Education Is Politics

CRITICAL TEACHING ACROSS DIFFERENCES, K–12

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Education of African American Children; Funding for Justice: Money, Equity and the Future of Public Education; and *Classroom Crusades: Responding to the Religious Right's Agenda for Public Schools.* The editors of *Rethinking Schools* invite inquiries and article submissions.

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Multiculturalism, Social Justice, and Critical Teaching

Sonia Nieto

Editors' Notes: We begin this volume with excerpts from Sonia Nieto's widely read *Affirming Diversity,* which connects a framework of multicultural education to critical pedagogy. Nieto believes that multicultural education in a sociopolitical context can offer hope for change, explore alternatives to traditional teaching systems, and open up awareness of the role culture and language can play in education. The first excerpt defines seven characteristics of multicultural education. The second provides a model for educators who want to incorporate multicultural education into their curriculum and instruction. A particularly useful chart showing the characteristics and levels of multicultural education concludes these excerpts. Nieto's emphasis on "social justice" in critical multiculturalism places her in the Freirean context of activist education.

I: Multicultural Education and School Reform

When multicultural education is mentioned, many people first think of lessons in human relations and sensitivity training, units about ethnic holidays, education in inner-city schools, or food festivals. If limited to these issues, the potential for substantive change in schools is severely diminished. However, when broadly conceptualized, multicultural education can have a great impact on redefining how the four areas of potential school conflict already discussed can be addressed. These are: racism and discrimination, structural factors within schools that may limit learning, the impact of culture on learning, and language

diversity. This chapter focuses on how multicultural education addresses each of these areas.

Multicultural education is not being proposed as a panacea for all educational ills. It will not cure underachievement, remove boring and irrelevant curriculum, or stop vandalism. It will not automatically motivate parents to participate in schools, reinvigorate tired and dissatisfied teachers, or guarantee a lower dropout rate. Schools are part of our communities and as such reflect the stratification and social inequities of the larger society. As long as this is the case, no school program, no matter how broadly conceptualized, can change things completely and on its own. Furthermore, in our complex and highly bureaucratic school systems, no approach can yield instant and positive results for all students.

Given these caveats, we can nevertheless say that multicultural education, conceptualized as broad-based school reform, can offer hope for change. By focusing on major factors contributing to underachievement, a broadly conceptualized multicultural education permits educators to explore alternatives to a system that leads to failure for too many of its students. Such an explanation can lead to the creation of richer and more productive learning environments, diverse instructional strategies, and a more profound awareness of the role culture and language can play in education. In this way, educational success for all students can be a realistic goal rather than an impossible ideal. Multicultural education in a sociopolitical context becomes both richer and more complex than simple lessons on getting along or units on ethnic festivals.

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a definition of multicultural education, then to analyze the seven primary characteristics included in the definition. These characteristics underscore the role that multicultural education can play in reforming schools and providing an equal and excellent education for all students.

What follows is but one definition of multicultural education and thus reflects a particular understanding of the concept. My approach has been to consider multicultural education in light of the persistent problems in our schools and the lack of achievement of so many students, rather than as an add-on or luxury disconnected from the everyday lives of students and schools. In this sense, it is a comprehensive definition that emphasizes the context and process of education, not simply its outcomes. In spite of some minor differences over the past 20 years among the major theorists in the field, there has been remarkable consistency about the goals, purposes, and reasons for multicultural education.[1]

Because no definition can truly capture the complexities of multicultural education, I hope that the following will serve as a basis for dialogue and reflection. This definition reflects my own way of conceptualizing the issues. Although I have developed 7 qualities that I believe are important in multicultural education, you might come up with just 3, or with 15. The point is not to present a definitive way to understand multicultural education, but instead to start you thinking about the interplay of societal and school structures and contexts and how they influence learning. What I believe *is* essential is an emphasis on the sociopolitical context of education and a rejection of multicultural education as either a superficial adding of content to the curriculum, or alternatively, as the magic pill that will do away with all educational problems. I hope that in the process of considering my definition, you will think about multicultural education in a substantive way and develop your own priorities.

A Definition of Multicultural Education

I define *multicultural education* in a sociopolitical context as follows:

> Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. Multicultural education permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes the democratic principles of social justice.

The seven basic characteristics of multicultural education in this definition are:

Multicultural education is *antiracist education.*

Multicultural education is *basic education.*

Multicultural education is *important for* all *students.*

Multicultural education is *pervasive.*

Multicultural education is *education for social justice.*

Multicultural education is a *process.*

Multicultural education is *critical pedagogy.*

Multicultural Education Is Antiracist Education

Antiracism, indeed antidiscrimination in general, is at the very core of a multicultural perspective. This is especially important to keep in mind when we consider that only the most superficial aspects of multicultural education are apparent in many schools, even those that espouse a multicultural philosophy. Celebrations of ethnic festivals are as far as it goes in some places. In others, sincere attempts to decorate bulletin boards or purchase materials with what is thought to be a multicultural perspective end up perpetuating the worst kind of

stereotypes. And even where there are serious attempts to develop a truly pluralistic environment, it is not unusual to find incongruencies, such as the children of color as overwhelmingly visible in the lowest academic tracks and invisible in the highest. All of these are examples of multicultural education *without* an explicitly antiracist perspective.

It is important to stress multicultural education as antiracist because many people may believe that a multicultural program *automatically* takes care of racism. Unfortunately this is not always true. According to Weinberg,

> Most multicultural materials deal wholly with the cultural distinctiveness of various groups and little more. Almost never is there any sustained attention to the ugly realities of systematic discrimination against the same group that also happens to utilize quaint clothing, fascinating toys, delightful fairy tales, and delicious food. Responding to racist attacks and defamation is *also* part of the culture of the group under study.[2]

Being antiracist and antidiscriminatory thus means paying attention to all areas in which some students may be favored over others: the curriculum, choice of materials, sorting policies, and teachers' interactions and relationships with students and their communities.

To be more inclusive and balanced, multicultural curriculum must by definition be antiracist. Teaching does not become more honest and critical simply by becoming more inclusive, but this nevertheless is an important first step in ensuring that students have access to a wide variety of viewpoints. Although the beautiful and heroic aspects of our history should be taught, so must the ugly and exclusionary. Rather than viewing the world through rose-colored glasses, antiracist multicultural education forces both teachers and students to take a long, hard look at everything as it was and is, which also means considering the effects and interconnections among events, people, and things.

Confronting in an honest and direct way both the positive and negative aspects of history, the arts, and science is avoided in too many schools. Michelle Fine calls this the "fear of naming," and it is part of the system of silencing in public schools.[3] To name might become too messy, or so the thinking goes. Teachers often refuse to engage their students in discussions about racism because it might "demoralize" them. Too dangerous a topic, it is best left untouched.

Related to the fear of naming is the insistence of schools on sanitizing the curriculum, or what Kozol calls "tailoring" important men and women for school use. Schools manage to take our most exciting and memorable heroes and bleed the life and spirit completely out of them. Because it is dangerous to teach a history that he describes as "studded with so many bold, and revolutionary, and subversive, and exhilarating men and women," Kozol maintains that schools instead drain these heroes of their passions, glaze them over with an implausible veneer, place them on lofty pedestals, and then tell "incredibly dull stories" about them.[4] For example, in trying to make Martin Luther King, Jr., palatable to the mainstream, schools have made him a Milquetoast. The only thing most children know about him is that he kept having a dream. Bulletin boards are full of ethereal pictures of Dr. King surrounded by clouds. If children get to read or hear any of his speeches at all, it is his "I Have a Dream" speech. Rare indeed are the allusions to his early and consistent opposition to the Vietnam War; his strong criticism of unbridled capitalism; and the connections he made, near the end of his life, among racism, capitalism, and war. Martin Luther King, a man full of passion and life, becomes lifeless. He becomes a "safe hero."

