculturalism as a threat, North African immigrants in France are faced with a major challenge; they must give up a majority of their cultural identity in order to be recognized as true “French” citizens.

## **CHAPTER 2: North African Immigrants in France**

### ***Who are North African Immigrants in France?***

“The young people born of North African immigrants refer to themselves as ‘Beur’ or ‘Reubeu’ which are both backslang terms for ‘Arab.’ They are less willing than their parents to live as second-class citizens in their own country, since they were born in France” (Aitsiselmi, 2006, p. 138).

“[...] the children of North African immigrants command new respect because they have become an active part of French society and they participate in redefining what it means to be French” (Begag, 1990, p. 4).

There is a long history of interaction between France and North Africa. In 1830, French troops entered Algeria for the first time. The French were undoubtedly awed by Arab history, language, literature and culture upon arriving into the area but their interests focused on passing on the ideals of Western civilization in order to turn “Arab Algerians” into “French Algerians” (Seljug, 1997). The result was a blending of the West and East where cultural characteristics of both could be found existing together in major Algerian cities. The same pattern held true when France expanded its interest into Tunisia, in 1881, and Morocco, in 1912 (Seljug, 1997).

The turbulent histories between France and its former colonies of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco have led to a complex relationship between the citizens of those countries and France. France had a colonial presence in Algeria from 1830-1962, in Tunisia from 1881-1956, and in Morocco from 1912-1956. As a result, many Muslim immigrants in France originate from these countries (Aitsiselmi, 2006). The diversity among the group begins with their countries of origin. Algeria was the only country of the three that fought a war against France to gain independence from French colonial rule and also endured the longest period of French colonization; therefore, the relationship between Algerian immigrants and France is even more tumultuous. In the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries immigrants came to France to help rebuild after the destruction of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), WWI (1914-1918) and

WWII (1939-1945) had left the country in disrepair. Many North African immigrants came to France as a part of worker programs for this reason. The public opinion in France at this time was that these immigrants were temporary and would return “home” after rebuilding their country. In the 1980’s, as French society began to acknowledge that these “guest workers” were remaining in the country, gaining citizenship, and bringing their families over through reunification programs, a new second generation of permanent immigrants became the topic of discussion in the political arena. Right-wing parties began to develop anti-immigration stances. They gained ground due to public concern of integrating people from such culturally different backgrounds (Aitsiselmi, 2006).

A peaceful existence between native French citizens and North African immigrants lasted over half a decade but this peace can no longer be seen in France. Seljug (1997) explains growing tensions between native French citizens and those of North African origin with the following description:

“The growing religious awareness, the quest to retain their identity, socioeconomic disparities, French government policy regarding the Muslim world, waves of subversive activities, and last but not least, the Gulf War and its aftermath - all these diverse and multivariant factors, joined by the rise of neo-Nazism in Germany, have posed serious challenges to the peace and stability of the Mediterranean region. French cities, especially ports where there is a sizeable immigrant population, are gradually turning into crisis areas in the contemporary European scene, challenging the peace and harmony of the region, as the latest incidents of violence in Nice and other cities in Southern France indicate” (p. 67).

In addition, in more recent events, riots broke out across France in 2005 and again in 2007 with the children of North African immigrants being held responsible for setting fire to hundreds of cars across the country (“Understanding the violence,” 2007). According to the CBS article, “Understanding the violence,” this second generation of immigrants from North Africa is a very different group of people from their parents because they have grown up in ethnic “ghettos” and

are now facing high unemployment rates and racism. In addition, “The weight of family and tradition and historical background certainly separates them from mainstream French society” (“Understanding the violence,” 2007). If peace is to be restored in France, measures will need to be taken to help this group find its place within French society.

The children of North African immigrants in France are most often referred to as “second generation immigrants,” “youths of foreign or immigrant origin,” “French-Arabs,” “Maghrebins,” “Beurs,” or “*pieds noirs*” (repatriates of French ancestry following Algerian independence) (Heath, Rotheron and Kilpi, 2008). Some of them were born in France; others immigrated as children and teenagers. As individuals in a group, they are diverse, holding unique reasons for immigrating into France, and integrating differently into the context of French society upon arrival (Begag, 1990). Even though the above terms have led to grouping these individuals into categories in French society, it is important to know that they are not a homogenous set of individuals, instead their identities are a result of differing levels of cultural and religious attachment and many see themselves as French as well as North African, a sort of ‘hybrid identity’ (Aitsiselmi, 2006).

Abdelmalek Sayed (1999) wrote largely on the subject of “la double absence” which discusses the weight of the North African (specifically Algerian) experience as immigrants living in France. The double absence of which he speaks describes the isolation of the immigrant who is not seen as a member of his country of origin or a member of his country of residence. This double absence is amplified in the generation of children of immigrants who have been born to North African parents living in France. They cannot be located as members of the home country of their parents and this reality often acts as a barrier in the parent/child relationship. Sayed

(1999) describes these children as often seen as “illegitimate children” by their parents because of the lack of common background between the two.

The most contentious issue surrounding the North African immigrant population in France is the confrontation between the religious practices of the immigrant and a secular French society. One thing that the majority of North African immigrants have in common is an Islamic heritage. Mauseen (2010) describes the sentiment in France as one of disdain for Muslim “guest workers” after the Algerian War as “they were perceived as more culturally different because of their skin color but also because of their Muslim religion” (p. 137). Christopher Caldwell (2009) develops a very substantial discussion of the apparently inherent conflicts between European culture and Islamic culture. For one, he describes the conception of Europe as a set of progressive, forward thinking countries, while Islam is seen as backwards especially in its treatment of women. Additionally, he illuminates the idea that to practicing Muslims, Islam defines identity deeper than any cultural, social or national characteristic. According to him, a Muslim in France will first see him/herself as Muslim and then “French.” A population that holds such a strong religious identification is undoubtedly seen as a threat to a country that places such a high value on the separation of church and state.

### ***The Educational Position of North African Immigrants in France***

“A large portion of [children of North African immigrants in France] fail in the education system and, therefore, see their job opportunities considerably reduced” (Begag, 1990).

“[...] policymakers in Western countries commonly regard education as critical for the socioeconomic success of immigrant children. To ensure successful future societal participation, immigrant children must perform well in school” (Levels, Dronkers and Kraaykamp, 2008).



The educational position of North African immigrant children in France is bleak in comparison with native students. As stated by Heath, Rethon and Kilipi (2008), “[...] minorities whose parents came from less-developed non-European origins tend to have substantially lower educational attainment or qualifications than do their respective majority groups. The most disadvantaged groups in this respect [include] young people of... Maghrebin ancestry in France...” (p.216). On standardized tests, these students often score lower, frequently follow lower academic tracks, and are overrepresented in schools found in low socio-economic communities. In addition, these students often have linguistic differences that impede their ability to communicate effectively with teachers, are unfamiliar with the French educational system, and have parents who are unable to fully participate in their education due to religious and linguistic barriers. Because educational performance and attainment is the key which unlocks future possibilities for students in France it is important to understand how North African students are performing in relation to students of French origin.

Standardized tests provide a quick and easy method for comparing student performance and have therefore been adopted by many countries. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) mandates students in France to take standardized tests provided by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and this shows that North African immigrant students perform considerably lower than native French students. The internationally mandated tests, which are given to 15 year old students in over 70 countries every three years, help position the performance of French students in relation to those from other countries, as well as compare the performance of different subgroups within France (“PISA - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development,” 2013). This is important because in France there are no national statistics broken down by categories of race and ethnicity and

without them real “group-based disadvantage” of North African students remains hidden (Hochschild and Cropper 2010). Hochschild and Cropper (2010) use PISA data from 2000-2006 to show the lower performance of North African immigrant students on standardized tests in comparison with native students. Three subject tests, reading, math and science, were given to 15 year old students in France. Each test had an average score of 500 points and therefore a combined 1500 points was used as an average overall score. In 2006, PISA scores in France revealed that native-born French students scored right at the 1500 point average while second-generation immigrant students score 1375 points on average and first-generation immigrant students score 1330 points on average (Hochschild and Cropper 2010). By looking at this data, it is clear to see that immigrant students, both first and second-generation, are underperforming academically when compared to native-born French students.

However, standardized tests, while providing a means for comparison, do not always reveal the reality of student performance in the classroom. They are a snapshot of how well a student can focus and take a test on any one given day. Heath, Rethon and Kilpi (2008) point out a further limitation to the PISA standardized tests stating that there is an “insufficient size [of the tested groups] to examine the attainments of specific minorities” (p. 218). Because PISA tests are only given to a small sampling of students in France, the data gathered may not reveal the total reality of student performance in the country. However, given the lack of sufficient national data to measure North African immigrant performance, PISA does provide an appropriate baseline for beginning to understand the situation of these students in the academic environment in France.

