

**Tracking**

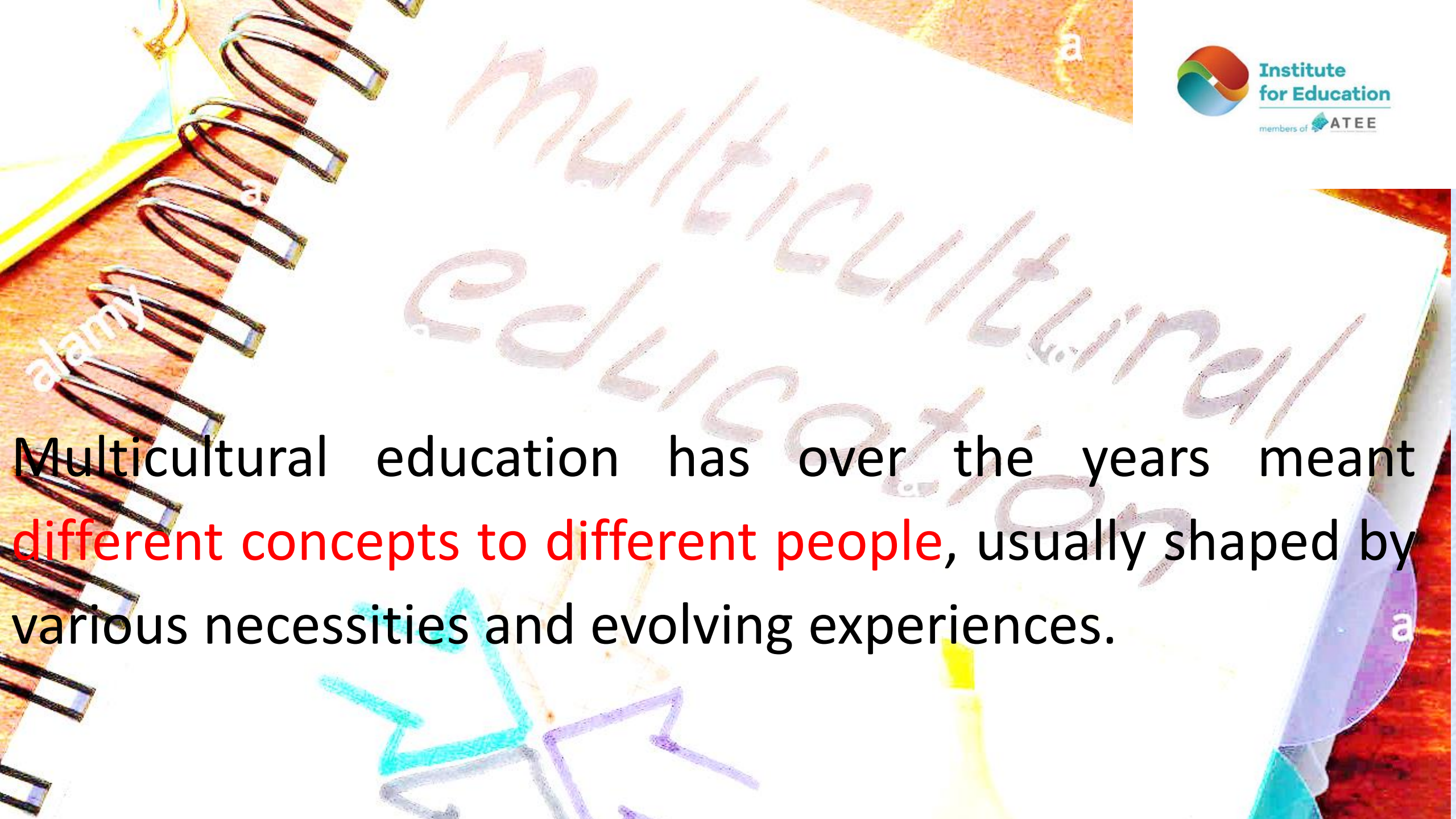


**Conceptual Development**

**in**

**Multicultural Education:**

**A mixed-methods approach.**



Multicultural education has over the years meant **different concepts to different people**, usually shaped by various necessities and evolving experiences.

- Multicultural education is **an inherent part of education** and **not an add-on** in response to an expected predicament.

- ME is still struggling to become a salient part of the curriculum directly offered to all students.
- In fact some would argue that educators have downgraded it to some topics within social studies, fine arts and language arts.
- These attitudes somehow contort the scope behind ME philosophies and severely limit its implementation to superficial activities in schools.