Most of the heroes we present to our children are either those in the mainstream or those who have become safe by the process of "tailoring." Others who have fought for social justice are often downplayed, maligned, or simply ignored. For example, although John Brown's actions in defense of the liberation of enslaved people are considered noble by many, in our history books he is presented, if at all, as somewhat of a crazed idealist. Nat Turner is another example. The slave revolt that he led deserves an important place in our history, if only to acknowledge that people fought against their own oppression and were not simply passive or victimized by it. Yet his name is usually overlooked, and Abraham Lincoln is presented as the "great emancipator." Nat Turner is not safe; Abraham Lincoln is.

To be antiracist also means to work affirmatively to combat racism. It means making antiracism and antidiscrimination an explicit part of the curriculum and teaching young people skills in confronting racism. It also means that students must not be isolated, alienated, or punished for naming it when they see it. If developing productive and critical citizens for a democratic society is one of the important goals of public education, antiracist behaviors can help to meet that objective.

Racism is seldom mentioned in school (it is bad, a dirty word) and therefore is not dealt with. Unfortunately, many teachers think that simply having lessons in getting along or celebrating Human Relations Week will make students nonracist or nondiscriminatory in general. Yet it is impossible to be unaffected by racism, sexism, linguicism, ageism, anti-Semitism, classism, and ethnocentrism in a society characterized by all of them. To expect schools to be an oasis of sensitivity and understanding in the midst of this stratification is unrealistic. Therefore, part of the mission of the school becomes creating the space and encouragement that legitimates talk about racism and discrimination and makes it a source of dialogue in the schools. Part of this task includes learning the missing or fragmented parts of our history.

Multicultural education is also antiracist because it exposes the racist and discriminatory practices in schools discussed in preceding chapters. A school truly committed to a multicultural philosophy will closely examine its policies and the attitudes and behaviors of its staff to determine how these might be discriminating against some students. How teachers react to their students, whether native language use is permitted in the school, how sorting takes place,

and the way in which classroom organization might hurt some students and help others are questions to be considered. In addition, individual teachers will reflect on their own attitudes and practices in the classroom and how they are influenced by their background as well as by their ignorance of students' backgrounds. Although such soul-searching is often difficult, it is a necessary step in becoming a teacher committed to an antiracist multicultural philosophy.

Nevertheless, being antiracist does not mean flailing about in guilt or remorse. One of the reasons why schools are reluctant to deal with racism and discrimination is that they are uncomfortable topics for those who have traditionally benefited by their race, gender, and social class, among other differences. These topics often place people in the role of either the victimizer or the victimized. An initial and quite understandable reaction of European American teachers and students is to feel guilty. Such a reaction, however, although probably serving a useful purpose initially, needs to be understood as only one step in the process of becoming multiculturally literate and empowered. If one remains at this level, then guilt only immobilizes. Teachers and students need to move beyond guilt to a stage of energy and confidence, where they take action rather than hide behind feelings of remorse.

Although the primary victims of racism and discrimination are those who suffer its immediate consequences, racism and discrimination are destructive and demeaning to everyone. Keeping this in mind, it is easier for all teachers and students to confront these issues. Although not everyone is directly guilty of racism and discrimination, we nevertheless are all responsible for it. Given this perspective, students and teachers can focus on discrimination as something everyone has a responsibility to confront. For example, in discussing slavery in the United States, it is important to present it not simply as slave owners against enslaved Africans. There were many and diverse roles among a great variety of people during this period: enslaved Africans and free Africans, slave owners and poor White farmers, Black abolitionists and White abolitionists, White and Black feminists who fought for both abolition and women's liberation, and so on. Each of these perspectives should be taught so that children, regardless of ethnic background or gender, see themselves in history in ways that are not simply degrading or guilt-provoking. The incident of the only Black child in a classroom who was asked by his teacher to draw himself as a character during the Civil War is a poignant example. This child drew a horse, preferring to see himself as an animal rather than as an enslaved man. The deep sense of pain and emptiness that this child felt can only be surmised. Providing alternative roles for our students is therefore another aspect of an antiracist multicultural perspective.

Multicultural Education Is Basic Education

Given the recurring concern for the "basics" in education, it is absolutely essential that multicultural education be understood as *basic* education. Multicultural literacy is as indispensable for living in today's world as are reading, writing, arithmetic, and computer literacy. When multicultural education is unrelated to the core curriculum, it is perceived as unimportant to basic education.

One of the major stumbling blocks to implementing a broadly conceptualized multicultural education is the ossification of the "canon" in our schools. The canon, as used in contemporary U.S. education, assumes that the knowledge that is most worthy is already in place. According to this rather narrow view, the basics have in effect already been defined. Knowledge, in this context, is inevitably European, male, and upper class in origin and conception, especially in the arts and social sciences. In art history, courses rarely leave France, Italy, and sometimes England in considering the "great masters." What is called "classical" music is classical only in Europe, not in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. This same enthnocentrism is found in our history books, which places Europeans and European Americans as the actors and all others as the recipients, bystanders, or bit players of history.

It is unrealistic, for a number of reasons, to expect a perfectly "equal treatment" in the curriculum. A force-fit, which tries to equalize the number of African Americans, women, Jewish Americans, and so on in the curriculum, is not what multicultural education is all about. A great many groups have in effect been denied access in the actual making of history. Their participation therefore has not been equal, at least if we consider history in the traditional sense of great movers and shakers, monarchs and despots, and makers of war and peace. The participation of diverse groups, even within this somewhat narrow view of history, has been appreciable. It therefore deserves to be included. The point is that those who *have* been present in our history, arts, literature, and science should be made visible. More recent literature anthologies are a good example of the inclusion of more voices and perspectives than ever before. Did these become "great writers" overnight, or was it simply that they had been buried for too long?

However, we are not talking here simply of the "contributions" approach to history, literature, and the arts. Such an approach may consider some small contributions from usually excluded groups and can easily become patronizing by looking for contributions to a preconceived canon. Rather, the way in which generally excluded groups have made history and affected the arts, literature, geography, science, and philosophy *on their own terms* is what is missing.

The "canon" is unrealistic and incomplete because history is never as one-sided as it appears in most of our schools' curricula. What is needed is the expansion of what we define as basic by opening up the curriculum to a variety of perspectives and experiences. The problem that a canon tries to address is a real one: Modern-day knowledge is so dispersed and compartmentalized that our young people learn very little that is common. There is no *core* to the knowledge to which they are exposed.[5] However, proposing a static list of terms, almost exclusively with European and European American referents, does little to expand our common culture.

The alternative to multicultural education is *monocultural education.* Education reflective of only one reality and biased toward the dominant group,

monocultural education is the order of the day in most of our schools. What students learn represents only a fraction of what is available knowledge, and those who decide what is most important make choices that are of necessity influenced by their own limited background, education, and experiences. Because the viewpoints of so many are left out, monocultural education is at best a partial education. It deprives all students of the diversity that is part of our world.

No school can consider that it is doing a proper or complete job unless its students develop multicultural literacy. What such a conception might mean in practice would no doubt differ from school to school. At the very least, we would expect all students to be fluent in a language other than their own; aware of the literature and arts of many different peoples; and conversant with the history and geography not only of the United States but also of African, Asian, Latin American, and European countries. Through such an education, we would expect our students to develop the social skills to understand and empathize with a wide diversity of people. Nothing can be more basic than this.

Multicultural Education Is Important for All *Students*

There is a widespread perception that multicultural education is only for students of color, or for urban students, or for so-called disadvantaged students. This belief is probably based on the roots of multicultural education, which grew out of the civil rights and equal education movements of the 1960s. The primary objective of multicultural education was defined as addressing the needs of students who historically had been most neglected or miseducated by the schools, primarily students of color. In trying to strike more of a balance, it was felt that attention should be paid to developing curriculum and materials that reflect the reality of these students' history, culture, and experience and that this curriculum should be destined particularly for inner-city schools populated primarily by children of color. This thinking was historically necessary and is understandable even today, given the great curricular imbalance that continues to exist in most schools.

