Critical Translation for Education

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Introduction

Multicultural education has become an issue in public school education. Many universities require undergraduate and graduate level courses to address diversity, multiculturalism, or ethnicity (Banks, 1993). Practitioner preparation is problematized by the wide variety of approaches to multicultural education (Grant & Sleeter, 1986). Maureen Gillette and Carl Grant (1991) express concern about the discontent with multicultural education. The discontent comes from both advocates of multicultural education and scholars who want to preserve the traditional curriculum based on Western culture.

Grant (1994) explains how conservative critics reduce multiculturalism to the “melting pot” perspective, arguing “that the United States has always been ‘multicultural’ so there is, in fact, no controversy” (p. 5). Absent from this multicultural perspective is a critical lens. Lost in this de-valuing of multiculturalism is the importance of learning to develop a critical lens that challenges ways of knowing and teaching in the classroom, ways that embrace multiculturalism through a critical pedagogy.

The purpose of this study is to critically examine a graduate level multicultural education course to determine its effectiveness in preparing teachers as critical pedagogues. Specifically, the study examines the translation of multicultural learning activities in a college classroom into critical pedagogy in the public school classrooms.

Theoretical Frame

The theoretical frame for this study is guided by the researcher’s interest in understanding the potential of critical pedagogy (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) to serve as a critical lens for teachers in promoting equity, student voice, and democratic structure. The researcher also strongly believes that until university and public school classroom teachers translate critical pedagogical theory (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) into practice, it will remain only academic theory.

The theoretical frame is grounded in critical pedagogy (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) and multicultural education (Grant & Sleeter, 1986). Critical pedagogy as a focus of this study seeks to examine teacher learning for classroom practice versus actual teacher practice in classrooms (Gore, 1993; Lather, 1998). Relatedly, critical pedagogical study considers where “education, as an integral part of the socialization process, is directed by particular beliefs, values, and interests” (Leistyna, 1999, p. 9). Critical pedagogy questions whose beliefs, values, and interests get to be the foundation and how they reached that plateau. It challenges the hidden curriculum that socializes students into the dominant culture (Leistyna, 1999; Wink, 1997; McLaren, 1998; Gay, 1995; Darder, 1995). It addresses social oppression tied to race, gender, and class (McLaren, 1998; Giroux, 1988; Wink, 1997; Thompson & Gitlin, 1995; Semali, 1998). It challenges curriculum that fosters the unquestioned transmission of knowledge as “banking deposits” or funneling from teacher to student as a learning ritual that calls for dispensation and regurgitation (Leistyna, 1999; Kincheloe, 1993; Wink, 1997; Freire, 1998/1970; Knupfer, 1995).

Moving beyond transmission to translation challenges the preparation and practice of teachers. Grant and Sleeter (1986) describe five approaches to multicultural education, including: Teaching the Culturally Different, Human Relations, Single Group Studies, Multicultural Education, and Education that Is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. Each program has a different point of focus. Teaching Culturally Different builds on “learning styles, experiential backgrounds, and home language” (p. 106). Human Relations builds “better relations between students of different backgrounds and for building student self-concept” (p. 106). Single Group Studies focus on a particular group. Multicultural Education adds on to the established curriculum by reflecting “contri-
tions and perspectives of a variety of groups" (p. 106). This approach celebrates diversity.

Education that Is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist is a critical approach to examining the presence of diversity in school and society. This approach critiques voice, curriculum, and participation in education and society. Education that Is Multicultural challenges the traditional approach to education that is based on one culture—the Western, middle-class, Protestant culture. It is the translation of one professor's critical pedagogy into the development of a university course entitled Education that Is Multicultural that is the subject of this study.

Participants and Setting

The 15 participants of this study were selected from 30 students enrolled in a graduate level education course, Education That Is Multicultural. The 15 participants were selected because they are classroom teachers, K-12. The students not selected are administrators and one junior college instructor. The teachers experienced one professor's critical pedagogical translation, a practice that is far from dispensing information. This professor's critical pedagogical practice utilized multicultural simulation activities followed by debriefing dialogue. Each class period was filled with group activities that required students to relate from different cultural referent points. Through simulated learning activities, students experienced a sense of being identified as "Other" in relationship to classmates. The professor's practices, informed by Carl Grant's multicultural lens in the late 1960s during his involvement in Teacher Core (Personal conference, 9-15-99), were embedded in the concept of "learning communities where everyone's voice can be heard, their presence recognized and valued" (hooks, 1994, p. 185).

Methods and Procedures

The research design for this study is grounded in critical theory research methodology that seeks to give voice to marginalized participants and expose social injustices (Anderson, 1989). It establishes the presence of persons as individuals with voice (Tierney, 1994) and as members of society and culture. The lens of criticality used in this study to illuminate and interrogate the context, processes, and patterns of teacher learning and practice is grounded in post-formalism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999), and employs a critical hermeneutic approach.