- The major hurdle from implementing effective multicultural strategies in the classroom are teachers themselves who voice sceptical arguments ranging from

- “lack of time”
- “lack of feasibility”
- “addition to an already overburdened curriculum’

Such convictions being rooted in **the erroneous perception of ME as an added content** that educators must append to the existing curricula as a result of new political decisions.

- ME professes more than mere content. It purports to encompass

- inclusive and innovative teaching strategies.
- an improved learning environment (Vassallo 2008, 2014),
- supported instructional delivery
- contextual leadership (Vassallo 2016a, 2016b) and
- evaluation.

- Banks and Banks (2001) and Neito (2000) strongly believe that teachers need to project ME as a springboard to promote justice and equality, high academic outcomes but most of all democratic citizenship.

- To infuse these theoretical conceptions into practical learning, educators need a repertoire of skills to:

- a) systematically weave a tapestry of topics into the central core of curriculum,
- b) teaching strategies,
- c) school headship,
- d) policymaking,
- e) guidance and counselling,
- f) classroom climate, and
- g) performance assessment.



- Research emphasizes that teachers need to have the necessary skills to meet the impending needs of a :

- diverse community of students
- Moving across different developmental stages,
- have different learning styles, and
- come from diverse backgrounds.

- Improving multicultural skills is,

1. an act of compassion,
2. a moral commitment and
3. a pledge for social justice.

- teacher preparation programs often fail to expose teacher candidates to diverse perspectives and experiences.

# Concept Maps, Critical Analysis and Learning Theories.

Concept mapping as a **procedure of making sense out of a set of differing concepts.** They can be organized into graphical illustrations by linking phrases and sets of ideas, forming new propositions.

Concept maps are

- 1) highly effective tools which enable deep critical analysis.
- 2) graphic devices depicting a set of concept meanings within a proposed framework.
- 3) provide a visual diagrammatic representation of conceptual meanings used to scaffold meaningful learning, both at an individual or group level.
- 4) These diagrammatic representations provides opportunity for adult learners to assimilate novel concepts into existing cognitive schema.

## • 2.2 Reflective journals as a research tool

- What is a reflective enquiry?
- A reflective inquiry as the **active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends.**

# Reflective journals are:

- 1) a deliberate act which **focuses on an idea** and considers its implications in future.
- 2) **reduce the chance of erroneous decision-making** and allows a person to make informed choices based on the examination and re-examination of information collected from many experiences, thus resulting in purposeful thinking.

- **Through concept mapping and self-reflective journaling, adult learners can:**

- ✓ prioritize ideas,
- ✓ critically analyse concepts,
- ✓ make decisions about what is meaningful to them.
- ✓ They educators to construct new knowledge at a deeper level.

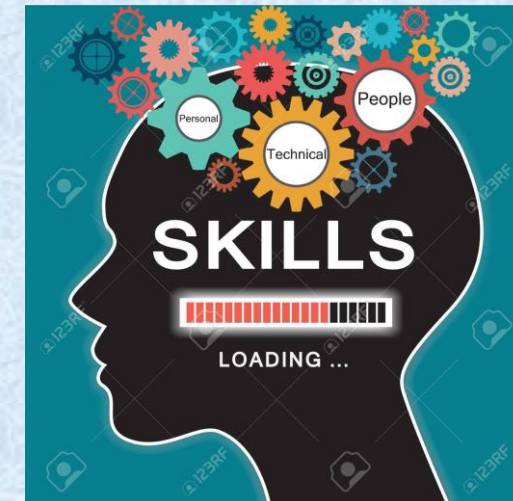
# Methodology

- The researcher's scope in this study was to **gain insight** into how educators' concepts of ME changed from before to after an intensive course in ME.
- The focus centred on the participants' **initial** conceptualization of ME to their **evolved** conceptualization at the end of the course.



- The researcher divided the learning outcomes of the course into four major categories namely:

- *Knowledge,*
- *Understanding,*
- *Competences and*
- *Critical Abilities*



- The researcher sought to measure the effect of an intensive course by delving deeply into each of these learning outcomes.