Not only are North African immigrant students performing lower on standardized tests in France, they are also overrepresented on lower tracks. In France, three academic tracks are

available to students following primary schooling; vocational, technological, and general. The general track is the most direct route to studying at a University, whereas the vocational track often leads students into professions that do not require a higher educational degree. Track orientation is decided by a committee who are informed by the student's scores on the *brevet des colleges* (exams taken in the final year of primary school) and also the preference of the family (Brinbaum and Boado, 2007). Brinbaum and Boado (2007) found that students with parents of North African origin are more likely to follow the vocational track and many of these students perceive the decision of the committee as an injustice. Being placed on a lower track at the end of primary schooling sets students on an inflexible path for the remainder of their school career, limiting their post-secondary educational /career options.

In addition, a lack of understanding of the French educational system creates further barriers to academic success. The tracking system is often a new and confusing concept for immigrant families to understand. Brinbaum and Keiffer (2010) suggest that immigrant parent's poor command of the French language impedes their knowledge of what track placement really means to the educational future of their child. "[Immigrant families] lack the kind of knowledge that is required to navigate the French school system and they do not have the cultural and social resources that would allow them to adopt the strategies of the French middle class" (Brinbaum & Boado, 2007, p. 463). These factors places immigrant children at a disadvantage when compared with students whose parent's understand the system and can knowingly advocate for children.

Large proportions of immigrant students live and attend school in low socio-economic communities. Schools found in low socio-economic communities in France are said to be located in Zones d'Education Prioritaire (Priority Education Zones or ZEPs) as labeled by the French Ministry of Education and they are known to provide the poorest academic environments

(Brinbaum & Kieffer, 2010). Students of North African origin attend schools in ZEPs at a rate five times that of students of French origin. According to the study by Brinbaum and Kieffer (2010), performance in a ZEP school is lower than public schools in higher socio-economic communities in both French and mathematics; a direct result of teachers lowering their standards for student work. Therefore, according to the study, schools in these communities are the cause for the underachievement of North African immigrant students and these schools often cause North African students to hold negative attitudes toward education.

Linguistic misunderstandings increase these negative attitudes and often create tension between teachers and students of North African origin. A study conducted by Welsh (2002) shows how simple misunderstandings in communication can damage the relationship between North African students and their teachers. Through his interviews of junior high aged Arab boys in Lille, France he was able to learn that in the school systems they had come from, the familiar “tu” is used between teachers and students signifying a more cordial relationship. In France, however, students are required to address their teachers using the formal “vous” as an indication of respect. Welply (2010) refers to the French classroom as a very formal space where instruction “is mainly teacher-centered and consist[s] of impersonal interactions between pupils and teachers” (p. 350). Teachers who are addressed informally feel their authority is being challenged, while students who are used to a more relaxed relationship between teacher and student feel chastised when reminded to properly address the teacher. Therefore, many students in Lille blame the teachers for their disaffection; linguistic misunderstandings acting as another cause for their alienation within French public schools.

While it can sometimes be shown that immigrant-origin students increase their performance in school at a faster rate than native French students, this is often a result of a “floor

effect” (Boado, 2009). This effect suggests that starting with a lower grade allows for more rapid improvement than starting at a higher grade would allow. The “Panel d’Élèves du Second Degré” (1995-2002), provides the data that reveals this effect. Since immigrant students’ grades were initially lower than native students grades, immigrant students were able to improve on them more easily and more rapidly than native students. This example further enforces the underachievement of these students because, while their grades did seem to improve at a faster rate as compared with native students, their final grades were still lower in comparison (Boado, 2009).

There is a wide range of literature that debates the factors responsible for this academic underachievement; among these are the low socioeconomic status held by the majority of the North African immigrant population in France (Brinbaum & Boado, 2007; Brinbaum & Kieffer, 2010; Heath, Rethon & Kilpi, 2008), language and cultural barriers that are being ignored (Alba, 2006), and curriculum needs that are not being met (Soysal & Szakács, 2010). When North African graduates enter the workforce they are often unable to compete with native French students because of their comparative academic underachievement. This results in their often having to take low-skilled, low paying jobs and sometimes leaves them with no job opportunities at all. Unemployment rates of North African young adults are much higher than the national average in France (Heath, Rethon & Kilipi, 2008). This reality has led to a cycle of North African immigrant families being trapped in a low socio-economic class.

Immigrant-origin students and native students who face the same socio-economic hardships have performed relatively similarly in school. Many scholars believe that disadvantages in educational achievement faced by immigrant students in France are largely due to the low socio-economic status of the immigrants (Brinbaum & Boado, 2007; Brinbaum &

Kieffer, 2010; Heath, Rotheron & Kilpi, 2008). In fact, Brinbaum and Kieffer (2010) point out that the low socio-economic status many immigrant families hold is the reason they must attend low performing schools, stating that: “Because of residential and social segregation, immigrant-origin students usually attend a collège in a ZEP” (p. 515). These researchers insist that if all socio-economic variables were removed and these two groups were compared, there would be no difference in their levels of academic achievement. Heath, Rotheron, and Kilpi (2008) stress the idea that socioeconomic factors play the largest role in North African immigrants’ disadvantage in schools in France, rather than ability-driven characteristics. In addition, studies by Brinbaum and Kieffer (2010), and Vallet and Caille (1996) suggest that holding socio-economic factors constant, the parents of North African immigrant students often hold higher aspirations for their children’s educational futures. However, because low socio-economic communities in France are largely populated by immigrant populations, the true problem is that schools and teachers in these ZEP’s are underprepared to meet the needs of the large immigrant populations of students they serve.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION**

“[...]schooling is the main vehicle for children’s successful assimilation” (Hochschild and Cropper, 2010).

The French believe strongly in civic cohesion in order to form a strong nation, therefore, immigration through assimilation into a “homogenous cultural identity” has been the model of the French Republic. Emerson (2011) explains that “[assimilation] means that the individual who has come from a minority immigrant group has totally blended in with the landscape of the country of adoption – in terms of citizenship and mastery of the language, and as a matter of attitudes and perceived identity. The individual may think of him or herself as ‘French’ rather than ‘Moroccan’ ...” (p. 2). This means immigrants in France must give up a part of their identity in order to acclimate to living as citizens in France.

Historically the “ideal French citizen” was formed through the education provided by the national public schooling system. Students were taught explicitly and implicitly that a “French identity” held certain unwavering qualifications and immigrants were expected to assimilate into this homogeneous identity if they wanted to become active members of society. However, it is apparent that North African immigrants have cultural identities that are not easily assimilated within French society and ignoring this fact has resulted in social unrest in France. According to Aitsiselmi (2006), “For French politicians and scholars, cultural pluralism is viewed as a threat to national unity and for them the recognition of ethnic groups in France would represent abandonment of republicanism in favor of the Anglo-Saxon model which recognizes even fosters, communal identities” (Aitsiselmi, 2006, p. 140). This is why these politicians and scholars hold so tightly to the assimilationist ideal.

The school system reflects the country's mindset toward assimilation. To assimilate in France first means to adopt the secular ideal. For the French, "the philosophy of Enlightenment, the foundation of secular politics in Europe, specifically in France, has placed religion in the private domain of individual believers and opposed it to 'public reason'" (Kastoryano, 2003, p.1234). The result of this history is zero tolerance for anything religious in the public arena. Young French students are explicitly taught about the strict interpretation of *laïcité* (secularism) in civics classes during their first year of secondary school. The French interpretation is viewed as strict by outsiders because it makes no exception to the demands of no religious symbols in the public domain. According to O'Connor & Faas (2012), the exclusionary undertones within the civics curriculum are detrimental to Muslim students in their identity formation as French citizens. These exclusionary undertones were brought to the surface with the passing of a law which banned 'ostentatious religious insignia' (such as large crucifixes, yamakas, and veils) in state institutions in 2004. Aitsiselmi (2006) considers the implementation of this law a failure of the French policy makers to reinterpret the strict definition of *laïcité* further pushing assimilation onto newcomers in France, *laïcité* being a concept which does not fit well with identification as a Muslim.

The Republican ideal of *laïcité* is the reason for the conflict between identifying as French and identifying as Muslim in France. *Laïcité* is an ideal of the French republic and demands complete separation of church and state in the public space (Kastoryano, 2003). Kastoryano (2003) analyzes the concept as a result of a long historical struggle between religion and the state of France. In effect, *laïcité* has become the "national religion" in France. This becomes a conflict of interest when considering that the majority of North Africans in France have a cultural heritage strongly tied to Islam. For a devout Muslim the practices required by



their religion inform daily life, from what they eat to how they dress to how they interact with the opposite sex, the domains cannot be separated. Their religion defines their cultural identity. Viewed in this way it is easy to see how conflict would arise in public spaces in France where Muslims participate, specifically in schools.