Consistent with post-formal inquiry, both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques were used in this study. Specific data techniques included survey/questionnaire and personal interviews. The survey/questionnaire was designed to give the participating teachers the opportunity to share the ways that they used multicultural activities in their classroom. The survey limited responses to checking which multicultural activities were transferred to the classroom and to listing other activities used.

Research interview questions (Mishler, 1986) were designed to give participants the opportunity to share the ways their thinking about teaching, learning and instruction had been impacted by the course. I was particularly interested in the ways that teachers' classroom practices had changed as a result of the course. I was looking for expressions of critical consciousness and critical pedagogical practices.

Drawing on the personal experience methods of Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1994), the professor and participating teachers were invited to tell about their personal experiences in developing a critical pedagogical perspective. Two elements of narrative inquiry methodology were used to analyze the data. Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes between analysis of narrative and narrative analysis. Analysis of narrative allows the researcher to begin with storied accounts, categorize data within the stories, and analyze to learn conceptual knowledge. Narrative analysis begins with descriptions of events and happenings, and uses analysis to produce stories that contain practical, common sense knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1995). In the present study, a three-part non-fiction nar-
rative story is told by the professor who designed and teaches the course, Education that Is Multicultural. The story is then analyzed for critical elements in the critical pedagogical development of a professor and critical elements in translating critical pedagogy into practice.

Narrative analysis is also used to create teacher stories of critical pedagogical development and translation of education that is multicultural into practice in public school settings. Four non-fiction teacher stories are constructed in collaboration with the teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988) who critically reflected on their personal experiences in the course, their thinking, and their practice during the year following the course. Member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) and fidelity (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995) were used as provisions of trustworthiness and collaboration. I wanted to ensure accuracy of events and subjective interpretation. Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) combines these two criteria for trustworthiness and authenticity in evaluating narrative inquiry.

**Storied Account of Critical Pedagogical Translation for Education that Is Multicultural**

**Morgan's Story of Critical Pedagogical Development**

I was raised in Selma, Alabama and a freshman in college when George Wallace was running for governor. If I go back and think about how I developed in this whole issue of critical pedagogy in terms of multiculturalism, there was a turning point in my freshman year in college where I took a course called Bio-Social. It was a single statement by Dr. Riley that was a turning point in how I looked at things. The professor told our class that more Blacks from the North scored higher than Whites from the South on the army IQ tests during and following World War II.

What it tells you is that there was something going on there that was below the surface, that my racism was based on ignorance to a large degree because that one idea would not have started that domino to fall if there had not already been something going on. Basically, what I think it was were three factors as growing up that probably made me able to accept that kind of statement and deal with the contradiction in my cognitive structure that that statement caused. I was sick with asthma, bronchitis, and pneumonia from the age of three until about the fifth or sixth grade. Also, in the second grade, I had everything conceivable (chicken pox, mumps, and measles). I missed a lot of school, and I basically could not read. When I hit the fifth grade, I was probably reading on a second-grade level. So, I experienced some of what it feels like to be discriminated against and stereotyped because I was tall and dumb.

If I was at school, I might make Cs, but when I was sick, I made Ds and Fs. That's basically how I grew up. So, I think that's what later gave me empathy for people who have experienced stereotyping from racial or religious groups.

In the sixth grade, I had polio and had to stay in the hospital or inside the house for six months. This was before television was popular, and I didn't have one in the hospital or at home while I was in isolation. The only thing I had to do was to read, and I jumped six grade levels in six months by learning to read; but nobody ever knew that. Therefore, I wore the stereotype of the kid who always had trouble in school, even though I read a lot outside of school. I knew what stereotyping and prejudice felt like.

A third thing that influenced me came from my mother. She taught me to be tolerant of other people's religions, and that prepared me for transferring the principle to racial tolerance. I think that when I hit that point in my freshman year, I luckily got associated with six or seven individuals who were very serious about studying at college, had a very liberal perspective, and started discussions about these kinds of issues that probably helped me prepare for that kind of change. It also helped that I got married during my freshman year. My wife was in the eleventh grade and already had a liberal view. She influenced me in the area of sex equity issues.

After that change my freshman year, I became radical and couldn't go home and talk to my parents. I'd go back and want to run my mouth off and tell them how wrong they were and how bad ev-

everything was in Selma. I got to the point where I just couldn't talk anymore. I had my wife as support, and we grew toward multiculturalism together.

It took a long time to realize that it was not doing any good to preach at people about racism. To try to understand why people were the way they were, was an important part in me developing my approach to multicultural education because I learned to accept the unacceptable. That's the basis of that kind of approach. You learn how to accept the bigots, those people who are prejudice, who hate as human beings. Reject their behavior. Reject their actions and always look for the cause of their behavior and actions even though you may never figure it out.