# Participants

- 29 educators enrolled in a voluntary multicultural education course of 20 hours. The cohort was composed of educators of
  - Maltese Nationality (21),
  - Germany (1),
  - Lebanon (1),
  - Albania (2),
  - Greece (2),
  - Morocco (1) and
  - Libya (1).
- There were female ( $n_f = 26$ ), male ( $n_m = 3$ ).
- **The lecturer of the course, who is also the author of this paper is Maltese.**



- **Course content**

- The course consisted of a once a week interactive lecture of 2.5 hours for a span of 8 weeks. This amounted to a total of 20 hours. The course was intended to offer participants the following learning outcomes:



## Knowledge:

At the end of the sessions the participants would be able to:

- Apply basic knowledge about cultures into professional development sessions,
- Apply theoretical knowledge into practical understanding of their surrounding cultures,
- Create bridges between cultures that facilitate instructional processes,
- Plan for culturally inclusive schools.

# Understanding:

- Examine his/her multicultural attitudes and how these impinge on his/her daily, decisions,
- b) understand why incorporating cultural frameworks is important in the work of a school leader,
- c) discuss with colleagues the importance of incorporating cultural aspects in various aspect of their work,



## Understanding: ...

- understand the impact of different cultural systems on Education,
- interpret cultural symbols,
- compare cultural systems,
- apply knowledge of cultural systems to assist colleagues, students and parents dealing with cultural incompatibilities,
- shift from one cultural frame of reference to another,
- mediate cultural incompatibilities,

## Critical Abilities:

- engage in self-reflective analysis about his/ her own culture and how it impinges on his/her work as educator,
- be able to partake in discussions leading to a high level of critical analysis using the models researched during lectures,
- reflect on their legal, ethical and moral responsibilities to provide the best education,
- students coming from all racial, ethnic and cultural groups present in their educational establishments.