It is in the schools in France where the conflict between *laïcité* and Islam has been significantly exposed. Issues surrounding the ‘headscarf affairs’ began in 1989. In a public school outside of Paris, three young Muslim girls failed to abide by the school’s rules to take off all “religious insignia” and left their headscarves on while attending school. The girls were forced to leave the school which led to much controversy in the political arena. Politicians defended the decision on the basis that the headscarves blatantly threatened *laïcité*. While on the other hand, “this mobilization reinforced Islam as the core of a collective identity of North African immigrants and their descendants, making religious identity paramount over that of national origins” (Kastoryano, 2003, p. 1239). Aitsiselmi (2006) argues that the debates that have arisen from these affairs and those that eventually led to the 2004 ban of religious symbols demonstrate a clear conflict between religious rights of Muslims in France and the tradition of France as a strictly secular nation. A school that demands Muslim girls must remove their headscarves when they would otherwise prefer to wear them sets an example for all other students that valuing one another’s cultural differences is not a priority. Furthermore, it signifies to all students that there is only one acceptable identity as a French citizen. In France requiring this kind of assimilation is limited in its application to the North African population (largely Muslim) who wish to include their unique cultural and religious identity and at the same time claim French citizenship (Aitsiselmi 2006).

## **CHAPTER 4: MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION THEORY AND APPLICATIONS TO FRANCE**

“[...] the quest for quality and effectiveness in the education system can be compatible with a commitment to equality” (Gomolla, 2006, p. 54).

Multicultural education is a concept grounded in the mission that “all students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as those related to gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, social class, religion, or exceptionality, should experience educational equality in the schools” (Banks and Banks, 2009, p. 25). Although Multicultural Education is a concept that began as a reform movement for education in the U.S., its objectives are applicable and transferable to any society that is made up of diverse cultures, such as France. For North African immigrants in France, this would mean that teachers would try to understand the unique cultural, religious, and linguistic aspects that have shaped their identity, taking these into consideration when planning lessons, instructing and interacting with students and parents. At a higher level, a true multicultural approach to education in a school would look at restructuring formalized curriculum, school policy and politics, and school culture based on the context of the society at large in order to ensure that all students are supported within the schools so they can have academic success (Banks & Banks, 2009).

True multicultural educational reform encompasses changing how teachers teach. In order for teachers to be truly effective in the classroom they must use “culturally responsive teaching” methods. This concept is explained by Geneva Gay (2002) as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). According to her research, students learn best when

they are able to make connections to the material being taught. In addition, varying ethnic groups learn in different ways which are informed by their culture. For example, students who are from cultures that are used to communal living tend to perform better on academic tasks that are group-oriented. In addition, culture informs appropriate interactions between adults and students in academic settings, as seen in Lille, France (Gay, 2002). Instructional strategies need to be varied based on the diverse needs of the students that make up the classroom if all students are to be given the same opportunity to excel academically.

Along with addressing how teachers teach, multicultural educational reform also addresses what teachers teach. Gay (2002) describes three different types of curriculum within the school; formal curriculum, in the context of France these are the objectives and standards mandated by the ministry of education, symbolic curriculum, the signs, symbols, and pictures seen on the walls and bulletin boards in schools, and the societal curriculum, the messages sent to students through the mass media which can lead to prejudices regarding certain ethnic groups. According to multicultural education theory, teachers should abide by the curriculum but interweave issues, concepts, events, and themes from perspectives other than that of the dominant cultural groups in order to inspire all students to learn the material. Concepts within the curriculum in France surrounding immigration and colonization provide opportunities for teachers to introduce varying perspectives.

Every teacher has a unique idea of how to ensure his/her students are awarded an equal opportunity to attain an excellent education. No two teachers have the exact same goals within their own classroom or students with identical sets of needs. This is why it is important to look at what different approaches to multicultural education can look like within varying classrooms. Grant and Sleeter (2010) provide a comprehensive discussion of five approaches that teachers

can use as a framework for guiding their attempts at fostering a multicultural educational experience for their students.

The first approach is called “Teaching of the Exceptional and the Culturally Different.” It assumes that teachers are obligated to prepare their students to “fit into and achieve within the existing school and society” (Grant and Sleeter, 2010, p. 63). Each student has unique strengths and a teacher’s responsibility is to identify these strengths to inform their teaching techniques. There is a certain set of knowledge that students need to know and understand in order to function successfully in society and it is the teacher’s job to “bridge gaps” for the students so that they can acquire this knowledge. In order to understand a society, the functions of certain institutions and the mainstream culture, teachers must “equip students with the cognitive skills, concepts, information, language, and values” relevant to that society (Grant and Sleeter, 2010, p. 63). As we have seen in the case of France, when parents do not understand the school system, their children can slip through the cracks, failing to rise to their full academic potential.

The second approach Grant and Sleeter (2010) illuminate is the “Human Relations” approach to Multicultural Education. Because the world is becoming more interconnected each and every day, it is both the school and the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that students learn how to “live together harmoniously.” If students learn to respect each other and work together in school it will promote social equality and students will carry this mentality with them out into the world. This approach seeks “to promote a feeling of unity, tolerance, and acceptance among people...[it] engenders positive feelings among diverse students, promotes group identity and pride for students of color, reduces stereotypes, and works to eliminate prejudice and biases” (Grand and Sleeter, 2010, p.64).

The “Single-Group Studies” approach examines how knowledge acquired in school is political; consequently, a change should be made to transform the often male-dominated and Eurocentric curriculum into one that focuses on a specific group at a time, learning their history, struggles, and current challenges in order to “improve the group’s status in society” (Grant and Sleeter, 2010, p. 65). Young people will be given the tools to improve their life chances if they are taught about the successful struggles against oppression of certain members of the group with which they identify (Grant and Sleeter, 2010). In France, this may mean that a teacher leads a classroom conversation about the inconsistencies in employment opportunities for people of North African origin while at the same time highlighting North African figures who have risen to successful positions within French society.

There is also an approach referred to as the “Multicultural Education” approach. This approach is significant because it addresses the need for reforms within the entire schooling system. Only then will social reform within a society begin to be initiated. Schools should be reformed to model “equality and pluralism.” Teachers must acknowledge that their students are able to learn at a challenging level in a cooperative way and the school should provide an environment that reflects the diversity of society at large (Grant and Sleeter, 2010). In other words as Counts (1932) states, “Any defensible educational program must be adjusted to a particular time and place, and the degree and nature of the imposition must vary with the social situation” (p.18). An education system that does not take into account the components of present-day society will be irrelevant to the students within the system. In those areas in France where minorities are underrepresented, a responsibility should still exist for a school to teach about the diversity of society at large. If students are not directly exposed to members of another culture within their schools they must be given some background about these groups’ cultures and

heritages within the curriculum. This is a transformative approach to Multicultural Education because it seeks “to reduce prejudice and discrimination against oppressed groups, to work toward equal opportunity and social justice for all groups, and to effect an equitable distribution of power among members of the different cultural groups” (Grant and Sleeter, 2010, p. 66). Its purpose is in fact to create large scale change in society through empowerment.

Finally, the “Multicultural Social Justice Educational” approach assumes that students are not getting the appropriate opportunities in school to question why society functions the way that it does today. Students should have the opportunity to understand how they can work to change the inequities which exist in society while they are at school through taking ownership of their own learning in the classroom. Grant and Sleeter (2010) refer to this as students “direct[ing] a good deal of their learning...helping students become subjects rather than objects in the classroom” (p. 68). This approach seeks “to prepare future citizens to take action to make society better serve the interests of all groups of people, especially those who are of color, poor, female, or have disabilities,” and “to reconstruct society toward greater equity in race, class, gender, and disability” (p. 67). As stated before, different approaches can be taken by different teachers considering their comfort level in implementation and also the content area they are teaching. The major problem within the French school system with regards to potential for implementing these various approaches is the lack of flexibility teachers have in their classrooms

A formal centralized curriculum in France constrains the ability of the teachers to create unique learning opportunities for their students. If a teacher follows only the formal curriculum, or mainstream curriculum referred to by Banks and Banks (2009), both the mainstream students and minority students will be negatively affected. The negative consequences of following this type of curriculum for mainstream students is that “it reinforces

their false sense of superiority, gives them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups” (Banks & Banks, 2009, p. 234). Even more detrimental are the effects to the minority students because “it marginalizes their experiences and cultures and does not reflect their dreams, hopes, and perspectives” (Banks & Banks, 2009, p. 234).

Under a Multicultural Education approach, teachers would have control over the instructional techniques and the kinds of activities they use to teach the objectives. According to Counts (1932), “To the extent that [teachers] are permitted to fashion the curriculum and the procedures of the school, they will definitely and positively influence the social attitudes, ideals, and behavior of the coming generation” (p. 28). When curriculum is formulated by the teacher with multicultural educational approaches in mind, students will be afforded the opportunity to understand other’s points of view. Additionally, each student will have a stake in what is being presented and will feel valued as a member in the classroom, the end result being greater academic success for all.