More recently a broader conceptualization of multicultural education has gained acceptance. It is that all students are *miseducated* to the extent that they receive only a partial and biased education. The primary victims of biased education are those who are invisible in the curriculum. Females, for example, are absent in most curricula, except in special courses on women's history which are few and far between. Although these courses are important and helpful in remediating the almost total lack of a female presence in curriculum and materials, they, too, are a double-edged sword. The message of these courses to both females and males is, as Shakeshaft has noted, that there are two kinds of history: women's history, which is peripheral, and American history, which is "real" history.[6] Working-class history is also absent in virtually all U.S. curricula. Anyon found, for example, that the content of the social studies curriculum was the *least* honest about U.S. history in the working-class schools than in all the others she observed.[7] The children of the working class are deprived not only of a more forthright education but, more important, of a place in history, and students of all social class backgrounds are likewise deprived of a more honest and complete view of our history.

Although the primary victims of biased education continue to be those who are invisible in the curriculum, those who figure prominently are victims as well. They receive only a partial education, which legitimates cultural blinders. European American children, seeing only themselves, learn that they are the norm; everyone else is secondary. The same is true of males. And the children of the wealthy, although generally exposed to a more comprehensive view of history, learn nevertheless that the wealthy and the powerful are the real makers of history, the ones who have left their mark on civilization.

Multicultural education is by definition expansive. Because it is *about* all people, it is also *for* all people, regardless of their ethnicity, language, religion, gender, race, or class. It can even be convincingly argued that students from the dominant culture need multicultural education more than others, for they are often the most miseducated about diversity in our society. In fact, European American youths often feel that they do not even *have* a culture, at least not in the same sense that clearly culturally identifiable youths do. At the same time, they feel that their way of living, of doing things, of believing, and of acting are simply the only possibilities. Anything else is ethnic and exotic.

Feeling as they do, these children are prone to develop an unrealistic view of the world and of their place in it. They learn to think of themselves and their group as the norm and of all others as a deviation. These are the children who learn not to question, for example, the name of "flesh-colored" adhesive strips even though they are not the flesh color of three-quarters of humanity. They do not even have to think about the fact that everyone, Christian or not, gets holidays at Christmas and Easter and that other religious holidays are given little attention in our calendars and school schedules. Whereas children from dominated groups may develop feelings of inferiority based on their school experiences, dominant group children may develop feelings of superiority. Both responses are based on incomplete and inaccurate information about the complexity and diversity of the world, and both are harmful.

Nevertheless, multicultural education continues to be thought of by many teachers and schools as education for the "culturally different" or the "disadvantaged." Teachers in predominantly European American schools, for example, may feel it is not important or necessary to teach their students anything about the civil rights movement; likewise only in scattered bilingual programs in Mexican American communities are students exposed to literature by Mexican and Mexican American authors; and only at high schools with a high percentage of students of color are ethnic studies generally taught. These are ethnocentric interpretations of multicultural education.

This thinking is paternalistic as well as misinformed. Anything remotely digressing from the "regular" (European American) curriculum is automatically

considered soft. Therefore, the usual response to make a curriculum multicultural is to water it down. Poor pedagogical decisions are then based on the premise that so-called disadvantaged students need a watered-down version of the "real" curriculum, whereas more privileged children can handle the "regular" or more academically challenging curriculum. Gay suggests that the curriculum selected for learners of backgrounds different from the dominant group should be of a parallel *order.* For example, "if Robert Frost's and Emily Dickinson's works are used to teach the canons of good poetry for Anglo students, then the rapping routines of Run DMC and the Fat Boys are inappropriate to use as an Afro-American illustration of those same principles."[8] Although *all* students need to learn about the literature of many different cultures, her point is that usually *only* African American students are exposed to curriculum adaptations of this kind. Gay thus suggests that a parallel, and thus more appropriate, example would be the works of Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes. Making a curriculum multicultural should in no way dilute it; on the contrary, making it more inclusive inevitably enriches it. All students would be enriched by reading the poetry of Hughes and Angelou. One study based on extensive interviews, for instance, found that students of all backgrounds preferred a school community where differences were valued rather than feared or avoided.[9]

Multicultural education, being an alternative approach, is often considered to be most appropriate for children "at risk" of educational failure. This term has become a code word for students of color from inner-city schools or poor students of all cultural backgrounds from rural and urban schools. Yet students at risk of educational failure can and do come from all social and cultural backgrounds and find themselves on the periphery of the educational environment for a variety of reasons. Perhaps a more appropriate term for such students is *marginal,* as used by Sinclair and Ghory.[10] This term implies that the conditions for the failure of students are inherent not in the students themselves, as "at risk" implies, but rather in the learning environments created for them. By changing the environments, the so-called risk factors are reduced and marginal students again enter the educational center. A broadly conceptualized multicultural education focusing on school reform represents a substantive way of changing the curriculum, the environment, the structure of schools, and instructional strategies so that all students can benefit.

Multicultural Education Is Pervasive

Multicultural education is sometimes thought of as something that happens at a set period of the day, yet another subject area to be covered. Some school systems even have a "multicultural teacher" who goes from class to class in the same way as the music or art teacher. Although the intent of this approach may be to formalize a multicultural perspective in the standard curriculum, it is in the long run self-defeating because it tends to isolate the multicultural philosophy from everything else that happens in the classroom. By letting classroom teachers avoid responsibility for creating a multicultural approach, this strategy often alienates them by presenting multicultural knowledge as somehow contradictory to all other knowledge. The schism between what is "regular" and what is "multicultural" widens. In this kind of arrangement, classroom teachers are not encouraged, through either formal in-service programs or alternative opportunities, to develop expertise in multicultural education. It becomes exotic knowledge that is external to the real work that goes on in most classrooms. Given this conception of multicultural education, it is no wonder that teachers sometimes feel that it is a frill they cannot afford.

A true multicultural approach to education is pervasive. It permeates everything: the school climate, physical environment, curriculum, and relationships among teachers and students and community. It can be seen in every lesson, curriculum guide, unit, bulletin board, and letter that is sent home; it can be seen in the process by which books and audiovisual aids are acquired for the library, in the games played during recess, and in the lunch that is served. Thus, multicultural education is a philosophy, a way of looking at the world, not simply a program or a class or a teacher. In this comprehensive way, multicultural education helps us rethink school reform.

What might this multicultural philosophy mean in the way that schools are organized? For one, it would probably mean the end of tracking, which inevitably favors some students over others. It would also mean that the complexion of the school, both literally and figuratively, would change. That is, there would be an effort to have the entire school staff be more representative of our nation's diversity. Pervasiveness probably would also be apparent in the great variety and creativity of instructional strategies, so that students from all cultural groups, and females as well as males, would benefit from methods other than the traditional. The curriculum would be completely overhauled and would include the histories, viewpoints, and insights of many different peoples and both males and females. Topics considered dangerous could be talked about in classes, and students would be encouraged to become critical thinkers. Textbooks and other instructional materials would also reflect a pluralistic perspective. Parents and community people would be more visible in the schools because they would offer a unique and helpful perspective that the school would welcome. Teachers, parents, and students would have the opportunity to work together to design motivating and multiculturally appropriate curricula.

In other less global but no less important ways, the multicultural school would probably look vastly different as well. For example, the lunchroom might offer a variety of international meals, not because they are exotic delights but because they are the foods people in the community eat daily. Sports and games from all over the world might be played, and not all would be competitive. Letters would be sent home in the languages that parents understand. Children would not be punished for speaking their native language; on the contrary, they would be encouraged to do so and it would be used in their instruction as well. In summary, the school would be a learning environment in which

curriculum, pedagogy, and outreach are all consistent with a broadly conceptualized multicultural philosophy.

Multicultural Education Is Education for Social Justice

All good education connects theory with reflection and action, which is what Paulo Freire defines as *praxis*.[11] In particular, developing a multicultural perspective means learning how to think in more inclusive and expansive ways, reflecting on what we learn, and putting our learning into action. Multicultural education invites students and teachers to put their learning into action for social justice. Whether debating an issue, developing a community newspaper, starting a collaborative program at a local senior center, or beginning a petition for the removal of a potentially dangerous waste treatment plant in the neighborhood, students learn that they have power, collectively and individually, to make change.

This aspect of multicultural education fits in particularly well with the developmental level of young people who, starting in the middle elementary grades, are very conscious of what is fair and what is unfair. Their pronounced sense of justice seldom has an opportunity to be channeled appropriately. The result can be anger, resentment, alienation from schooling, or simply dropping out physically or psychologically. Schools represent an ideal environment for tackling some of these important issues.