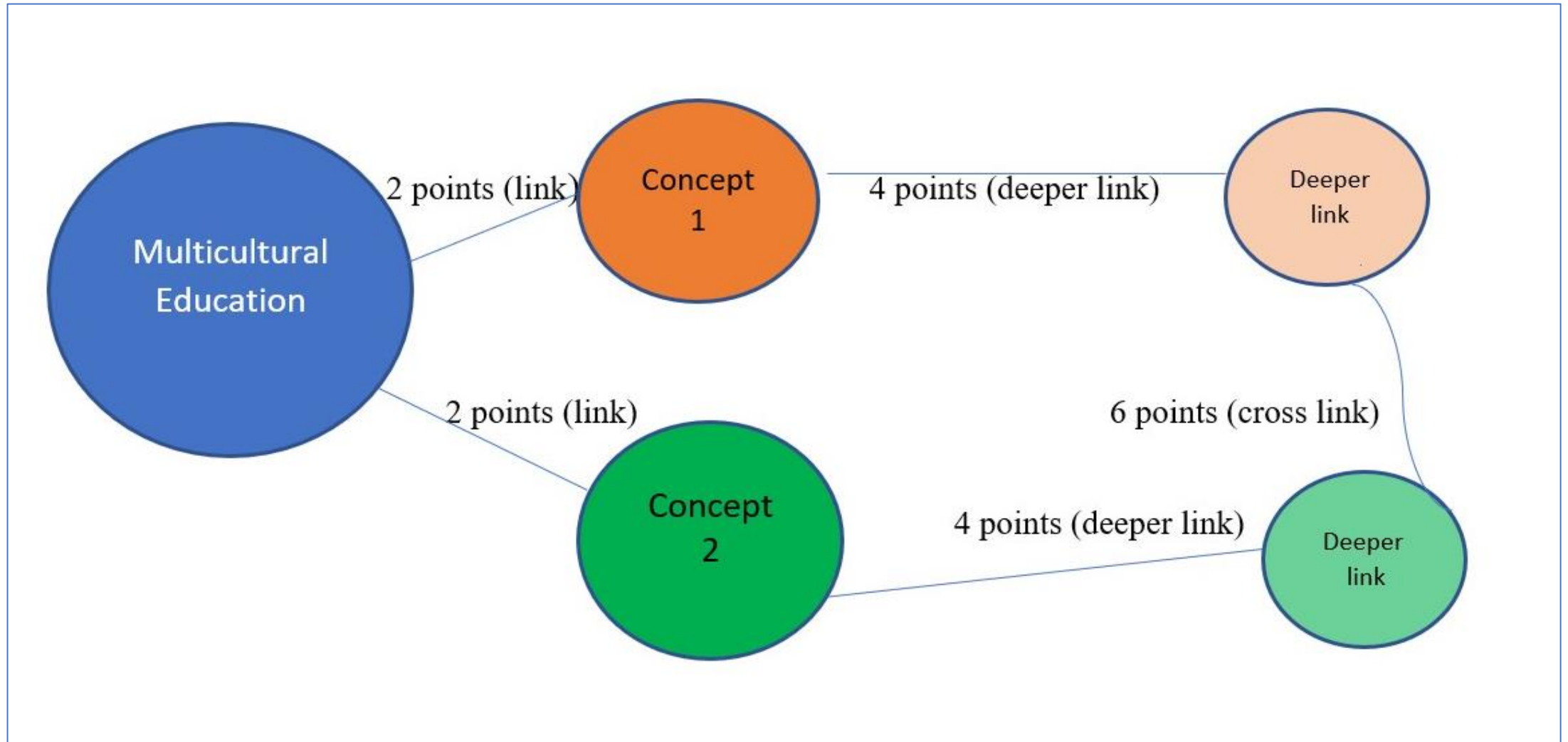
## Data Collection Methods

1) The researcher outlined the mechanics of concept mapping to the participants.

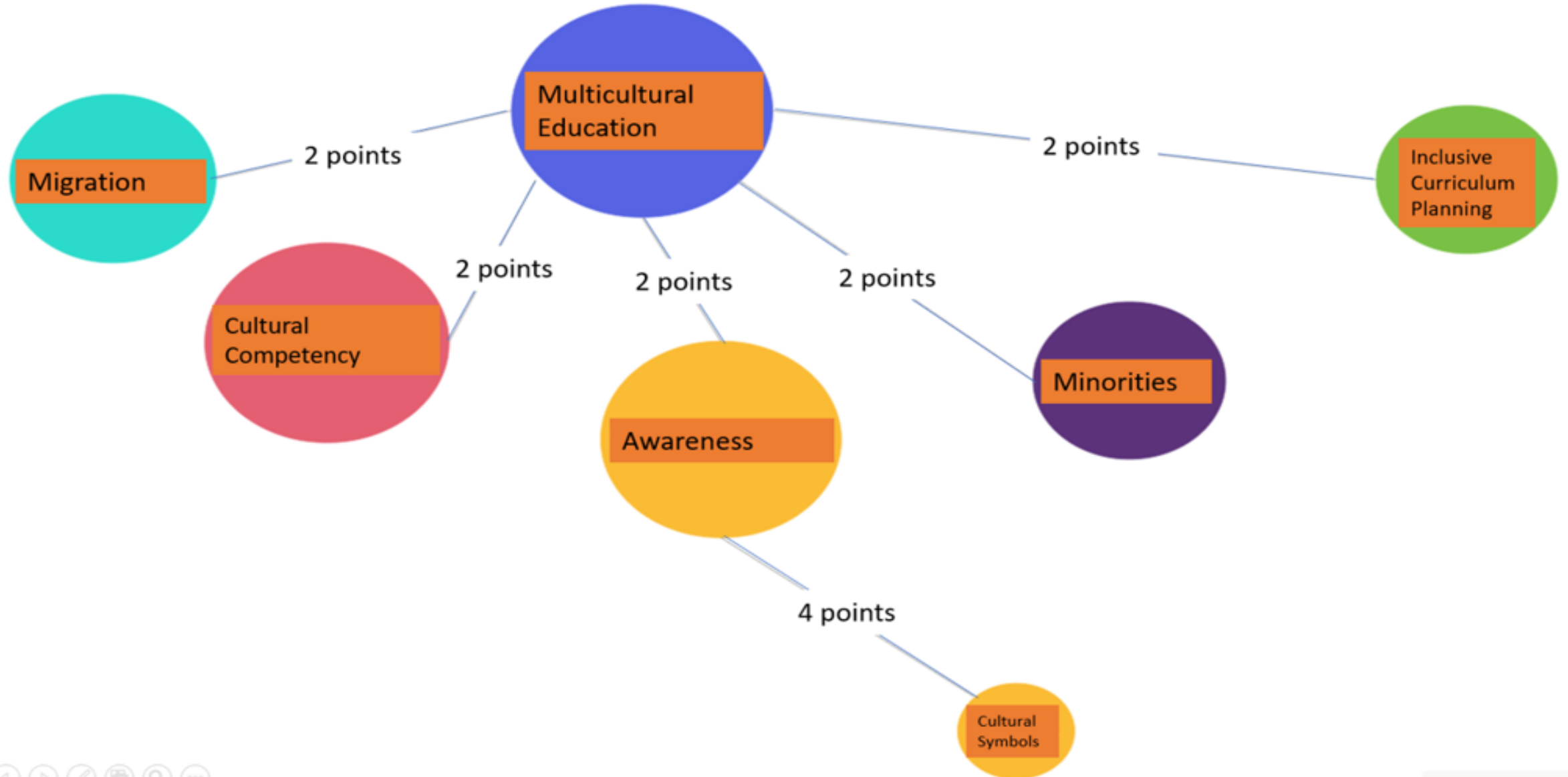
2) Course participants were invited to construct concept maps with ME as the central theme. This was done at intervals: *before* the actual lectures, *after* 4 lecture periods and also *after* the last lecture.