Even though France continues to view itself as a monocultural society, French society has clearly changed as a result of transnational migration and many French citizens now hold multicultural identities. This notion is reaffirmed by Martiniello (2010): “Clearly, France is a multicultural, multi-identificational society, but it is rarely willing to discuss openly the changes needed to accommodate its diversity and its de facto multicultural character” (912). Wieviorka (2010) presents a multifaceted discussion of multiculturalism in the context of France. He believes that the identities of all people are shaped by more than one culture. He stresses that France has avoided confronting the topic by assigning an American meaning to the concept of

multiculturalism. However, the ‘headscarf affairs’ and the continuing debates over *laïcité* in France prove that many immigrants would like to hold onto part of their cultural identity as Muslims in addition to their French identity.

The curriculum in France ignores cultural diversity and presents history largely through a European perspective. Reforms have been made in history and civics curriculum since the mid-1940s in France to address the new composition of France’s citizenry; however, many deficiencies still exist in addressing the historical and current roles of immigrants in the country (Soysal & Szakács, 2010; Hélot, 2003). Until 2008, topics of colonization and decolonization were largely discussed from a European perspective in textbooks. For example, in the textbooks, France is presented as having a lingering positive influence today in the countries it once colonized (Soysal & Szakács, 2010). The curriculum reforms of 2008, while providing a more ambivalent perspective on both colonization and decolonization, do not fully present the topic from multiple perspectives. The most noticeable shortcoming of the national curriculum in France however, is “the lack of an adequate historical and contemporary discussion of immigration in France, and its cultural and political implications...” (Soysal & Szakács, 2010). Without classroom conversations about contributions of immigrants, past and present, in French society those students who identify as “immigrant-origin” are left out of the discussion. This is significant because according to Okoye-Johnson (2011) systems of education best serve students when cultural diversity is acknowledged and teaching strategies and curriculum are informed by the varying cultures of the students within the classroom.

In addition to minor reforms, French policy makers have attempted to align certain policies with European initiatives which seek to embrace the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe. Between 2000 and 2002 the Ministry of Education implemented policy reform in the



area of “foreign languages” at the primary schooling level. At this time France had begun to understand the need to move away from categorizing itself as a monolingual country, and therefore additional languages were offered at the primary level. This included the offering of Arabic as well as Chinese, Portuguese, Russian and Italian in addition to English, German and Spanish. However, English still dominates as the main “foreign language” chosen for study in France (Hélot, 2003). Also, the “foreign language” classes serve to provide bilingual instruction for monolingual students. For example, a student of North African origin would be underserved in an Arabic course because the curriculum was designed for students with no prior knowledge of the language. The knowledge this student possessed of the Arabic language would be underutilized instead of being used to enhance the cultural and linguistic knowledge of all the students in the classroom in addition to the teacher (Hélot, 2003). While policy changes have been made, it seems that little change has been effected within the schools.

Another way that education policy has had little change is seen in the example of “language maintenance” programs. Acquisition of French is seen as the gateway to successful assimilation and integration into French society and policies have been designed to help students in this process; however, policy aims and actual outcomes do not always align (Hélot, 2003). Hélot (2003) refers to a “language maintenance” program which was created in 1973 and still exists in France today. The program was created as a means for helping immigrant students who were having linguistic struggles with the French language. Nonetheless, the model referred to as ‘language and country of origin’ never met the aim of its original purpose. These courses were developed for immigrant children to help them make connections with their cultural heritage while living in France.

In 1973, when they were first created, the perception was that the immigrants were temporarily living in France and would undoubtedly return to their “home countries.” The special classes were funded by immigrant home countries leaving French teachers skeptical that the intent of the classes was to serve religious purposes. In addition, these courses are often offered outside of regular school hours or require students to be pulled out of their regular classes to attend them, as a result “segregating” the students from the mainstream (Hélot, 2003). These policies have completely failed their original goal, helping immigrant students master the French language: “For mastery of the French is seen as the main factor for social, cultural and professional integration, and ultimately of social cohesions” (Hélot, 2003, p.267-268). Adaptations of these courses have not been made, meaning the off-target procedures are even further underserving the new needs of second and third generation immigrants who also have cultural and linguistic ties to their countries of origin.

Although minor reforms in policy and curriculum have been implemented in France, it is clear that additional reform is needed to make curriculum, instructional strategies, and cultural and linguistic programs more relevant and beneficial for all students. This is the aim of multicultural education.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODS**

To determine if the underachievement of North African immigrant students can be tied to French education policy which encompasses, teaching styles, administrative decisions, and curriculum design, I needed first-hand data on the educational experiences of North African immigrants in France. I designed a 33 question questionnaire that I gave to approximately 5-10 individuals of North African origin who were either attending or had attended French public schools. Because of budget constraints I was unable to conduct fieldwork in France as a part of my primary data collection. Through connections at KU, I was able to correspond with a fellow student and a professor who are both of North African origin and who have relatives living and attending public schools in France. These relatives agreed to be the participants in my primary data collection. They also shared my project idea with their peers (of North African origin) to gain additional participants.

I acquired email addresses of the parents of participants under 18 in order to ensure proper authorization and consent was granted for the participant. This was done through a Qualtrics survey sent via email to the parent/guardian. Qualtrics is a web-based survey program that allows a researcher to create a survey/questionnaire and distribute it electronically to participants. After participants have taken the survey/questionnaire their responses are automatically uploaded into the researcher's online Qualtrics database. The researcher can then use the program to create various representations of the obtained data for analysis.

The survey I designed had an introductory letter which explained my project, an Informed Consent form that described what their child was asked to do as a participant, and a statement which required the parent/guardian to select "yes" in order to formally authorize

participation. Once the authorization and consent form had been sent back to me, I emailed the Qualtrics questionnaire to the participant. There was an additional consent form at the beginning of the questionnaire that the participant was required to read through and had to select “yes” in order to gain access to the questions. Participants who were over 18 were only required to give consent in the questionnaire.

In order to address my main research question: *Are students who are children of North African immigrants in France given equal opportunities within the education system as those who have parents of French origin?* I used a framework provided by James A. Banks titled, “Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education” (See appendix C). Because the aim of multicultural education is to ensure equal opportunities for all within an education system, this framework allowed me to design questions that would reveal if these equal opportunities are awarded to North African immigrant students in France when compared to native French students.

I designed questions that corresponded to one of the five dimensions: knowledge construction, content integration, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and an empowering school culture and social structure. I framed different questions around each of these dimensions. For example, question 29 stated: *“Describe to me what is taught in your history classes concerning French colonization in Africa. Did you feel uncomfortable at any time during these lectures? If so, what made you feel that way?”* This question directly related to the knowledge construction dimension. Within multicultural education, knowledge construction is concerned with helping students understand the underlying assumptions within the curriculum. Concerning French colonization of North Africa, multicultural education approaches would ensure that students are given the opportunity to learn multiple perspectives on colonization, not

just the French perspective. It was vital that I knew what was taught about colonization in the schools, and not just the content, but how the North African students themselves perceived the lessons. With this knowledge I was able to determine if students would be better served by multicultural approaches. Knowledge construction is a vital dimension of multicultural educations according to Banks (2010). It articulates the need for teachers to make an effort to equip students with varying perspectives and frames of reference so that they can begin to understand how and why common assumptions came to exist in the world.

It is Bank's (2010) belief that when aspects of a student's background are incorporated within the material being presented by the teacher, the student will more clearly understand what is being taught and will retain the new material. This is what he refers to as content integration. On my questionnaire, question 20: *"Have guest speakers ever come to your class? If yes, who were they and what was their message?"* and question 31: *"Do you remember ever having done an activity or assignment in school that centered around North African culture or heritage? (Examples: reading a story by a North African writer, ect.). If yes, can you describe the activity?"* address this first dimension. These two questions were written to determine if students were given the opportunity to learn about the experiences of diverse people at school.

Student success in a classroom is enhanced when teachers modify their lessons to address the needs of students from different cultures who comprise the class. Banks (2010) refers to these modifications as equity pedagogy. Banks (2010), Gay (2002) and many other scholars on multicultural education argue that there are certain groups (Africans largely emphasized) who perform better when working in groups and also when discussing the material verbally with one another. Questions 24 and 26 centered on the idea of classroom modifications: *"Do teachers interweave group activities into their lessons and if so, how often? Do teachers pause during*

*their lessons and allow students time to discuss the material with one another in order to better serve those students who learn better while interacting verbally?”* These are important questions to address because failure to use these strategies could be one of the largest contributing factors to the comparatively lower academic achievement of North African immigrant students.