Students are often denied the opportunity to engage in learning that is related to the lives they lead in their communities. Although preparing students for active membership in a democracy is the basis of Deweyan philosophy and has often been cited as a major educational goal, the possibility for having schools serve as a site of apprenticeship for democracy is rarely provided.[12] For one, policies and practices such as rigid ability grouping, inequitable testing, monocultural curricula, and unimaginative pedagogy mitigate against this lofty aim. The result is that the claim of democracy is perceived as a hollow and irrelevant issue in many schools. Giroux, for example, suggests that what he calls "the discourse of democracy" has been trivialized to mean such things as uncritical patriotism and mandatory pledges to the flag.[13] In many schools, democratic practices are found only in textbooks and confined to discussions of the American Revolution, but most schools provide little chance for students to practice day-to-day democracy. Social justice becomes an empty concept in this situation.

There are numerous examples of the mismatch between students' lives and how they are disconnected from their school experiences. Commins found that the school lives of Mexican American children were not only different but almost diametrically opposed to their home lives.[14] Although the children and their families were intimately acquainted with the issues of undocumented workers, poverty, and discrimination, the school reflected an almost total lack of awareness of these problems or at least an unwillingness to reflect them in the curriculum. The children found that what they learned at school could not be applied to their lives outside of school. In contrast, Moll's research in effective classrooms for Latino students found that teachers in these classrooms encouraged their students to use personal experiences to make sense of their school experiences.[15] Topics that might be considered controversial because they concerned community issues were commonplace in these classrooms and were used to expand students' literacy. This might be the case, for example, in exploring issues of language discrimination, police brutality, or homelessness in the community.

The fact that social structures and power are rarely discussed in school should come as no surprise. Schools are organizations fundamentally concerned with maintaining the status quo and not exposing contradictions that make people uncomfortable in a society that has democratic ideals but wherein democratic realities are not always apparent. Such contradictions include the many manifestations of inequality. Yet schools are also supposed to wipe out these inequalities. To admit that inequality exists and that it is even perpetuated by the very institutions charged with doing away with it are topics far too dangerous to discuss. Nevertheless, such issues are at the heart of a broadly conceptualized multicultural perspective because the subject matter of schooling is society, with all its wrinkles and warts and contradictions. And because society is concerned with ethics and with the distribution of power, status, and rewards, education must focus on these concerns as well.

Although the connection of multicultural education with students' rights and responsibilities in a democracy is unmistakable, many young people do not learn about these responsibilities, the challenges of democracy, or the important role of citizens in ensuring and maintaining the privileges of democracy. A major study on adolescents found, for example, that most youths know little about the political process and do not make connections between the actions of government and the actions of citizens.[16] This is precisely where multicultural education can have a great impact. Not only should classrooms *allow* discussions that focus on social justice, but they should in fact *welcome* them. These discussions might center on concerns that heavily affect culturally diverse communities—poverty, discrimination, war, the national budget—and what students can do to change them. Schools cannot be separated from social justice. Because all of these concerns are pluralistic, education must of necessity be multicultural.

Multicultural Education Is a Process

Curriculum and materials represent the *content* of multicultural education, but multicultural education is above all a *process*. First, it is ongoing and dynamic. No one ever stops becoming a multicultural person, and knowledge is never complete. Thus, there is no established canon, frozen in cement. Second, it is a process because it involves relationships among people. The sensitivity and

understanding teachers show their students are often more important than the facts and figures they may know about different ethnic and cultural groups. Third, and most important, multicultural education is a process because it focuses on such intangibles as teachers' expectations, learning environments, students' learning styles, and other cultural variables that are absolutely essential for schools to understand how to be successful with all of their students.

However, this process is too often relegated to a secondary position, because content is easier to handle and has speedier results. For instance, developing an assembly program on Black History Month is easier than eliminating tracking. Both are important, but the processes of multicultural education are generally more complex, more politically volatile, or more threatening to vested interests. Changing a basal reader is therefore easier than developing higher expectations for all students. The first involves changing one book for another; the other involves changing perceptions, behaviors, and knowledge, not an easy task.

Multicultural education must be accompanied by unlearning conventional wisdom as well as dismantling policies and practices that are disadvantageous for some students at the expense of others. Teacher education programs, for example, need to be reconceptualized to include awareness of the influence of culture and language on learning, the persistence of racism and discrimination in schools and society, and instructional and curricular strategies that encourage learning among a wide variety of students. Teachers' roles in the school also need to be redefined, because empowered teachers help to empower students. The role of parents needs to be expanded so that the insights and values of the community could be more faithfully reflected in the school. A complete restructuring of curriculum and of the organization of schools is called for. The process is complex, problematic, controversial, and time-consuming, but it is one in which teachers and schools must engage to make their schools truly multicultural.

Multicultural Education Is Critical Pedagogy

Knowledge is neither neutral nor apolitical, yet it is generally treated by teachers and schools as if it were. Consequently, what is presented to students tends to be knowledge of the lowest common denominator: that which is sure to offend the fewest (and the most powerful) and is least controversial. Nevertheless, history, including educational history, is full of great debates, controversies, and ideological struggles. The debate concerning the canon and cultural literacy versus the need for multicultural literacy in the curriculum is one example.[17] These controversies and conflicts are often left at the schoolhouse door. Yet every educational decision made at any level, whether by a teacher or by an entire school system, reflects the political ideology and worldview of the decision maker. Decisions to dismantle tracking, discontinue standardized tests, lengthen the school day, use one textbook rather than another, study the Harlem Renaissance, or use learning centers rather than rows of chairs—all of these decisions reflect a particular view of learners and of education.

It is important to understand that as teachers, all the decisions we make, no matter how neutral they seem, may impact in unconscious but fundamental ways the lives and experiences of our students. This is true of the curriculum, books, and other materials we provide for our students. State and local guidelines and mandates may limit what particular schools and teachers choose to teach, and this too is a political decision. What is excluded is often as telling as what is included. Because most literature taught at the high school level, for instance, is heavily male and Eurocentric, the roles of women, people of color, and those who write in other languages are thus diminished, unintentionally or not.

A major problem with a monocultural curriculum is that it gives students only one way of seeing the world. Reality is often presented in schools as static, finished, and flat. The underlying tensions, controversies, passions, and problems faced by people throughout history and today are sadly missing. To be truly informed and active participants in a democratic society, students need to understand the complexity of the world and of the many perspectives involved. They have to understand that there is not only one way of seeing things, nor even two or three. A handy number to keep in mind, simply because it reflects how complex a process it really is, is 17: There are at least 17 ways of understanding reality, and until we have learned to do that, we have only part of the truth.

What do I mean by "17 ways of understanding reality"? I mean that there are multiple perspectives on every issue. Unfortunately, most of us have been given only the "safe" or standard way of interpreting events and issues. Textbooks in all subject areas exclude information about unpopular perspectives, or the perspectives of disempowered groups in our society. For instance, there are few U.S. history texts that assume the perspective of working-class people, although it is certainly true that they were and are the backbone of our country. Likewise, the immigrant experience is generally treated as a romantic and successful odyssey rather than the traumatic, wrenching, and often less-than-idyllic situation it was and continues to be for so many. Furthermore, the experiences of non-European immigrants or those forcibly incorporated into the United States are usually presented as if they were identical to the experiences of Europeans, which they have not at all been. And finally, we can be sure that if the perspectives of women were taken seriously, the school curriculum would be altered dramatically. Unless all students develop the skill to see reality from multiple perspectives, not only the perspective of dominant groups, they will continue to think of it as linear and fixed and to think of themselves as passive in making any changes.

According to Banks, the main goal of a multicultural curriculum is to help students develop decision-making and social action skills.[18] By doing so, students learn to view events and situations from a variety of perspectives. A multicultural approach values diversity and encourages critical thinking, reflection, and action. Through this process, students can be empowered as well. This is the basis of critical pedagogy. Its opposite is what Freire calls "domesticating

education," education that emphasizes passivity, acceptance, and submissiveness.[19] According to Freire, education for domestication is a process of "transferring knowledge," whereas education for liberation is one of "transforming action."[20] Liberating education encourages students to take risks, to be curious, and to question. Rather than expecting students to repeat teachers' words, it expects them to seek their own answers. Empowerment also means that students and teachers recognize their right and responsibility to take action.