I became a high school teacher and helped my school go through integration of 800 black students into the previously all-white school. My college experience had prepared me for the transition while some of the teachers at the high school struggled. I developed a kind of a natural affinity for a lot of the black students and got involved with the track team. Ron Jones, the track coach, had a Ph.D. in psychology and had been a head track coach in California for 20 years at the junior college level and had won the California Junior College track championship 16 out of the 20 years he had been there. Ron became my mentor as a beginning teacher. I helped out with the track team, going out with the clock, keeping records, and that sort of thing.

We desegregated the Civitan club at the high school and admitted black members and the Civitan club downtown made a rule. They had always historically sent two Civitan members to every one of their luncheons. It had always been white up to that point. But when we desegregated the club, they passed a rule that if a white Civinette went to the luncheon, we had to send two white Civinettes together. So the club just said, "Well, no. We're not going to do it." And they wrote up something that looked like the Declaration of Independence. This was a fantastic group, and we went to the State Civitan meeting, walked out of the convention because they voted us down, saying that we should not be able to exist as a club with the sponsorship of this racist Civitan organization.

Following that, there was a professor at the University of Georgia who got a grant and came down and ran a desegregation workshop. I took it along with a friend of mine from that high school. We
were real active in that class and got the professor to come and visit at the high school, talk to students, and see what they were doing. Parker High School became a model for desegregating schools in Georgia, and I began conducting workshops in several different communities around the state. I went to probably 20 different cities' high schools just to share with them my perspectives, and I found that I had a lot of power because of the fact that I grew up in Selma, a city known at the time for its racial problems.

That got me interested in going into the master and doctoral programs. I was already developing my ideas for approaching multicultural issues in education programs. I concentrated on taking Third World history courses and sociology of religion and things of that nature that I wanted to use to build that part of my approach to the multicultural issues.

The Urban-Rural School Development Program to help Native Americans and Hispanics was my first job out of the doctoral program. We went to Stanford and places like that, and I came into contact with groups that I had never perceived in terms of my multicultural understanding. I had never dealt with native Americans or Hispanics, and I got some rude awakenings as to how some of those folks viewed white folks. For the first time, I began to confront my own whiteness from the perspective of non-whites. It was in Teacher Core that I got involved with Carl Grant and Bruce Joyce, as well as other people who worked in the curriculum area, developing a multicultural education curriculum. Education that is multicultural became central to my thinking.

Most of the growth I've experienced as an adult has been because of the experiences that I've had, not the intellectual material that I have read. I read stuff too, but it's the experience that made me grow more than the reading.

I taught education courses in South Carolina for 15 years but was never allowed to offer a multicultural course. In 1994, here in Texas, I was finally allowed to offer the course under the title, Special Topics in Education. Three years later, the course was offered, as it is now, as Education that Is Multicultural. Through word of mouth, the course has grown in popularity.

There's a need for the course. There's a lot of prejudice going on, and so much of it is subtle. We had a big argument in the chair's meeting about ExCET and testing and that kind of stuff. I just said, "There's a lot of racist legislators and ever since 1954, they've been trying to get rid of black teachers and they did it blatantly for 10 years through the NTE test and all the other tests; but then they learned they couldn't do it blatantly so now they do it in terms of accountability and business." Business does this. Business calls it accountability when all it is there's a group of legislators who don't want any black teachers. It's pure racism. Some people don't like to hear that.

Analysis of Narrative

In the using of analysis of narrative to examine Morgan's storied accounts, three themes emerged as lessons about elements that contribute to the breakdown of stereotypical thinking and the development of multicultural thinking and critical pedagogical practice. Personal experience is clearly a theme. Morgan's personal experience with being stereotyped as "tall and dumb" made it possible for him to relate to the inequity and the pain of stereotyping that leads to racism.

A second theme in Morgan's story is the role that research plays in educating people in a way that can trigger critical thinking. When Morgan heard the statistic that more Blacks from the North scored higher than Whites from the South on the army IQ tests during and following World War II, he was able to critically rethink the stereotype that Whites were inherently intellectually superior to Blacks.

A third theme in Morgan's story has to do with bridging the gap between theory and practice. Morgan began by arguing in
an effort to change “racists” but soon realized that would not work. Instead, he put his energy into critical pedagogical practice. This can be seen in his running of the track team to integrate the Civitan Club. It can be seen in the way he got involved in workshops to actively help schools in Georgia to process integration. It can be seen in his development of curriculum that promotes education that is multicultural. Finally, it can be seen in his development of an experiential teacher preparation course, Education that Is Multicultural, a course that causes teachers to critically self-reflect on their own stereotypes.

Description of Simulation Activities

**Stereotypes:** This is an introductory activity in which students draw pictures to represent various cultures. During debriefing, participants realize that their stereotype images have been exposed. The activity is especially effective when representatives of the various stereotyped cultures express outrage. For the first time, some white students experience that it is part of the white culture to stereotype others from a point of view that is prejudice.

**Seal Hunt:** This cooperative activity requires participants to learn that survival as a human race is dependent on everyone working together for the common good.