Prejudices can be reduced in school when students have opportunities for interpersonal interaction with one another (Banks, 2010). The prejudice reduction dimension of Bank’s (2010) model encompasses the “lessons and activities teachers use to help students develop positive attitudes toward different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups” (p. 21). Banks (2010) states clearly that students often enter school with strongly formed prejudices about groups that are different from themselves. Because school is the place where children have opportunities to interact with those who are different from themselves it is critical that teachers provide occasions where students can learn about one another’s differences through positive interactions and lessons about diverse groups of people. I developed question 25: *“If you ever have the opportunity to work in groups, do teachers assign students to the group or do students choose their group members?”* because I wanted to know if the teachers push students to work with others who might be different from themselves. Adolescents tend to first form connections with students who are similar to them and then become comfortable working with their “friends” rather than taking a chance to get to know someone different. When teachers encourage students to work in groups often and to work with different people it helps students form interpersonal relationships and through these relationships, prejudices are broken down.

Another way that students can learn about diverse groups of people at school is through teachers including guest speakers in their lessons. By presenting positive role models from

various cultural groups to the students, teachers can help break down prejudices and stereotypes held by their students. I revisited the responses to question 20 about guest speakers in order to determine if this was something that was already occurring in public schools in France or if this is a strategy that could be used to reduce societal discrimination.

The final dimension of Bank's (2010) model of multicultural education is creating an empowering school culture. When schools promote gender, racial and social-class equity they create an environment where students feel empowered and can take ownership of their education. For example, an empowering school culture would mean that effort on the part of the teacher is made to foster positive relationships with the parents of their students. Question number 19 asked: *"What steps does your school take to promote parental involvement at your school (do parents help out in the classroom, do parents attend field trips with students, ect.?"* As has already been discussed, North African immigrant parents often do not fully understand the structure of the French school system and many times the academic potential of their children suffers because of this lack of knowledge. A school that provides an empowering culture would promote parent involvement in order to break down these barriers.

Schools embody an empowering culture as Banks (2010) has stated, when they promote equity. In France, North African immigrant students are over-represented on the lower track. Question 17: *"Do you ever attend classes with students who are following a different track than your own? If so, what classes are they?"* was created to determine how segregated students become once their track has been identified. An empowering school culture would promote interaction of students from various tracks rather than isolate students on lower tracks while providing a "superior" education to those on upper tracks.

There were a few limits to my methods for data collection that need to be discussed. First of all, my inability to conduct research in France limited my data collection to having participants respond to a specific set of questions rather than being able to conduct an open-ended conversation about their individual educational experiences. Not being able to ask follow-up questions definitely constrained the level of detail I was able to receive from each participant. Furthermore, because I was unable to travel to France, I could not recruit participants myself and had to rely on only two North African contacts at the University of Kansas to help me recruit participants. Participants expressed concerns in taking the questionnaire because they were skeptical as to my true intention in wanting to know about their educational experiences being that I am a researcher from the United States. Singling out participants specifically because of their ethnic/racial/cultural background is not something that is commonly done in France and so potential participants were again wary about my intentions.

Additional constraints in my research methods were the ages and locations of my participants. Because I was so limited in the amount of participants that I could reach through my two contacts, my respondents ages varied from 18 to 35 years old. Therefore, it must be taken into consideration that my participants went through their schooling during different periods of time in France. Also, for the same reason of limited contacts, my participants were concentrated mainly in the city of Marseille. This area is known to have a historically large population of North African immigrants because of its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. I was hoping, but unable to find any willing participants in school districts near Paris, an area of great interest to me because of its large populations of North African immigrants. Despite the constraints described above, I was able to get some rich data which enlightened me as to the actual experience of several North African students in France.



I will start my analysis by looking at the responses given concerning each of the five dimensions of multicultural education as described by Banks (2010) in order to suggest the most appropriate steps for educational reform in France in order to better serve North African immigrant students. Then I will look at the responses to the big question that motivated my research, question 30: *(From your point of view, are North African immigrants/children of North African immigrants in France awarded equal opportunities within the educational system as students who have parents of French origin? Explain.)*.

## CHAPTER 6: DATA ANALYSIS

I was able to collect full responses to the questionnaire from five North African immigrants living in France. Of the five respondents, three were of Algerian origin, one was of Tunisian origin and one was of Moroccan origin. Three respondents were male, one was female and one chose not to identify. The families of the participants immigrated to France for a variety of reasons including, access to a steady job, access to public education and access to higher education; the greatest of these responses being access to a steady job. Four out of five of the participants were born in France and the fifth moved to France as an infant. On a scale of religiosity, 1 being not at all religious and 10 being very religious, all respondents identified as 8 or higher. On a similar scale describing the strength of respondents' identification to their North African heritage, two respondents replied with a 10, while the other three respondents replied, 6, 7 and 8. Even though all of the respondents were born France (with the exception of one being an infant when immigrating to France), only two of the respondents acknowledged French as their native language.

Several other questions were asked which inquired about the students' academic setting and performance. These included inquiring about the size of the school, the city where the school was located, the student's average gpa (scale out of 20) and the track the student followed in high school. Four of my five participants were from Marseille and attended schools in the varying arrondissements (districts) in the city. The fifth participant was from a small village in the north-east of France. Schools ranged in size from 120 students to 620 students. In France gpa is based on a raw score out of 20 points. A score of 15/20 is seen as a very good academic gpa, a 12/20 is average, and anything below a 10/20 is a failing academic gpa. All of the participants who shared their academic scores (4 out of 5 respondents) had an academic gpa of

12 or lower; two students had a gpa of 12, one student had a gpa of 10 and one had a gpa of 9.5. Furthermore, each of these participants followed either a general (2 respondents) or technological track (2 respondents). The responses provided by the participants in this section of the survey reveal that the academic performance of these students collectively was average or below average; however, none of the respondents followed a vocational track. I will now turn to a closer examination of the responses of the participants based on Banks (2010) five dimensions of multicultural education, beginning with the dimension of knowledge construction.

### *Dimension 1: Knowledge Construction*

The question concerning what is taught about colonization in history classes is the indicator I have chosen to understand how knowledge is constructed in French schools. The consensus I gathered from the respondents is that not much time is spent discussing the topic of colonization in school. The opinions on the subject of colonization varied from one saying that the topic is TABOU in France, to the lessons were hard to listen to from the standpoint of a North African, to the most extreme opinion stating that in these lessons France is always depicted as right and Africa is always wrong and that the participant's parents recounted a different version of colonization entirely from the one that is taught in school.

Knowledge construction as described by Banks (2010) denotes the need for teachers "to help students understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the way in which knowledge is constructed" (Banks, 2010, p. 23). If, as in the case of curriculum surrounding colonization, the frames of reference of the North African group are left out, this group is immediately made to choose between disassociating with their cultural heritage due to the

negative undertones associated with the part played by Africans before, during, and after colonization or feeling uncomfortable and angry because the story being told in school does not match the story they know to be true. If teachers presented this topic in a way that helped students understand both sides of the story, North African students would not have to feel uncomfortable during these lessons and might even be able to add perspectives shared by their family to enrich the discussion. From the responses I gathered, it is clear that teachers and not including opportunities for their students to construct knowledge within the current education system.

### *Dimension 2: Content Integration*

These students are not disconnected from their cultural heritage as North Africans. In fact, they closely identify with this cultural heritage. In order to help the students make connections to the content being taught, a method which Banks (2010 ) and Gay (2002) deem incredibly important, it would make sense that North African heritage and culture should be interwoven into various areas of curriculum in France in order to help this group make these important connections to what is being taught. In regards to content integration, only one of the respondents could name a time when North African culture/heritage was used within the French curriculum. The respondent noted a time when a reading was assigned by the author Albert Camus. In addition, not a single respondent mentioned ever having a guest speaker come to a class. Guest speakers provide varying perspectives to the students through sharing their life experiences which in turn can inspire students of different backgrounds to set goals they might not have thought attainable. The fact that content integration is minimal at best in French schools is a reality that should be given much attention because it is a definite avenue for increasing the academic performance of North African students.

### *Dimension 3: Equity Pedagogy*

Banks (2010) says that teachers are implementing an equity pedagogy when they take into account that members of diverse groups from different racial, cultural, gender, and social-classes learn better through varying means. In other words, teachers use varying instructional techniques because some groups may not learn best when instructors are simply telling them what to know. What I found in the responses of my participants is that working in groups is something that is done at most, one time a week. In addition, the majority of respondents said that they rarely or never have the opportunity to discuss material with a partner during lessons. This reality could be an additional cause of the underperformance of North African students in France since we know that members of this group benefit largely from working in group settings. Additionally, the aims of the “Multicultural Social Justice Educational Approach” to education examined above describe the importance of students learning to be subjects rather than objects in the learning process. This can only be actualized if students have time to think about, discuss and question the material with which they are being presented. This is not occurring on a regular basis in public schools in France.