What does critical pedagogy mean in terms of multicultural education? Critical pedagogy acknowledges rather than suppresses cultural and linguistic diversity. According to Cummins, because transmission models exclude and deny students' experiences, they cannot be multicultural: "A genuine multicultural orientation that promotes minority student empowerment is impossible within a transmission model of pedagogy."[21]

A few examples of how the typical curriculum discourages students from thinking critically, and what this has to do with a multicultural perspective, are in order. In most schools, students learn that Columbus discovered America; that the United States was involved in a heroic westward expansion until the twentieth century; that Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917; that enslaved Africans were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863; that the people who made our country great were the financial barons of the previous century; and if they learn anything about it at all, that Japanese Americans were housed in detention camps during World War II for security reasons.

History, as we know, is generally written by the conquerors, not by the vanquished or by those who benefit least in society. The result is history books skewed in the direction of those who are dominant in a society. When American Indian people write history books, they generally say that Columbus invaded rather than discovered this land, and that there was no heroic westward expansion but rather an eastern encroachment. Mexican Americans often include references to Aztlán, the legendary land that was overrun by Europeans during this encroachment. Puerto Ricans usually remove the gratuitous word *granted* that appears in so many textbooks and explain that citizenship was instead *imposed,* and it was opposed by even the two houses of the legislature that existed in Puerto Rico in 1917. African Americans tend to describe the active participation of enslaved Africans in their own liberation and include such accounts as slave narratives to describe the rebellion and resistance of their people. Working-class people usually credit laborers rather than Andrew Carnegie with building the country and the economy. And Japanese Americans generally cite racist hysteria, economic exploitation, and propaganda as major reasons for their evacuation to concentration camps during World War II.

Critical pedagogy is not simply the transfer of knowledge from teacher to students, even though that knowledge may contradict what students had learned before. Thus, learning about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is not in itself critical pedagogy. It only becomes so when students critically analyze different perspectives and use them to understand and act on the inconsistencies they uncover. A multicultural perspective does not simply operate on the principle of substituting one "truth" or perspective for another. Rather, it reflects on multiple and contradictory perspectives to understand reality more fully. In addition, it uses the understanding gained from reflection to make changes. Thus teachers and students sometimes need to learn to respect even those viewpoints with which they may disagree, not to teach that which is "politically correct" but rather to teach students to develop a critical perspective about what they hear, read, or see.

Consider the hypothetical English literature book previously mentioned. Let us say that students and their teacher have decided to review the textbook to determine whether it fairly represents the voices and perspectives of a number of groups. Finding that it does not is in itself a valuable learning experience. However, if nothing is done with this analysis, it remains academic; it becomes more meaningful by being used as the basis for further action. Students might propose, for example, that the English department order a more culturally inclusive anthology for the coming year. They might decide to put together their own book, based on literature with a variety of perspectives. Critical pedagogy, however, does not always mean that there is a linear process from *knowledge* to *reflection* to *action.* If this were the case, it would become yet another mechanistic strategy. Furthermore, reflection and action do not take place only within high school classes. On the contrary, critical pedagogy can take place from the preschool level on.[22]

Critical pedagogy is also an exploder of myths. It helps to expose and demystify as well as dymythologize some of the truths that we have been taught to take for granted and to analyze them critically and carefully. Justice for all, equal treatment under the law, and equal educational opportunity, although certainly ideals worth believing in and striving for, are not always a reality. The problem is that we teach them as if they were always real, always true, with no exceptions. Critical pedagogy allows us to have faith in these ideals without uncritically accepting their reality.

Critical pedagogy is based on the experiences and viewpoints of students rather than on an imposed culture. It is therefore multicultural as well because the most successful education is that which begins with the learner. Students themselves are the foundation for the curriculum. Nevertheless, a liberating education takes students beyond their own particular and therefore limited experiences, no matter what their background.

Critical pedagogy is not new, although it has gone by other terms in other times. In our country, precursors to critical pedagogy can be found in the work of African American educators such as Carter Woodson and W. E. B. DuBois.[23] In Brazil, the historic work of Paulo Freire has influenced literacy and liberation movements throughout the world. Even before Freire, however, what could be called critical pedagogy was being practiced in other parts of the world. Many years ago, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, teaching Maori children in New Zealand, found that their education was completely imposed from above.[24]

curriculum, materials, viewpoints, and pedagogy were all borrowed from a culture alien to that of the students. Because Maori children had been failed dismally by New Zealand schools, Ashton-Warner decided to develop a strategy for literacy based on the children's experiences and interests. Calling it an "organic" approach, she taught children how to read by using the words *they* wanted to learn. Each child would bring in a number of new words each day, learn to read them, and then use them in writing. Because her approach was based on what children knew and wanted to know, it was extraordinarily successful. In contrast, basal readers, because they had nothing to do with their experiences, were mechanistic instruments that imposed severe limitations on the students' creativity and expressiveness.

Other approaches that have successfully used the experiences of students are worth mentioning: Heath's work is particularly noteworthy, as are the ethnographic case studies in multiethnic classrooms documented by Saravia-Shore and Arvizu. Curriculum projects and instructional strategies based on students' languages, cultures, families, and communities are included in a valuable monograph by Menkart. May's study of the Richmond Road School in New Zealand offers another inspiring example of multicultural education in practice. Walsh's culturally affirming work with Puerto Rican youngsters is another good example. Shor's descriptions of elementary and high school classrooms, as well as the work he does in his own college classroom, are further proof of the power of critical pedagogy at all levels. Also, Darder and her colleagues have developed an entire college-level program based on critical pedagogy.[25] All of these projects use the learners' backgrounds, languages, and cultures as the basis for their education. Rather than avoid their experiences, these programs consciously seek them out and incorporate them into the curriculum.

Notes

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II: Affirming Diversity: Implications for Schools and Teachers

Starting Out

How does a school or a teacher start a multicultural program? To say that multicultural education must be comprehensively defined, pervasive, and inclusive is not to imply that only a full-blown program qualifies. Because multicultural education is a process, we need to understand that it is always changing and never quite finished. Given that multicultural education is critical pedagogy, it must also be dynamic. A static "program-in-place" or a slick-packaged program is contrary to the very definition of multicultural education.

Let me illustrate with an example from a junior high school English teacher in a community of European American (primarily Irish, French, and Polish) and Puerto Rican students.[1] When asked how she included a multicultural perspective in her teaching, she replied that she has not yet reached that level. Rather, she said, her classroom had what she called "bicultural moments." She was very supportive of multicultural education and used curriculum and instructional strategies that emerged from this perspective, but she felt that the children in her classes did not even know about their own or one another's backgrounds, let alone about the world outside their communities. In her curriculum she focused on exploring, through reading and writing, the "little world" of her students' community before venturing beyond it. Her reasoning was logical: If students do not even understand themselves, their families, and their communities, how can they appreciate others of different backgrounds?

An example of a "bicultural moment" in writing concerned the journals her students kept. One of the central themes about which they wrote was the family, and their writings were later used as the basis for class discussions. A particularly vivid example involved two adolescent boys, one Irish American and the other Puerto Rican, and their perspectives and feelings toward their baby sisters. The Irish American boy complained about what a brat his little sister was. But the way in which he described her, hidden under the crusty surface of a young man trying to conceal his feelings, was full of tenderness. The Puerto Rican boy's journal, in contrast, was consciously sentimental. He described in great detail just how beautiful and wonderful his baby sister was and concluded that everyone in his family thanked God for sending her to them. Both of these boys loved their sisters and both were poetic and loving in their descriptions of them, but they expressed their love in widely different ways. Although not claiming that one was an Irish American and another was a Puerto Rican "way" of feeling or expression, this teacher was nonetheless using these differences as a basis for students' understanding that the same feelings are often expressed in distinct ways and that different families operate in unique but valid ways. This bicultural moment was illuminating for all students; it expanded their literacy and their way of thinking. For the teacher, to "begin small" meant

to use the experiences and understandings students bring to class rather than an exotic or irrelevant curriculum that is meaningless to them.