**Star Power:** A simulation that models the abuse of power that develops in a trading society. Students trade and are awarded by being allowed to draw chips from an enriched pool. Additionally, the group that moves ahead, point-wise, gains the right to create new rules as they desire. The result is a society in which the rich get richer, etc. The simulation usually ends with a revolt by the peasants against a system in which they have no hope. Debriefing is critical.

**Decisions:** This simulated activity requires students to work in small groups and make decisions based on a given scenario. Each member plays a character in the scenario and states positions from the given point of view. This activity helps students to see issues from varying positions and learn how to negotiate decisions for the common good.

**GT:** In this simulated learning activity, students are presented with ten student identity profiles and asked to choose three of the represented profiles for placement in a Gifted and Talented program. This is a program that continues to separate and stereotype children in schools. Only after the students have made their selections do they realize that they rejected people like Abraham Lincoln.

**Ghetto:** In this simulated learning activity, participants experience the frustration of life lived in poverty. Participants receive identity packets that assign them to a given economic level. As play progresses, many students experience life with limited transportation, the shame of not being able to pay bills, and the pain and crime that often results.

**Foods Across the Globe (Overpopulation):** This learning activity allows the participants to make global connections between affluence and poverty. Students are challenged to think about humanity from a global perspective and realize that what one nation’s economy affects other nations’ economy.

**Balkanization:** This learning activity requires research and transference of the principle of Balkanization to race relations. Students are challenged to consider pluralism as an alternative to Balkanization in multicultural relations.

**Cultural Heritage:** This learning activity requires students to work with other students of similar national heritage, and prepare a presentation to show the ways that prejudices were historically developed.

**Concepts:** In this activity, students are presented with a series of pictures through which they must look for the development of a concept. Students look for common themes in the pictures. Each picture reinforces the developing theme or results in students changing their point of view as the broader picture unfolds. The emphasis is on misconceptions held by participants. Example: most students have a stereotypical definition of “desert” until they are shown pictures of deserts covered with ice.

These were the activities that the students participated in during the course, Education that Is Multicultural. Was there transfer from the university classroom to the public school setting where the fifteen participating teachers daily interact with children from diverse cultures?

**Transfer from University Classroom to Public School Setting**

**Statistical Analysis**

Thirteen of the 15 teachers returned completed surveys in May 2000, following participation in the course during the summer of 1999. The other two students returned the completed survey in November 2000 at the time of the interviews. Survey responses indicate that there was little transference to the public school classroom in terms of using the simulated activities. If the goal of the course was to get teachers to use the simulated activities, the results would be interpreted as an indication that Morgan’s course, Education that Is Multicultural, was a failure.

Simple transfer of specific multicultural activities as a form of multicultural education is not the goal of the course, Education that Is Multicultural. The real objectives are to have people start integrating some ideas that are multicultural into their classrooms and thinking of things that they have been doing all along that have multicultural potential, but that they never saw before. More importantly, the goal is for teachers to change from a monocultural perspective centered in white, middle-class, Protestant, European heritage to a multicultural perspective of education that respects all cultures and legitimates all voices in the classroom.

**Narrative Analysis of Critical Pedagogical Translation for Education that Is Multicultural**

Follow-up interviews with the participating teachers tell a different story than the one told by the statistics. Fourteen of the 15 teachers who participated in the course were interviewed. One teacher had moved and could not be located. The purpose of the narrative inquiry was to determine what kind of critical pedagogical development had occurred in the participating teachers. The statistical data only indicates the use of specific multicultural curriculum activities by teachers. The use of these activities would not ensure that critical pedagogy was being operationalized.

Sleeter and McLaren (2000) remind us that “many white educators have pulled multicultural education away from social struggles and redefined it to mean the celebration of ethnic foods and festivals” (p. 12). The number of multicultural activities used in a classroom is no measure of the social struggle as critical pedagogy. Rather, multiculturalism is a concept to be wrestled with through self-reflection and dialogical practices.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) define multiculturalism as the state of existence of the society in which we live. Their perspective problematizes the status quo of Western monoculturalism that once left the dominant white majority free to not think of self in terms of cultural values, which appeared more as a universal state.
of being, rather than a socially constructed culture. Only through teachers' sharing of their critical self-reflective struggle with this issue, can the degree of critical pedagogy, as a translation for education that is multicultural, be determined.

Interviews were conducted in order to explore critical pedagogical development with the teachers and evaluate whether people started integrating some ideas that are multicultural into their classrooms. The interviews were guided by questions designed to generate personal stories of experiences in the course and transfer to the classroom, and these stories serve as a narrative analysis of critical pedagogical development for education that is multicultural.

Four points of exploration trace teacher pedagogical development. These include: understanding of the concept of education that is multicultural; critical learning experience during the class; influence of the course on teacher thinking about teaching, learning, and instruction; and translation into critical pedagogical practice for education that is multicultural.