3) Right after pre-concept and post-concept mapping, participants were asked to reflect upon and write a brief paragraph (reflective journal) on the reasons/motivations behind their choices of linked concepts. After completion, participants were asked to a) identify similarities and differences between the pre and post concept maps, b) reflect upon why some conceptual changes occurred whilst others did not, c) highlight the most important conceptual change they identified and how this would support them in their teaching and learning interaction with the students.

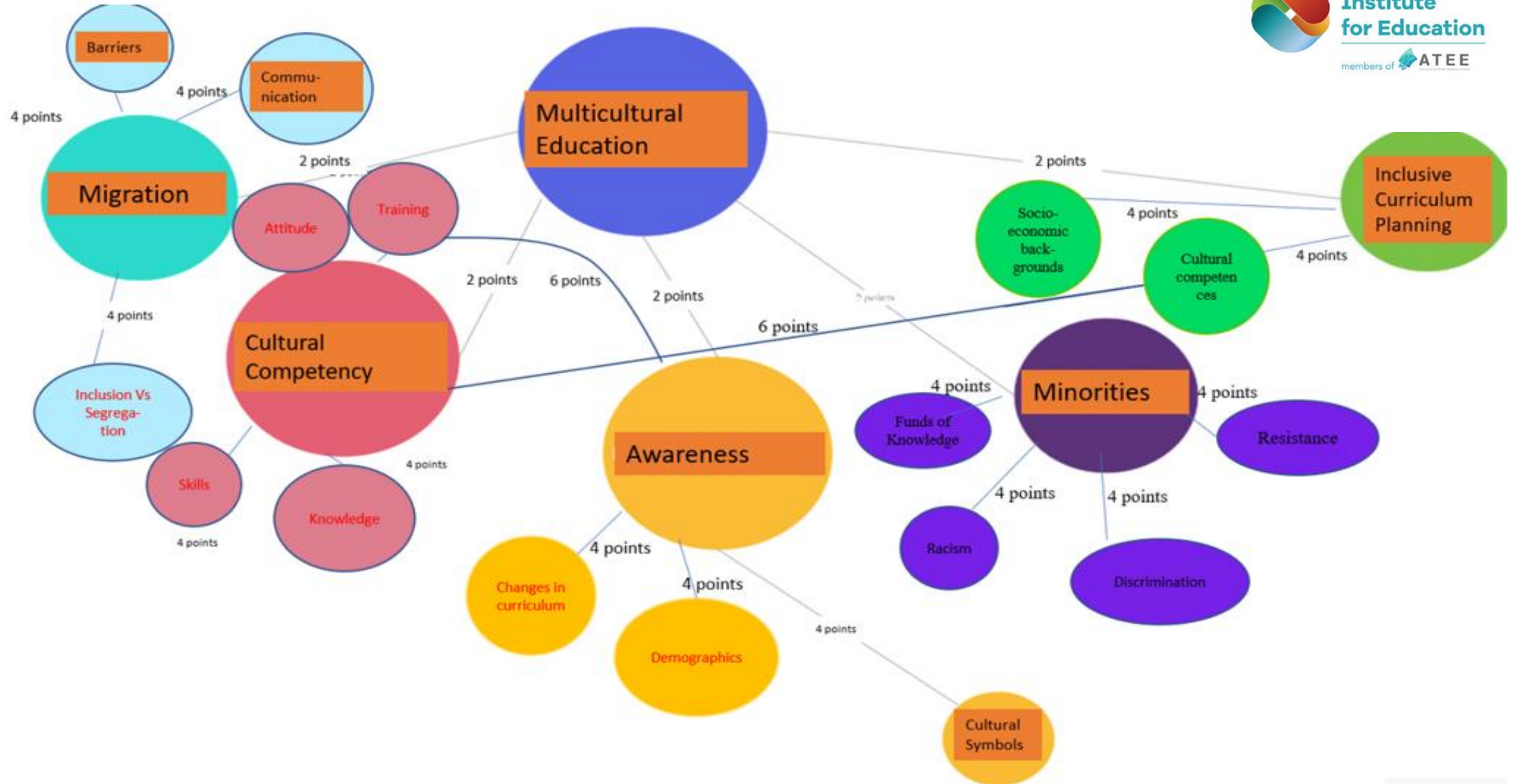
# Scoring a Concept Map



# Pre-Concept Map Example



# Post-Concept Map Example



Results from the concept mapping are summarised below:

Learning Outcomes	<i>Pre-Concept Maps</i>				<i>Post-Concept Maps</i>			
	Number of links ( $n_l$ )	Number of deeper-links ( $n_d$ )	Number of cross-links ( $n_c$ )	$P_{Pre-C}$	Number of links ( $N_l$ )	Number of deeper-links ( $N_d$ )	Number of cross-links ( $N_c$ )	$P_{Post-C}$
Knowledge	101	5	1	228	70	15	8	248
Understanding	119	9	3	292	68	10	7	218
Competences	82	1	1	174	139	22	11	432
Critical Abilities	34	0	0	68	45	12	11	204

**Table 2: Variations in participants' responses on *pre-concept* and *post-concept* maps.**

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# The Knowledge Category

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# Reflective Diary Responses

- “Presently, I don’t feel that I *know* enough to be a truly effective teacher in a multicultural class... I just feel lost.”
- This contrasted heavily with another response from a subsequent diary entry...
  - “It feels positive that in Multicultural settings there is an enrichment of the multicultural self and also a sense of shared knowledge with colleagues and students.”



# The Understanding Category

Results from the concept mapping are summarised below:

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## The Understanding Category: Reflective Diary Responses

Excerpts from a reflective journal show increased cognizance that ME is not just adding specific aspects to various school subjects but about “looking through different lenses” (Vassallo 2016, p. 25).



# The Competences Category

Results from the concept mapping are summarised below:

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	Number of links ( $n_l$ )	Number of deeper-links ( $n_d$ )	Number of cross-links ( $n_c$ )	$P_{Pre-C}$	Number of links ( $N_l$ )	Number of deeper-links ( $N_d$ )	Number of cross-links ( $N_c$ )	$P_{Post-C}$
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## The Competences Category

Participant responses ranged from ‘understanding students’ interests’, ‘clarifying expectations to students’, ‘planning teaching for individual, small groups and whole class’, ‘adapt to children’s learning style’ and ‘specifically target the cultural composition present in the classroom’.

Responses show that cultural competence is a dynamic task involving reaching out towards students of different cultures, ongoing self-assessment and a heightened sensitivity that allows us to understand the student outside one’s own cultural context

# Critical Abilities Category

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- In an excerpt, from a reflective journal a teacher wrote:

- “Being able **to incorporate all the differences present in my class is a mammoth task. I am only responsible for content and assessment, not in ensuring equity and justice.**”

However, after the sessions have finished the same teacher felt compelled to retrace his/her steps and stated,

- “I was sceptical at first but I decided to experiment a bit by integrating content, into my usual lessons. Soon, I realized it **provided me with an opportunity to test my students in higher learning skills, such as inquiry and problem-solving.**”

- In particular:

I noticed that **students themselves started to use the ethnic capital present in the classroom to test mathematical concepts**, for example they were able to draw bar graphs representing their ethnic backgrounds (eg: population) with relative ease. I noticed that **whilst working on mathematical distributions, students were enticed to exchange information about their cultures, critically analysing important historical events and achievements.**

## Conclusion and Recommendations

- Concept maps have proved to **be ideal to track educators' conceptual development in ME programs.** Also, by making connections between concept mapping, reflective practices and teacher education, we can broaden our horizons and bridge more effectively the theory-practice divide.



- Educators must first understand their own personal and cultural values and identity. By inculcating a **willingness to transform oneself, reflecting and working wholeheartedly, educators should be able to change their strategies to include all students irrespective of their cultural diversity.**
- By harnessing effectively **the tools garnered during ME courses, educators can create new effective solutions and challenge their students to think past their beliefs, engage in multicultural dialogue and present alternative viewpoints** as to how they want to see their future workplaces.

- The basis of effective teaching in multicultural classrooms is the **synergy erupting from a strong relationship between teacher and student based on mutual trust, sensitivity and understanding** – keeping the interest of the student at the very centre of practice.
- Such a synergy, however, needs to be complemented by **multicultural training resources** such as books, I.T. equipment and others.
- Besides, there needs to be **additional investment in human capital** which enhances the linguistic and cultural proficiency skills of all stakeholders. For all this to happen a direct injection of finance is needed.