This is a message worth remembering. In our enthusiasm to incorporate a multicultural philosophy in our teaching, we can sometimes forget that our classrooms are made up of young people who usually know very little about their own culture or that of their classmates. Starting out small, then, means being sensitive to these bicultural moments and using them as a beginning for more wide-ranging multicultural education.

Afrocentrism and Multicultural Education

Related to the issue of biculturalism is the development of what recently has been called *Afrocentrism,*[2] which refers to a philosophical worldview and values based on African cultures. In some ways, it is a direct response to *Eurocentrism.* This philosophy has become particularly visible in some schools with large African American student populations. Afrocentric curricula and educational environments have gained importance because traditional classrooms in the United States tend to put African American children at a disadvantage. This is true in the content of the curriculum, where African Americans are missing, as well as in the process of education itself, where a lack of understanding of students' communication styles by most teachers is evident.

A number of Afrocentric schools have been developed. The reasoning behind these schools is that because African American children (particularly males) suffer the consequences of miseducation in traditional schools, it is important that their culture, values, language, and communication patterns serve as the basis for their education. According to Ascher, these schools are mostly grass-roots reactions to the acute problems among those living in inner-city and poor neighborhoods, and their purpose is to protect African American young men from the many hostile forces in their environment. In addition, she cites that 86 percent of all African American children are likely to spend some time in a female-headed household and thus lack the influence of a male role model in their lives.[3] A number of the schools designed specifically for Black males are staffed almost entirely by Black male teachers, and emphasize positive identity, the value of education, parent and community involvement, and the provision of a safe haven.

It should be underscored that Afrocentrism in education represents a *range* of beliefs rather than a fixed ideology, and that it can be manifested in a variety of ways, from a sentimentalized and romantic view of culture, to an inclusive and humanistic curriculum, to a liberatory pedagogy. For example, Ladson-Billings and Henry, while supporting the use of an Afrocentric perspective in education and emphasizing its liberatory character, also caution that it can become "romantic, mythic, and monolithic."[4] Although Afrocentrism in general has come under great scrutiny for a tendency to become dogmatic and limiting, and some Afrocentric schools have been criticized for being rigidly nationalistic and exclusionary, these criticisms have probably been based on the more ideological and nationalistic models of Afrocentrism rather than on the more inclusive models. West points out its contradictory characteristics:

> Afrocentrism, a contemporary species of black nationalism, is a gallant yet misguided attempt to define an African identity in a white society perceived to be hostile. It is gallant because it puts black doings and sufferings, not white anxieties and fears, at the center of discussion. It is misguided because—out of fear of cultural hybridization and through silence on the issue of class, retrograde views on black women, gay men, and lesbians, and a reluctance to link race to the common good—it reinforces the narrow discussions about race.[5]

This caution is important because it points out how philosophies based on valid critiques of oppressive structures can themselves contain oppressive and limiting features. A similar analysis of all aspects of multicultural education, from culturally responsive strategies to bilingual programs, needs to take place if we are to move beyond sentimentality and toward a critical pedagogy.

Given the devaluation and destruction of large numbers of African American students in traditional school settings, the reasoning behind Afrocentric schools is an understandable and even healthy response. In a similar vein, *Latinocentric, Indiancentric,* and other pedagogical approaches based on the values and perspectives of marginalized cultures provide an alternative to business as usual. Furthermore, culture-centric responses represent an important challenge to the hegemony and Eurocentrism of the curriculum and pedagogy in most schools (or, in the case of schools for females that have a feminist perspective, to the hegemony of patriarchy). They question the promise of equal educational opportunity for all youngsters by demonstrating how this noble ideal has often been betrayed. In addition, because such schools are usually designed by people from the very community that they serve, they provide an important example of self-determination and self-definition.[6]

Although segregation is sometimes necessary for fostering a positive identity, historically it has provided few if any benefits to the most disempowered children in our society. Nevertheless, there is a crucial difference between segregated schools imposed by the dominant group and those developed from within subordinated communities. The goals of self-segregated schools are generally to provide excellent and affirming educational experiences for students who have too often been dismissed by traditional schools, whereas state-segregated schools were usually created to maintain one group on top and others on the bottom. In spite of such differences, however, and because we have few positive models for creating separate schools, Afrocentrism and similar approaches raise some disturbing issues. These include a tendency to create new myths in place of old ones, and segregation of students by race and gender. Hence, the issue becomes not whether segregation is good or bad in itself, but rather the extent to which such schools are engaged in a process of critical

analysis of issues, taking into account a variety of multicultural perspectives. Without this critical analysis, self-segregated schools may simply substitute one set of myths for another, and young people will again be the losers.

Afrocentric schools are specifically aimed at alleviating the educational disadvantages of a group that has traditionally been disenfranchised and miseducated by schools, and are thus just one option within a multicultural continuum. The need to establish special schools for any population, whether Black males, or gay and lesbian students, or females, is an indication of the nation's failure to achieve our stated multicultural goals. Such schools are examples of how particular social groups cope with society's failure to provide educational equity. The challenge for us as a society is to work toward a truly comprehensive and multicultural perspective that works for *all* of our students, while along the way responding to the very real educational needs of *some* of our students.

Becoming a Multicultural Person

Developing truly comprehensive multicultural education takes many years, in part because of our own monocultural education. Most of us, in spite of our distinct cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds, were educated in monocultural environments. We seldom have the necessary models for developing a multicultural perspective. We have only our own experiences; and no matter what our background, these have been overwhelmingly Eurocentric and English-speaking. Sleeter, for example, in a major ethnographic study of teachers involved in a two-year staff development program in multicultural education, found that because teachers share a pervasive culture and set of practices, there are limits to the extent to which they can change *without concurrent changes in their context.*[7]

Becoming a multicultural teacher, therefore, means first becoming a multicultural person. Without this transformation of ourselves, any attempts at developing a multicultural perspective will be shallow and superficial. But becoming a multicultural person in a society that values monoculturalism is not easy. It means reeducating ourselves in several ways.

First, *we simply need to learn more,* for example, by reading and being involved in activities that emphasize pluralism. This means looking for books and other materials that inform us about people and events we may know little about. Given the multicultural nature of our society, those materials are available, although sometimes they need to be sought out because we have learned not to see them.

Second, *we need to confront our own racism and biases.* It is impossible to be a teacher with a multicultural perspective without going through this process. Because we are all products of a society that is racist and stratified by gender, class, and language, we have all internalized some of these messages in one way or another. Sometimes, our racism is unconscious, as in the case of a former student of mine who referred to Africans as "slaves" and Europeans as

"people" but was mortified as soon as she realized what she had said. Sometimes, the words we use convey a deep-seated bias, as when a student who does not speak English is characterized as "not having language," although she may speak her native language fluently. Our actions also carry the messages we have learned, for example, when we automatically expect that our female students will not do as well in math as our male students. Our own reeducation means not only learning new things but also unlearning some of the old. The process is difficult and sometimes painful; nevertheless, it is a necessary part of becoming multicultural.

Third, *becoming a multicultural person means learning to see reality from a variety of perspectives.* Because we have often learned that there is only one "right answer," we have also developed only one way of seeing things. A multicultural perspective demands just the opposite. We need to learn to approach reality from a variety of perspectives. Reorienting ourselves in this way can be exhausting and difficult because it means a dramatic shift in our worldview.

Although the transformation of individuals from being monocultural to being multicultural will not by itself guarantee that education will become multicultural, it would certainly lay the groundwork for it.[8] As one teacher who is thoroughly multicultural in outlook and practice told me, "Since I've developed a multicultural perspective, I just can't teach in any other way." That is, her philosophical outlook is evident in the content she teaches, the instructional strategies she uses, the environment in her classroom, the interactions she has with students and their parents, and the values she expresses in her school and community.