Four teacher stories are presented as narrative analysis of events and happenings that resulted in teacher pedagogical translation for education that is multicultural. The stories are then followed by an analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1994) for the pattern of critical pedagogical development and examples of critical pedagogical practices.

**Teacher Stories of Critical Pedagogical Translation for Education that is Multicultural**

**Tracie's Story**

I am African American and female. I teach high school personal fitness. My ethnic heritage includes Native American Indian on the paternal side of my family. I teach in a predominantly African American and Hispanic high school in a SA school district. White students are in the minority at my school.

I took the course, Education That Is Multicultural, because I understood it was going to be a course in cooperation and thought it would be fun. I learned that education that is multicultural is education that takes different approaches to cover all cultures and backgrounds, not necessarily to satisfy, but to try to cover all cultures and backgrounds, and appeal to all different types of people. The course gave educational information to the people who were taking the course as well as information to pass on to younger students that we may be teaching to acquaint them with some things that they may or may not know about other races and populations.

One activity, Ghetto, really impacted me. Like so many other people, I had assumptions about how things were with people that may or may not be on welfare, may or may not have a certain amount of education. Getting to actually act out the part and see from the other person's point of view was an eye-opener. Seeing it like the person that worked at the bank or seeing it like the person that worked at the employment office was hard. I had to tell poor people, "We're closed. No, I can't help you regardless of what kind of story you have for me. The day's over for me, even if it may not be for you." It gives you a lot to think about.

I was the person at the employment office. And they had to fill out the application. I used to tell my students, and still do tell them, that it's important when they go to apply for jobs to fill out everything on the application and don't leave anything blank. I actually got to see that for myself. I saw how important it really is that they write legible because if the person that's looking at the application can't read and understand it at the employment office, the first place it's going to go is in the trash if they can't understand it. They're not going to call you and ask, "What does this say?"

This changed the way I view my students. I stopped making so many assumptions about students' understanding, whether it's because of learning abilities or otherwise. I finally noticed that there are other things that come into play: the way that they see things at home, things that may affect them before they get to school, and just a lot of other things to think about. When I'm questioning students about their homework assignment, I have to think about how a lot of them haven't done their homework assignment. It may be better to discuss it in class instead of always making assignments and taking them at the start of class.

In some cases, I know that I give more time for students to do assignments. We're on AB block schedule, and I used to just tell them to do an assignment and it's due the next class period. A lot of times I now make exceptions, depending on what each individual student may say about their homework assignment. If they're responsible enough to come and discuss the situation with me, then I give them more time.

**Sandy's Story**

I am middle class, white, and female. I teach sixth grade math in a small East Texas rural school district where I grew up. My ethnic heritage is Irish and German. I took the course, Education That Is Multicultural, because it was a course requirement. Also, I thought it would be a good class to help me as a teacher, just to get a good perspective on other lifestyles that I might not actually be aware of because culture has been in the background.

Education that is multicultural sounded like it would just have to do with the school setting. I learned that it really has to do with the education that you are receiving all the time, whether you are at school, at work, in your family; and it's more involved than what the title actually makes it sound. It was about backgrounds, but it all came back into how you can use it in class. We also learned how we can use it outside of the school settings in our neighborhood and in our communities.

The course makes people change. We definitely got a better understanding of the cultures around this area. It helped us to learn some of the views of other nationalities, their background, their belief system, why they do some of the things they choose to do. It also helped us become more in contact with ourselves and our background. It taught us something
about our culture that we did not know or weren’t aware of, and how our culture was built from other societies.

Ghetto really impacted me. I learned what life was like when lived in poverty. Although it was a game, and we were kind of enjoying it and having fun with it, once we were dealt who we were and we had to work as that person with our setbacks or our gains that we had, it made realize how lucky I was. Because of the family I was born into, I really have had a fairly easy life. Even though it was just a game, it was kind of harsh. One minute you’re about to go to college and the next minute you’re pregnant and you can’t. You have to work and find a way to have daycare and all this other stuff. I think that game really kind of put a lot of stuff into perspective for me that before I had probably just taken for granted.

I was like the head of my class. I was Hispanic and female. I got pregnant. It was frustrating. I knew it was just a game, but I thought, "This isn’t fair. I was doing so well, and now and I can’t seem to get ahead.” Next thing I knew, I was pregnant again, and had to go back on welfare. Every time I tried to get out, something happened, and I went right back in. So, it was very frustrating.

I learned some important lessons about myself as a person and as a teacher. I wrestled with the ways that I had treated my children without recognizing and respecting their cultural differences. After the class I realized that before hand I was not being, not necessarily unfair to some children, but my expectations of them and how I expected them to behave were just not something that they were brought up to do. For example, when I used to talk to children when they were in trouble, I would tell them to look at me. Some cultures, out of respect, they don’t look at you. That’s the way they’re taught, and so, instead of telling a child to look at me, I just make sure they are listening.