### *Dimension 4: Prejudice Reduction*

Discrimination in France is a topic that is not openly discussed. However, when we look at the disproportionate unemployment percentages of North African men in France and the discrimination noted by Ash (2012) against those with foreign names, it is clear that it does exist and needs to be dealt with. Schools are a place where students have the opportunity to work with others from different racial or ethnic groups than their own even if the community they return to is homogeneous. Schools are the institutions where prejudices and stereotypes can be reduced

and broken down through positive interpersonal interactions between students. These interpersonal interactions can be prompted by teachers through assigning students to work in groups.

Having been a teacher, I know that students often feel most comfortable working with those who are similar to them. For example, at Southern Vance High School in Henderson, NC I often saw groups form in my class where White students worked with White students, Black students with Black students, and Hispanic students with Hispanic students. Sometimes groups would even form around gender identification. If a teacher wants to ensure that new connections are being made that have the ability to break down barriers between students, the teacher needs to be the one assigning the groups. When asking my participants about their ability to choose groups when working on group assignments (which we must remember did not occur very often) three of the respondents said the students always chose their groups, one said that sometimes the teachers chose but often the students picked their group members, and one respondent said the teachers chose the groups. The lack of purposefully planned group work assignments by teachers is another example of how a dimension of multicultural education is missing in France.

#### *Dimension 5: Empowering School Culture*

The final dimension of Banks' (2010) dimensions of multicultural education is the creation of an empowering school culture. In France this begins with parental involvement and parental knowledge of the school system. A child is empowered in a school setting when their parents know how to advocate for them and teach their children how to be advocates for themselves. This happens when the school is interested in involving the parents. In my questionnaire results, not a single student said their parent was involved in activities at their

school. In fact, one respondent said that his parents were not involved in his schooling because of their illiteracy.

Another way in which a school can provide a culture of empowerment is when students feel that they are getting the best education possible. When students are segregated into separate tracks, students following lower tracks are not exposed to the type of academic rigor that those students who are on upper tracks are exposed to. Four out of five of my respondents said they never attended a class with students following a different track from the one they were following. In France, where lower tracks are often represented by minority students this segregation becomes racially and ethnically based and results in the life opportunities of groups like North Africans being substantially lower than those of Native French students. This does not provide a culture of empowerment within schools and could be a primary source of the overabundance of North African immigrants in low socioeconomic groups in France.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

Within my analysis above it becomes clear that Banks' (2010) dimensions of multicultural education are not present in schools in France. This leads me to conclude that children of North African immigrants are not being awarded equal opportunities within the education system in France when compared to those of French origin. According to the literature, the causes for academic underachievement of North African immigrant students in France were the low socioeconomic status common to the majority of this group, the language and cultural barriers faced within schools and the curriculum needs not being met within the schools. My research focused on the latter two causes using Banks' framework in order to determine if improvements in schools can work to enhance the performance of North African students in France as a means to increasing their life opportunities and breaking the cycle of their low socioeconomic classification.

Recommendations to French educators have been made in order to help ease the tension created by cultural conflicts between native French citizens and North African immigrants. For example, Seljug (1997) wrote that:

“School curriculum should be revised and lessons about Islam, and the history, languages, and literature of the Maghreb should be included in school text books. This will help the younger generation to know and understand better its neighbors living just on the other side of the Mediterranean. Revision of the school curriculum does not mean that the recommendations of the Islamic activists are necessarily incorporated. As the issue has been raised by the French Muslims, it deserves a thoughtful response” (Seljug, 1997, p. 75).

What he is suggesting is a reshaping of the curriculum to include a discussion of the North African culture so that native French students can learn about the cultural differences of their



classmates and so that North African immigrant students can feel a part of the educational system. Cultural tensions arise when ignorance prevails. Schools are the perfect institutions to interrupt this ignorance.

My respondents reaffirmed my conclusion that equal opportunities are not awarded within the education system in France. When asked in question 30: “*From your point of view, are North African immigrants/children of North African immigrants in France awarded equal opportunities within the educational system as students who have parents of French origin? Explain,*” two respondents firmly stated that North African immigrant students do not have equal educational opportunities because schools in certain communities have inferior resources as compared to other communities and in certain communities you will find much lower quality teaching. In addition, one respondent added that North African immigrant students are at a disadvantage because their parents are less-equipped to help them academically when compared to native French parents. These responses signal a dramatic need for a shift in the way educational methodology is viewed and implemented in France if an education system there is truly meant to act as an equalizer amongst its populace.

There are multiple steps that could be taken within the French education system to address the needs of North African students. Firstly, I suggest that there needs to be a strong push for students to take Arabic classes. Ukpokodu and Ukpokodu (2012) emphasize the importance of language by stating that, “Knowledge of foreign languages facilitates global citizenship. Because a language is a primary reference point and bearer of a people’s culture, a [person] who is able to interact in a foreign language is able to participate in and inherit some aspects of that culture, including philosophical concepts” (p.23). If students are to become cognizant of the North African culture, it must begin with acquiring basic knowledge of the

native language of that area. Teachers also need to spend time learning the languages of their students and the parents of their students in order to be able to effectively communicate with the students and to involve the parents in the schools.

This brings me to my second suggestion; a greater effort needs to be made on the part of teachers and administrators to ensure that the parents of their students understand the school system and have opportunities to be involved. A recent article highlights this issue. In November of 2010, the director of a French primary school denied the request of a mother to accompany her child on a field trip because the mother was veiled and therefore not abiding by French definition of *laïcité*. The director of the school stated that her “personal convictions” informed her decision to refuse any veiled women from attending school related events (“Islamophobie dans une école élémentaire de pantin,” 2011). What message does this send to the child, the mother, the other students and the community at large? It is not only a signal of intolerance to the cultural identity of the woman, but more importantly it is a sign of complete disregard to the importance of having parental involvement in a child’s education. This student undoubtedly felt shame in the fact that the French educational system had branded his mother an “outsider.” Furthermore, any attempt to involve this parent in the future academic or extra-curricular activities of her child were stifled by this one judgment. It is safe to assume that this woman’s situation is not unique in France and this is a reality that must be changed if working to enhance the educational outcomes of North African students in France is the goal.

Much reform needs to be centered on teacher training programs. Students who are planning to become teachers in France need to be taught about the potential benefits of teaching to diverse learners through multicultural education approaches. This is really the core of multicultural education, realizing that the students within the classroom are diverse, they have

diverse learning styles, and they have diverse backgrounds. Once teachers are open to this fact and believe in the need to provide equal opportunities for a great education to every child, systematic changes will begin to occur. Teachers in France need to understand the importance stressed by Banks (2010) and Gay (2002) that learning becomes easier for a child when the content is relevant to their lives. Furthermore, their instructional techniques need to be altered so that more learning opportunities are provided in group settings.

North African students in France will unquestionably benefit in many ways from a restructuring of curriculum to showcase the robustness of North African culture, this is my third suggestion. Students will be able to make more connections within the lessons if elements of their culture and background are interwoven into the curriculum. This will enhance their ability to retain the information being taught, all leading to higher educational outcomes. Additionally, when native French students are exposed to the richness of North African culture and heritage in a way that is not threatening (as it is often portrayed in the media) prejudices and stereotypes they once held will be lessened. This has the potential to reduce societal conflict provoked by cultural differences.

On the subject of teaching French colonization in North Africa, George Counts (1932) provides a noteworthy idea: “An education that does not strive to promote the fullest and most thorough understanding of the world is not worthy of the name” (p. 12). It is clear through the responses I received on my questionnaire that the French perspective on colonization is the only one that is taught in classroom. Applying Counts’ philosophy on the subject of colonization, teachers must open their students’ minds to the idea that there are different interpretations of history depending from which side you choose to look. The topic of colonization in France presents a valuable opportunity for instilling this knowledge into the minds of students in order

to help them better understand the world, to help them better understand one another, and to ensure North African students feel comfortable during these conversations.

When asked what teachers, administrators and policy makers could do to better serve North African students within schools, not a single respondent in my study could determine a suggestion for improving educational outcomes of this group. However, the continued underperformance of this group of students is not a societal reality that should be accepted. Changes can be made and the multicultural approaches to educational reform I have suggested will begin to bring about these needed changes.

Much research has been done on the application of multicultural education in U.S. public schools and many researchers have discussed a need for France to redefine itself as a multicultural society; however, little has been said of multicultural education in France as a means for developing a “multicultural mindset” among French citizens. My research has sought to fill this gap by taking an in-depth look at a group of students who might benefit from this type of educational reform movement.