A Model of Multicultural Education

A monocultural perspective represents a fundamentally different framework for understanding differences than does a multicultural one. Even multicultural education, however, has a variety of levels of support for pluralism. I would classify them into at least four levels: *tolerance; acceptance; respect;* and *affirmation, solidarity, and critique.* In the process of becoming multicultural, we need to consider these levels of multicultural education and how they might be operationalized in the school.

Whenever we classify and categorize reality, as I do in this model, we run the risk that it will be viewed as static and arbitrary, rather than as messy, complex, and contradictory, which we know it to be. These categories should be viewed as dynamic and as having penetrable borders, and my purpose in using them is to demonstrate how multicultural education might be manifested in schools in various ways. I propose a model ranging from monocultural education to comprehensive multicultural education, considered vis-à-vis the seven characteristics of multicultural education described previously. This allows exploration of how multicultural education, to be truly comprehensive, demands

attention to many components of the school environment and takes a variety of forms in different settings.[9]

Tolerance is the first level. To be tolerant means to have the capacity to bear something, although at times it may be unpleasant. To tolerate differences means to endure them, although not necessarily to embrace them. We may learn to tolerate differences, but this level of acceptance can be shaky. What is tolerated today may be rejected tomorrow. Tolerance therefore represents the lowest level of multicultural education in a school setting. Yet many schools have what they consider very comprehensive mission statements that stress only their tolerance for diversity. They may believe that this is an adequate expression of support, although it does not go very far in multicultural understanding. In terms of school policies and practices, it may mean that linguistic and cultural differences are borne as the inevitable burden of a culturally pluralistic society. Programs that do not build on but rather replace differences might be in place, for example, English as a second language (ESL) programs. Black History Month might be commemorated with an assembly program and a bulletin board. The life-styles and values of students' families, if different from the majority, may be considered as requiring understanding but modification.

Acceptance is the next level of support for diversity. If we accept differences, we at the very least acknowledge them without denying their importance. In concrete terms, programs that acknowledge students' languages and cultures would be visible in the school. These might include a transitional bilingual program that uses the students' primary language at least until they are "mainstreamed" to an English-language environment. It might also mean celebrating some differences through activities such as multicultural fairs and cookbooks. In a school with this level of support for diversity, time might be set aside weekly for "multicultural programs," and parents' native languages might be used for communication with them through newsletters.

Respect is the third level of multicultural education. Respect means to admire and hold in high esteem. When diversity is respected, it is used as the basis for much of the education offered. It might mean offering programs of bilingual education that use students' native language not only as a bridge to English but also throughout their schooling. Frequent and positive interactions with parents would take place. In the curriculum, students' values and experiences would be used as the basis for their literacy development. Students would be exposed to different ways of approaching the same reality and would therefore expand their way of looking at the world. *Additive multiculturalism* would be the ultimate goal for everybody.

Affirmation, solidarity, and critique are based on the premise that the most powerful learning results when students work and struggle with one another, even if it is sometimes difficult and challenging. This means accepting the culture and language of students and their families as legitimate and embracing them as valid vehicles for learning. It also means understanding that culture is not fixed or unchangeable, and thus one is able to critique its manifestations and outcomes. Because multicultural education is concerned with equity and social justice for all people, and because basic values of different groups are often diametrically opposed, conflict is inevitable. What makes this level different from the others is that conflict is not avoided, but rather accepted as an inevitable part of learning.

Passively accepting the status quo of any culture is inconsistent with multicultural education; simply substituting one myth for another contradicts its basic assumptions because no group is inherently superior or more heroic than any other. At this level, students not only "celebrate" diversity, but they reflect on it and confront it as well. As expressed by Kalantzis and Cope, "Multicultural education, to be effective, needs to be more active. It needs to consider not just the pleasure of diversity but more fundamental issues that arise as different groups negotiate community and the basic issues of material life in the same space—a process that equally might generate conflict and pain."[10]

Multicultural education without critique implies that cultural understanding remains at the romantic or exotic stage. If we are unable to transcend our own cultural experience through reflection and critique, then we cannot hope to understand and critique that of others. For students, this process begins with a strong sense of solidarity with others who are different from themselves. When based on this kind of deep respect, critique is not only necessary, but in fact healthy.

Without critique, the danger that multicultural education might be used to glorify reality into static truth is very real. Thus there has been vigorous criticism of the way multicultural education has been conceptualized and implemented in the past: "The celebration of ethnicity in intercultural education can . . . in fact function both as a new more sophisticated type of control mechanism and as a pacifier, to divert attention from social and economic inequality."[11] This criticism by Skutnabb-Kangas points out how diversity often skirts the issue of racism and discrimination. In some schools, *diversity* is a more euphemistic substitute for dealing with the very real issues of exclusion that many students face. Racism needs to be confronted head-on, and no softening of terms will help. However, when *diversity* is understood in the more comprehensive way described above, it can lead to inclusion and support of all people. A powerful example of this can be found in the inspiring and moving account by Greeley and Mizell of two schools' experiences in addressing racism and making it explicit in the curriculum.[12]

In the school, affirmation, solidarity, and critique mean using the culture and language of all students in a consistent, critical, comprehensive, and inclusive way. This goes beyond creating ethnic enclaves that can become exclusionary and selective, although for disenfranchised communities, this might certainly be a step in the process. It means developing *multicultural* settings in which all students feel reflected and visible, for example, through two-way

	Monocultural Education	Tolerance	Characteristics of Multicultural Education: Acceptance	Respect	Affirmation, Solidarity, and Critique
Antiracist/Antidiscriminatory	Racism is unacknowledged. Policies and practices that support discrimination are left in place. These include low expectations and refusal to use students' natural resources (such as language and culture) in instruction. Only a sanitized and "safe" curriculum is in place.	Policies and practices that challenge racism and discrimination are initiated. No overt signs of discrimination are acceptable (e.g., name-calling, graffiti, blatantly racist and sexist textbooks or curriculum). ESL programs are in place for students who speak other languages.	Policies and practices that acknowledge differences are in place. Textbooks reflect some diversity. Transitional bilingual programs are available. Curriculum is more inclusive of the histories and perspectives of a broader range of people.	Policies and practices that respect diversity are more evident, including maintenance bilingual education. Ability grouping is not permitted. Curriculum is more explicitly antiracist and honest. It is "safe" to talk about racism, sexism, and discrimination.	Policies and practices that affirm diversity and challenge racism are developed. There are high expectations for all students: students' language and culture are used in instruction and curriculum. Two-way bilingual programs are in place wherever possible. Everyone takes responsibility for racism and other forms of discrimination.
Basic	Defines education as the 3 R's and the "canon." "Cultural literacy" is understood within a monocultural framework. All important knowledge is essentially European American. This Eurocentric view is reflected throughout the curriculum, instructional strategies, and environment for learning.	Education is defined more expansively and includes attention to some important information about other groups.	The diversity of lifestyles and values of groups other than the dominant one are acknowledged in some content, as can be seen in some courses and school activities.	Education is defined as knowledge that is necessary for living in a complex and pluralistic society. As such, it includes much content that is multicultural. *Additive multiculturalism* is the goal.	Basic education is multicultural education. All students learn to speak a second language and are familiar with a broad range of knowledge.
Pervasive	No attention is paid to student diversity.	A multicultural perspective is evident in some activities, such as Black History Month and Cinco de Mayo, and in some curriculum and materials. There may be an itinerant "multicultural teacher."	Student diversity is acknowledged, as can be seen not only in "Holidays and Heroes" but also in consideration of different learning styles, values, and languages. A "multicultural program" may be in place.	The learning environment is imbued with multicultural education. It can be seen in classroom interactions, materials, and the subculture of the school.	Multicultural education pervades the curriculum; instructional strategies; and interactions among teachers, students, and the community. It can be seen everywhere: bulletin boards, the lunchroom, assemblies.
Important for All Students	Ethnic and/or women's studies, if available, are only for students from that group. This is a frill that is not important for other students to know.	Ethnic and women's studies are only offered as isolated courses.	Many students are expected to take part in curriculum that stresses diversity. A variety of languages are taught.	All students take part in courses that reflect diversity. Teachers are involved in overhauling the curriculum to be more open to such diversity.	All courses are completely multicultural in essence. The curriculum for all students is enriched. "Marginal students" no longer exist.
Education for Social Justice	Education supports the status quo. Thinking and acting are separate.	Education is somewhat, although tenuously, linked to community projects and activities.	The role of the schools in social change is acknowledged. Some changes that reflect this attitude begin to be felt: Students take part in community service.	Students take part in community activities that reflect their social concerns.	The curriculum and instructional techniques are based on an understanding of social justice as central to education. Reflection and action are important components of learning.
Process	Education is primarily content: who, what, where, when. The "great White men" version of history is propagated. Education is static.	Education is both content and process. "Why" and "how" questions are tentatively broached.	Education is both content and process. "Why" and "how" questions are stressed more. Sensitivity and understanding of teachers toward their students are more evident.	Education is both content and process. Students and teachers begin to ask. "What if?" Teachers empathize with students and their families.	Education is an equal mix of content and process. It is dynamic. Teachers and students are empowered. Everyone in the school is becoming a multicultural person.
Critical Pedagogy	Education is domesticating. Reality is represented as static, finished, and flat.	Students and teachers begin to question the status quo.	Students and teachers are beginning a dialogue. Students' experiences, cultures, and languages are used as one source of their learning.	Students and teachers use critical dialogue as the primary basis for their education. They see and understand different perspectives.	Students and teachers are involved in a "subversive activity." Decision-making and social action skills are the basis of the curriculum.