Also, I learned something about dealing with some of the parents. I think that one thing that came out of this class that I never thought about is how a lot of Hispanic families really value education, but they’re intimidated by teachers, especially if they are recent immigrants. Now, when I’m trying to talk with those parents, I try to be very down to earth, very nurturing and nice, and make sure that they realize that I value their opinion as much as I would another parents’. I really get to know them.

I now try to be more sensitive to students and where they were coming from, what their home life may be, more so than I did before; and I think that it really does help. The students feel like they can talk to me more easily. I won’t be judging them, I work with them. I just think I’m a lot more compassionate towards others now. I don’t just look at them and go, "Well, if they wanted to do something about it, they could." I realize that there are many people out there who try, and they keep trying. They keep being dealt these hands that you can only do so much with, and, you know, after a while, I can see why they get frustrated and give up.

Also started doing some volunteer work around my community, such as Peace Core, which I really enjoy. I get to meet students from all types of backgrounds. We deal with white children from an upper socioeconomic class, black children from upper economic class, and some children from the low classes. I really enjoy that because when they get in there, and we get to talk to them, they’re really good kids. They just got caught up in something wrong, and most of them really seem to care. They want to do better. I don’t know. I really enjoyed that.

The course also has helped me with my new job as a diagnostician. I’ve had to go on several home visits because the parents could not get to the school or the office. For instance, the other day, I took it as a compliment because that’s how he meant it. He asked me if I had ever gone to college, and I said, "Well, yes sir, I have." And he said, "Well, you seem like you have a lot more sense than some of those people. You’re real nice to us.” That made me feel good that he feels he could talk freely to me and that I’m not intimidating to them, and that I sat there one day and visited with them for like two and a half hours.

I just needed to get some paper work filled out, but then we sat around and talked. They told me a lot about their family and what was going on with their children. It gave us a little background that helped because we were having some problems with the students in the school. Then I was able to go back and tell the teachers that they needed to understand what these children had gone through and what they were going through right then, and the teachers were more understanding, and the children quit getting in trouble. I think they started feeling more comfortable at school, now that they didn’t feel like everybody’s out to get them. The teachers weren’t in the first place, but once they knew a little more about these two children’s backgrounds, they were a lot more understanding, and so, it helps me even in this new job, too.

Carolyn’s Story

I am African American. I was teaching in a high school in a 5A school district when I took the course. Education That Is Multicultural. I taught one more year and then took a job as an assistant principal at a culturally diverse middle school. Education has always, in my opinion, been given to us from an Anglo perspective, and education that is multicultural does not focus on just the Anglo perspective.

There were two incidents during the course that are really memorable to me. One was when I got to openly express my thoughts and feelings that were different from the dominant, white perspective. The second experience was presenting with other African American students, my own cultural heritage to the class. The first one was the decision exercise. The scenario had to do with a mayor being elected for this particular town and some of the things that mayor was facing when he was running for election. One thing had to do with a particular store in town that sold a lot of racial things. That particular exercise led into a discussion about things that were in the store that I found to be offensive. In the group discussion, I had an opportunity, as a minority, to express my feelings about things that are offensive to me. One thing was the displaying of a confederate flag. In my opinion, that just reminds people of slavery. Other people commented, "Well, that’s just part of our history." But I think it just showed how one race of people may perceive something, and another race of people perceive it just the opposite.

The other activity that we did which was memorable to me was when we looked at our heritage and did a history on our heritage about how we came to America. We had to do a presentation on that and shared history on how we got here to this country.

The course reinforced my thinking that being raised African American, a minority culture, in the dominant Anglo culture had helped me to already be sensitive to the diverse needs of my students. I believe that the children’s backgrounds and experiences have a lot to do with their learning styles. I think being sensitive to different backgrounds and different experiences that children have been involved in very definitely impacts the
way that they learn. I feel like I have to reach all children. Teachers have to be aware of the different learning styles and the different backgrounds from which children come. As a result of that, we have to find techniques that work with different children. The same teaching techniques do not necessarily make all children successful. I integrated some of the learning activities from the course, Education That Is Multicultural, into my lessons that brought about some cultural awareness. One specific thing I did was to give my students an opportunity to explore another country. They had the opportunity to choose any country in this world where they might like to live and give a reason for wanting to move there. They did some internet research, and the things that I wanted them to focus on when they were doing their research were the people, cultures, religions, economy, ethnicity of the country, and those sorts of things. So, I think, as a result of that class, I started trying to look for activities that brought about an awareness of other cultures within my students’ thinking.

I believe that the children’s backgrounds and experiences have a lot to do with their learning styles. I think being sensitive to different backgrounds and different experiences that children have been involved in very definitely impact the way that they learn. I feel like I have to reach all children. The critical moment for me came while playing a simulation game, Poverty. I think that might have been the final straw as far as feeling so negative towards the course. Just because I’m a white male, I didn’t have it great coming up. It just seemed to me, and it may be just because that my thought process was, I’m trying to learn about how all these minorities have it so bad when I had it bad myself.