The educational outcomes of North African immigrants in France are markedly lower than those of their French counterparts. This is a reality that has been shown through lower standardized test scores (PISA), lower track placement, and overall lower academic performance (Panel d'Élèves du Second Degré). Some researchers (Brinbaum & Boado, 2007; Brinbaum & Kieffer, 2010; Heath, Rethon & Kilpi, 2008), say that the effects of low-income status are the sole cause of the disparity. However, if the underachievement of this group of students continues and changes are not made within the education system, members of this group will

continue to find themselves underperforming academically leaving them with low paying jobs and trapped in the lower echelon of society, continuing the cycle of disparity (See Appendix E).

A great amount of a child's identity formation through socialization takes place in schools. This is where children spend the majority of their time during the week (Sabatier, 2007). In public schools in France they learn about what it means to identify as "French" through the formal civics and history curriculum as well as through multiple channels of informal or "hidden" curriculum (Gay, 2002). Here, North African immigrants in France receive the message of what they must believe and what they must give up in order to be accepted in society.

At its core, multicultural education is a movement that is meant to confront diversity head-on in the classroom. It does so by acknowledging the contributions, both past and present, of those individuals who are members of society, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Scholars like Banks and Banks (2009) and Gay (2002), among many others, believe that a student's academic achievement is critically tied to the stake they have in the classroom. They believe underachievement can be combatted by making students feel valued, giving clear connections to the content they are learning, fostering an empowering school culture, and reducing prejudice that results from false societal perceptions. Multicultural education was not intended to be specific to the U.S. context; instead it was intended to be a framework for any society with a multicultural citizenry, this includes France.

Many schools within communities in France serve populations of students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. An option for French educational policy makers that could potentially better meet the needs of these diverse students is the implementation of multicultural

education. This reform movement would call for alterations in curriculum as well as alterations in the beliefs and practices of teachers and administrators in the schools. The intention of these reforms would be to provide cultural connections for all students within the material, help students better understand one another, and create a school environment that appreciates diversity.

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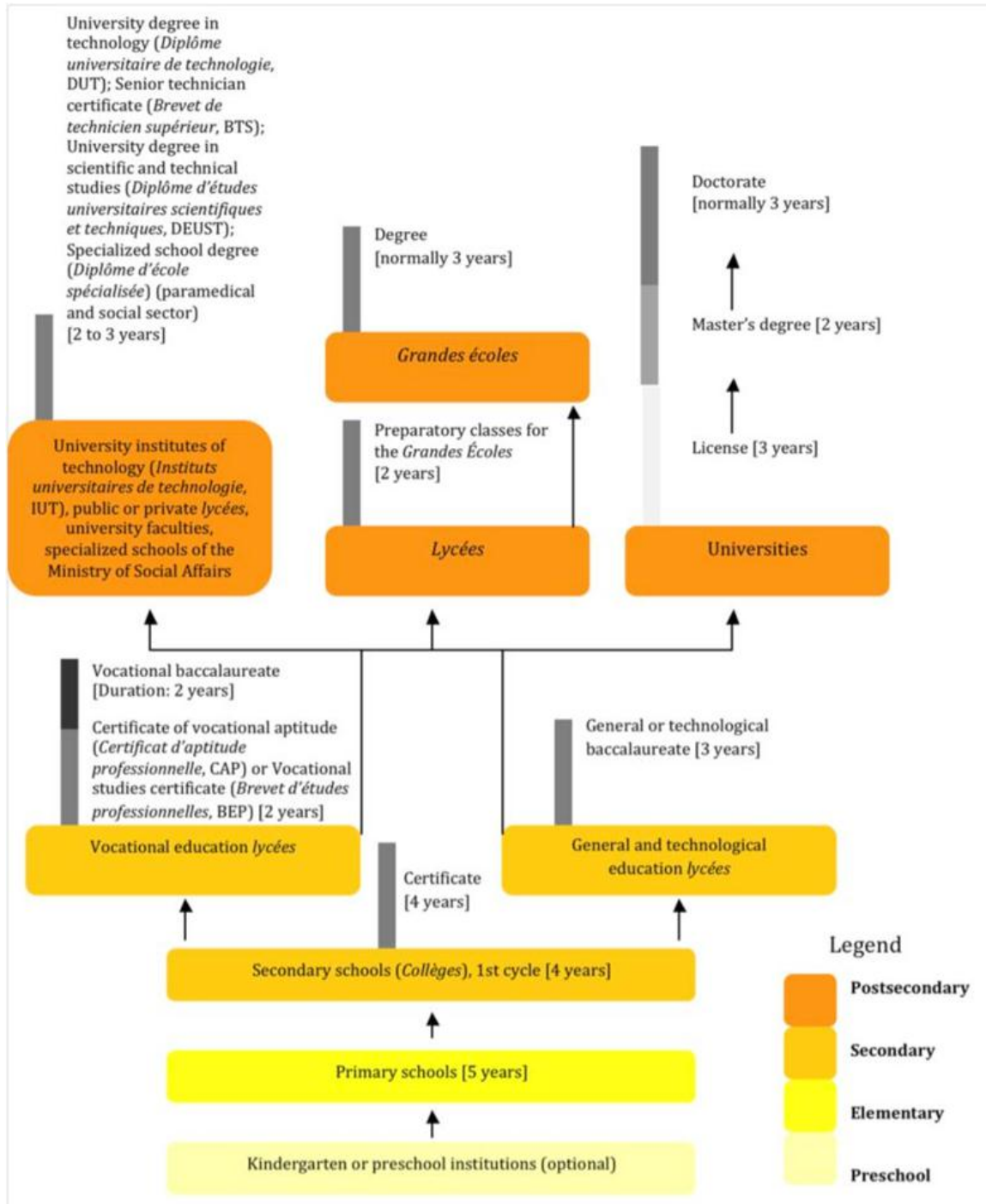


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## Appendices

### Appendix A:



Appendix A: <http://education.cicic.ca/app/profile/?lng=en&cid=1> Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials

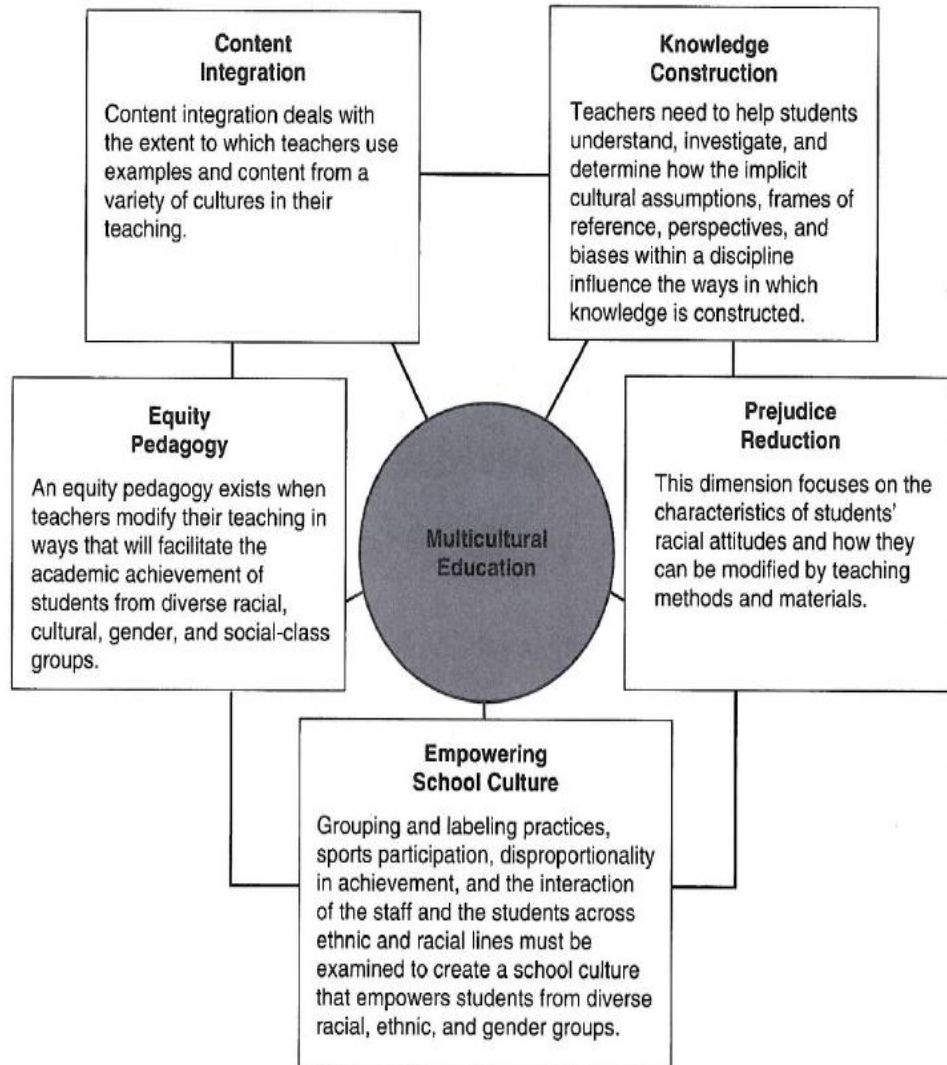
Appendix B:

<b>Système Français</b>	<b>Système Américain</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>2-3 ans</b> crèche</li> <li>• <b>3-4 ans</b> petite maternelle</li> <li>• <b>4-5 ans</b> moyenne maternelle</li> <li>• <b>5-6 ans</b> grande section de maternelle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>2-3 ans</b> nursery school/day care</li> <li>• <b>3-4 ans</b> preschool</li> <li>• <b>4-5 ans</b> pre-kindergarten</li> <li>• <b>5-6 ans</b> kindergarten</li> </ul>
<b>École Primaire</b>	<b>Elementary School</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>6-7 ans</b> = CP</li> <li>• <b>7-8 ans</b> = CE1</li> <li>• <b>8-9 ans</b> = CE2</li> <li>• <b>9-10 ans</b> = CM1</li> <li>• <b>10-11 ans</b> = CM2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>6-7 ans</b> = 1st grade</li> <li>• <b>7-8 ans</b> = 2nd grade</li> <li>• <b>8-9 ans</b> = 3rd grade</li> <li>• <b>9-10 ans</b> = 4th grade</li> <li>• <b>10-11 ans</b> = 5th grade</li> </ul>
<b>Collège</b>	<b>Junior High School</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>11-12 ans</b> = sixième</li> <li>• <b>12-13 ans</b> = cinquième</li> <li>• <b>13-14 ans</b> = quatrième</li> <li>• <b>14-15 ans</b> = troisième</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>11-12 ans</b> = 6th grade</li> <li>• <b>12-13 ans</b> = 7th grade</li> <li>• <b>13-14 ans</b> = 8th grade</li> <li>• <b>14-15 ans</b> = 9th grade</li> </ul>
<b>Lycée</b>	<b>High School</b> (selon l'école, certaines high school commencent au 9th grade)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>15-16 ans</b> = seconde</li> <li>• <b>16-17 ans</b> = première</li> <li>• <b>17-18 ans</b> = terminale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>15-16 ans</b> = 10th grade</li> <li>• <b>16-17 ans</b> = 11th grade</li> <li>• <b>17-18 ans</b> = 12th grade</li> </ul>

French and US education systems- Consulat Général De France à Boston.

<http://www.consulfrance-boston.org/spip.php?article2177>

Appendix C:



**Figure 1.4 The Dimensions of Multicultural Education**

Source: Copyright © 2009 by James A. Banks.

Banks, 2010, p. 23

Appendix D:

**The North African Experience in Public Schools in France: Questionnaire**

**Personal History**

1. What is your gender?
2. How old are you and what grade are you in?
3. What is your country of origin?
4. When did your family/parents move to France?
5. Why did your family move to France? (Underline the one that best describes your reason for moving)
  - a. Access to public education
  - b. Access to steady work
  - c. Professional job support
  - d. Access to high quality university
6. What is your native language?
7. Where did your family live prior to moving to France? Describe the city.
8. Where do you live now? Describe the neighborhood in which you live.
9. How strongly do you identify with your North African heritage? (Underline or highlight a number below: on a scale 1 being do not at all identify as North African and 10 being very strongly identify as North African).  
  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10
10. Are you religious? (Underline or highlight a number below: on the scale 1 being not at all religious and 10 being very religious)  
  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10
11. What is your religion?

**Your School**

12. What school do you attend? Is it public/private/religiously affiliated?
13. How many students attend your school? What is the average class size?
14. How well do you do in school? What is your current gpa? What is your current class rank (out of how many students)?
15. If you attend a lycee: What tracks are represented at your school (are there vocational, technical, and general tracks)?
16. If you attend a lycee: What track are you following?

17. Do you ever attend classes with students who are following a different track than your own? If so, what classes are they?
18. Describe a normal week's schedule at your school (What classes do you have on what day)?
19. What steps does your school take to promote parental involvement at your school (do parents help out in the classroom, do parents attend field trips with students, ect.)?
20. Have guest speakers ever come to your class? If yes, who were they and what was their message?

### Your Teachers

21. Describe the relationship between teachers and students at your schools.
22. Have you or anyone you know of in your school had a negative interaction with a teacher? If yes, describe what happened.
23. Do your teachers do anything specific in the classroom to make sure all students feel respected and that their opinions are valued? List these things.
24. How often do teachers give assignments that require you to work in a group? (Every day, twice a week, once a week, a few times each month, seldom, never).
25. If you ever have the opportunity to work in groups, do teachers assign students to the group or do students choose their group members?
26. How often during a lesson do you have the opportunity to discuss the material with a classmate For example, does the teacher pause during the lecture and ask you to talk with your partner about a question pertaining to the lesson? (Underline or highlight one)

Every day   twice a week   once a week   a few times each month   seldom   never

27. Do you feel that your educational needs have been/are being met by your teachers? If yes, what things do they do to help perform well in school? If no, what could they do to help you perform better in school?

### Your Experiences

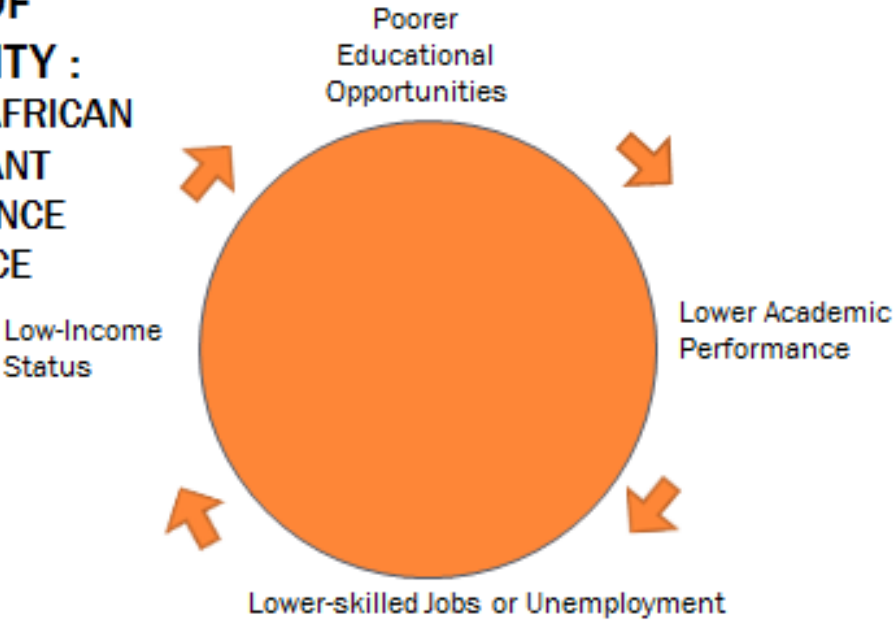
28. Have you ever encountered racism while at school? Can you describe the situation and the circumstances in which it occurred?
29. Describe to me what is taught in your history classes concerning French colonization in Africa. Did you feel uncomfortable at any time during these lectures? If so, what made you feel that way?
30. From your point of view, are North African immigrants/children of North African immigrants in France awarded equal opportunities within the educational system as students who have parents of French origin? Explain.
31. Do you remember ever having done an activity or assignment in school that centered around North African culture or heritage? (Examples: reading a story by a North African writer, ect.) If yes, can you describe the activity?

32. What (if anything) could teachers/administrators/schools do better to ensure all students, regardless of race or ethnic backgrounds are valued members of French society? (For example: should curriculum be altered, should students be allowed to voice their opinions more, ect?
33. What are your future goals in regards to education? In what profession do you see yourself in the future?



Appendix E:

**CYCLE OF  
DISPARITY :  
NORTH AFRICAN  
IMMIGRANT  
EXPERIENCE  
IN FRANCE**



Created by author - Kathryn Floyd, 2013

Appendix F:

## Human Subjects Committee Approval, University of Kansas

Human Subjects Committee Lawrence

Youngberg Hall | 2385 Irving Hill Road | Lawrence, KS 66045 | (785) 864-7429 | HSCL@ku.edu |  
research.ku.edu

2/8/2013

HSCL #20536

Kathryn Floyd

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence has received your response to its full IRB review of your research project,

20536 Floyd/Obadare (Global & International) Children of North African Immigrants: Experiences in Public Schools in France and found that it complied with policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. The subjects will be at minimal risk. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your consent form must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the consent form sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human\\_subjects\\_compliance\\_training](https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training).
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your

project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms

Coordinator

Human Subjects Committee - Lawrence

cc: Ebenezer Obadare