bilingual programs in which the languages of all students are used and maintained meaningfully in the academic setting. The curriculum would be characterized by multicultural sensitivity and inclusiveness, offering a wide variety of content and perspectives. Teachers' attitudes and behaviors would reflect only the very highest expectations for all students, although they would understand that students might express their abilities in very different ways. Instructional strategies would also reflect this multicultural perspective and would include a wide variety of means to teach students. Parents would be welcomed and supported in the school as students' first and most important teachers. Their experiences, viewpoints, and suggestions would be sought out and incorporated into classroom and school programs and activities. They, in turn, would be exposed to a variety of experiences and viewpoints different from their own, which would help them expand their horizons.

Other ways in which these four levels might be developed in schools are listed in Table 1–1. Of course, multicultural education cannot be categorized as neatly as this chart would suggest. This model simply represents a theoretical way of understanding how different levels of multicultural education might be visible in a school. It also highlights how pervasive a philosophy it must be. Although any level of multicultural education is preferable to the education offered by a monocultural perspective, each level challenges with more vigor a monolithic and ethnocentric view of society and education. As such, the fourth level is clearly the highest expression of multicultural education.

The fourth level is also the most difficult to achieve for some of the reasons mentioned previously, including the lack of models of multicultural education in our own schooling and experiences. It is here that we are most challenged by values and life-styles different from our own, and with situations that severely test the limits of our tolerance. For instance, dealing with people who are different from us in hygienic practices, food preferences, and religious rites can be trying. It is also extremely difficult and at times impossible to accept and understand cultural practices that run counter to our most deeply held beliefs. For example, if we believe strongly in equality of the sexes and have in our classroom children whose families value males more highly than females, or if we need to deal with parents who believe that education is a frill and not suitable for their children, or if we have children in our classes whose religion forbids them to take part in any school activities except academics—all of these situations test our capacity for affirmation and solidarity. And well they should, for we are all the product of our cultures and thus have learned to view reality from the vantage point of the values they have taught us.

Culture is not static; nor is it necessarily positive or negative. The cultural values and practices of a group of people represent their best strategies, at a particular historical moment, for negotiating their environment and circumstances. What some groups have worked out as appropriate strategies may be considered unsuitable or even barbaric and uncivilized by others. Because each cultural group proceeds from a different context, we can never reach total agreement on the best or most appropriate ways in which to lead our lives. In this sense, culture needs to be approached with a relativistic framework, not as something absolute.

Nevertheless, it should also be stressed that above and beyond all cultures there are human and civil rights that need to be valued and maintained by all people. These rights guarantee that all human beings are treated with dignity, respect, and equality. Sometimes the values and behaviors of a group so seriously challenge these values that we are faced with a real dilemma, but if the values we as human beings hold most dear are ultimately based on extending rights rather than negating them, we must decide on the side of those more universal values.

Multicultural education is not easy; if it were, everyone would be doing it. Similarly, resolving conflicts about cultural differences is difficult, sometimes impossible. For one, the extent to which our particular cultural lenses may keep us from appreciating differences can be very great. For another, some values may be irreconcilable. Usually, however, accommodations that respect both cultural values and basic human rights can be found. Because societies have generally resolved such conflicts in only one way, that is, favoring the dominant culture, few avenues for negotiating differences have been in place. Multicultural education, although at times extremely difficult, painful, and time-consuming, can help provide one way of attempting such negotiations.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Susan Barrett for this wonderful example.

2. See, for example, Molefi Asanti, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988).

3. Carol Ascher, *School Programs for African American Male Students* (New York: ERIC Clearinghouse for Urban Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, May 1991).

4. Gloria Ladson-Billings and Annette Henry, "Blurring the Borders: Voices of African Liberatory Pedagogy in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Education,* 172, 2 (1990), 86.

5. Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

6. For an important analysis of the multicultural debate and how cultures interact, see Joel Spring, *The Intersection of Cultures: Multicultural Education in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995); for a critique of multicultural education from both the left and the right, see Sonia Nieto, "From Brown Heroes and Holidays to Assimilationist Agendas: Reconsidering the Critiques of Multicultural Education." In *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference,* edited by Christine E. Sleeter and Peter McLaren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

7. Christine E. Sleeter, *Keepers of the American Dream: A Study of Staff Development and Multicultural Education* (London: Falmer Press, 1992).

8. Wurzel, for instance, maintains that it is necessary to go through seven "stages of the multicultural process," and these range from *monoculturalism* to *multiculturalism*. See Jaime Wurzel, "Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education." In *Toward Multiculturalism: A Reader in Multicultural Education*, edited by Jaime Wurzel (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1988).

9. I have expanded this model in a recent article, providing specific scenarios for each level. See Sonia Nieto, "Affirmation, Solidarity, and Critique: Moving Beyond Tolerance in Multicultural Education," *Multicultural Education*, 1, 4 (Spring 1994), 9–12, 35–38.

10. Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, *The Experience of Multicultural Education in Australia: Six Case Studies* (Sydney: Centre for Multicultural Studies, Wollongong University, 1990), 39.

11. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Legitimating or Delegitimating New Forms of Racism."

12. Kathy Greeley and Linda Mizell, "One Step among Many: Affirming Identity in Anti-Racist Schools." In *Freedom's Plow: Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom*, edited by Theresa Perry and James W. Fraser (New York; Routledge, 1993).

2

Life After Death

Critical Pedagogy in an Urban Community

J. Alleyne Johnson

Editors' Notes: Drawing from Freire's work, J. Alleyne Johnson adapts critical pedagogy to her middle-school classes, emphasizing the importance of connecting day-to-day realities of urban students to the syllabus. With her discovery of death as a generative theme in the lives of her students, Johnson transformed her role as "knowledge giver" to that of a teacher sharing power and making knowledge with her students. Students were invited to express thoughts and feelings about the deaths of their friends and to use that troubling material for critical thinking. Johnson's methods of incorporating students' knowledge into pedagogy are a lesson for teachers of all levels.

Recently I saw a dead boy. I don't know for sure if he was dead. He looked dead. He laid on the ground in fetal position. Blood oozed from beneath him slowly changing the color of his shirt. I was craning my neck through the car window to see why there were so many policemen on Redding Blvd., when I saw him. Four police cars, lights flashing hysterically, surrounded the stilled body. People were everywhere. I scanned the crowd for any familiar adolescent faces. I wanted to get out of the car and gather with the crowd. I wanted to see if the boy was dead. What happened? Did anyone see? I knew I'd hear about it tomorrow. My students all lived around here. In the hood. It could be family, a homey I saw lying on the ground. I hoped not. It would be hard enough as it was to insist that we get back to the math problems, world history, and lessons in sentence structure for English. (Journal entry, April 18, 1993)