John’s Story

I am a white male. At the time I took the course, I coached and taught high school health. I am now a principal of a middle school. I took the course, “Education That Is Multicultural,” to finish my mid-management certification as quickly as I could. I took 12 hours that summer and thought of the course as just something to get me closer to my degree. I had to have a multicultural course to be able to graduate. Education that is multicultural means learning the cultures of all different races, creeds, ethnic groups, and sexes. I guess that’s it. That is my opinion. I thought that the views that were pointed out in class were just to let you know how, and this is my opinion, how bad minorities have it and how great whites have it. When I tried to interject something, it always came back to all these minorities have been so bad off for so long, and we ought to excuse this kind of stuff. They don’t know how I grew up. How does a person know that I didn’t grow up having to do everything for myself? I mean, yes, I’m a white male, and I’m in the majority, but I didn’t eat from a silver spoon all my life. I worked for everything I had. In the class we played games the whole time, and I just didn’t like it.

The critical moment for me came when we played that game. The course didn’t change anything. I mean from my whole life, and when I started teaching, I look at all kids as one. I mean, I don’t say, “Hey, look, there’s a minority. There’s a kid that doesn’t have anything at home. He lives in a big house down the street.” I try to treat all kids the same.

Analysis of Narratives

The teacher narratives were analyzed for evidence of translation of education that is multicultural into critical pedagogy in the public school classroom. A pattern emerged. Most of the teachers were critically impacted during one or more of the learning activities in a way that resulted in a broader perspective and critical self-reflection with regard to their teaching practices. Those teachers who were able to understand the perspective of people different from themselves and the ways that society marginalizes people outside the dominant culture, changed their thinking about teaching, learning, instruction, and changed their pedagogical practices. The changed practices reflect critical pedagogy because the practices are culturally sensitive and empower students and their families to have a greater participation in the educational process.

A pattern of resistance to change was also evident. Four teachers expressed that the course did not result in a change in their thinking or their teaching practices. Three of these teachers were white males and one was a white female. The white female teaches in a private, religious-supported school that openly professes discrimination of beliefs and values.

Examples from the teacher narratives provide evidence for critical pedagogical practices and resistance to critical pedagogical practices. Tracie considers that students experience different routines in their homes and that not all routines are conducive to homework. Tracie “give[s] more time for students to do assignments” when they express a need. Cindy became “more sensitive to students” and to “what their home life may be” like. She expressed more compassion for her students and her “students felt like they could talk to [her] more easily.” Cindy’s critical pedagogy extended beyond the walls of the schoolhouse. She began to do volunteer work with Pain Core, where she took the time to get to know troubled teenagers as individuals.

Cindy’s story about visiting an Hispanic family to complete routine paper work is an exemplar of critical pedagogy. She ended up listening to the family’s stories for over two hours. She learned about the struggles that the children had been through and were going through. Giving the family members the opportunity to identify themselves and sharing the information with the teachers at school resulted in empowerment for the children who exhibited more control over their behavior at school after that and for the teachers who exhibited more understanding.

Carolyn’s critical pedagogical development is seen in her approach to teaching. When planning lessons, Carolyn looks for ways to let her curriculum become a tool for cultural awareness among her high school students. Also, Carolyn felt more empowered to act consistent with her belief that she had to reach all children. She used awareness of learning styles as a tool to reach more of her students’ needs.

John’s story is one among four that could have been selected as an exemplar of resistance to critical pedagogical practices. John’s story contains elements of the com
plexity of social stratification in the United States. John is part of the dominant white, male culture; but John did not grow up enjoying the benefits of membership based on gender and skin color. Socio-economically, John is more culturally akin to the majority of people who are marginalized by the society that was historically designed by the white, male dominant culture.

Like most students in the course, John experienced a critical experience, but it was not one that moved him to deeper understanding of social injustices. John experienced resentment and resistance to change because he has worked hard to gain access to the benefits that have traditionally been "rightfully" his as part of the dominant culture. John’s self-reflection reinforces the myth that through hard work anyone can move up in American society. John does not consider that his whiteness was a source of power that allowed him access to mobility, a mobility that is denied to others who work hard but experience discriminating social practices.

Michael, another white male teacher in the class, expressed that he did not change as a result of the course. “I was taught how to teach band. I approach a band the same way I approached it when I first stepped in front of a band. I teach it the same way. To me, in my way of thinking, I just kept on truckin’” (11/17/00). Michael went on to say that he does not see his students any differently than before he took the class, “I always felt like I was a pretty fair and impartial individual to begin with, and it didn’t effect me in any way. I feel like I’ve been pretty consistent in that area” (11/17/00).

Tom, another white male in the class, indicated that he did not change as a result of the class. His perception of the class was that “it was unorganized” and had no “clear-cut goals.” Tom said that he “was looking for something that was a little more linear.” In explaining what education that is multicultural means, Tom replied:

…it was designed for educators to make them more aware of teaching multicultural classrooms; that there’s more than one perspective; that you can’t be too centrist. You have to take everybody else’s opinions into account, cultures into account when you’re teaching. (11/27/00)

Tom was not impacted by the simulation activities, which he referred to as “abstract games.” He thinks the course would be improved by reducing the number of games and adding guest speakers, who could “come in with some life experiences to give anecdotal evidence of different things.”

Though the class was designed to allow all the students in the class to express their cultural identities and share their life experiences with regard to stereotyping discrimination, Tom did not seem to hear them or see them. Tom can give a cognitive definition of education that is multicultural, but believes that the course did not do “one thing” for him. He does not need to change because he was “pretty much aware as it was.”

Sarah, a white female, who teaches in a private religious school, did not change her thinking or teaching practices. For Sarah, education that is multicultural is about “tolerance for different races, religion, and backgrounds.” Sarah did not change because her beliefs and values do not accept the perspective of education that is multicultural. Sarah stated,

I teach at a private school, and we have different views and concepts. We’re not tolerant of all views, I guess, especially religion. We’re very, as he (the teacher) said, narrow on certain views.

Sarah stated that she could not apply what was taught in the class in the setting where she teaches. Sarah indicated that she was not impacted by the learning activities in the class. She referred to the activities by saying, “we played a bunch of those games.” Sarah’s concern about the course had to do with grading and the lack of thoroughness in the syllabus.

While John, Michael, Tom, and Sarah represent examples of students who did not develop a critical pedagogy or change their teaching practices towards a philosophy of education that is multicultural, the other eleven teachers indicated varying degrees of changed thinking about teaching, learning, and instruction.

Awareness of students’ learning styles emerged as a theme in Lisa’s story, not shared in this paper. Lisa described the course as a “hands-on way to learn different teaching techniques and to address the diversity in classrooms” (Lisa, 11/17/00). Lisa explains the concept of education that is multicultural, recognizing that “within every classroom, with the diversity of students, you’re going to have to teach in different ways to different learning styles” (Lisa,
11/17/00). For Lisa, diversity in a classroom is a given, and it’s the teacher’s responsibility to recognize it and address it.

Beth, a white female, used to limit her perspective of multiculturalism to the identification of Hispanics and African Americans in schools. These two groups were identified as minorities that are different from the norm set by the white culture. Beth stated that she “gained so much knowledge and a wider perspective about multiculturalism after the course” (Beth, 11/15/00).

Beth developed a greater “understanding about the backgrounds of where [her] kids are coming from.” She now sees that socioeconomic is a cultural element that she must be aware. Beth stated that she realizes that she has to bring her students’ cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic situation into view when she is “teaching, especially when [she is] dealing with parents, and parent conferences, and trying to get them involved with their children’s education” (Beth, 11/15/00).

Beth’s changed perspective was a direct result of playing the role of banker in the simulation activity, Ghetto. People came to Beth at the bank to cash their pay checks. Beth had to take their loan payment out before to give them the rest of the money. Sometimes, that left a customer with only ten dollars to take home to the family. This was an eye-opener for Beth, one that made her see some of her students and their families through a critical pedagogical lens. She became conscious of the social inequities that affect her students’ lives.

Marsha, a white female, also became conscious of the social inequities among her students. She found the courage to teach about the Civil Rights Movement with her elementary students. She does not want her students to grow up and be judgmental of people in low socioeconomic positions as she discovered that she was before the course. She no longer believes that her students’ families could do better if they would just try. She now respects what some of those parents are able to accomplish while living in very difficult life situations.

Jackie, an African American, indicated that she learned a lot about her own culture as well as the cultures of others. She found it interesting, and stated that “it’s something that I carry with me all the time when I see different people from different areas. This course enlightened me to be aware that everybody has a different culture. They have a history that goes back.” Jackie now believes that “just because I’m Black does not mean that I’m strictly Black. I could also be mixed with Italian” (Jackie, 11/13/00).

Conclusion

Education that is multicultural moves past the liberal multiculturalism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) that celebrates diversity through food festivals, special programs, and holiday observances. Education that is multicultural is a shift in perspective from viewing education through a centric, monocular perspective to viewing education through a critical multicultural lens (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Steinberg, 1995) that results in a critical pedagogy that empowers diverse students and their families. Education that is multicultural has the potential to permeate all aspects of the educational process, resulting in changed practices that work for authentic participation of all members of the broader society.

Teachers as critical pedagogues must utilize reflective-reflexive skills and engage in deep critical inquiry into their own teaching practices. Teachers must engage in the critical pedagogical discourse in scholarship, but more importantly must apply a critical multicultural lens to teaching practices. Only, then, can critical pedagogy be translated into public school practice and allow teachers to participate in the systemic change of education from education that is monocultural to education that is multicultural.


