

Curriculum & Schooling: Multiculturalism, Critical Multiculturalism and Critical Pedagogy

Delphina Hopkins-Gillispie, Ph.D.

Schools exist to prepare young people for the future. Throughout that future, students will be exposed to a multiethnic societal curriculum. How they perceive the curriculum, how it affects their beliefs and attitudes, and how it influences their interethnic behavior will, to a great extent, be a result of today's schools preparing them to be multiethnically literate (Banks & Banks, 2008). Changing schools to reflect the ethnic diversity within American society provides a tremendous opportunity to implement the kinds of significant curriculum reforms—including conceptual teaching, interdisciplinary approaches to the study of social issues, and value inquiry. Such change also provides opportunities for student involvement in social action and social participation activities. Thus, multicultural education/critical multiculturalism can serve as a vehicle for general and substantial educational reform. This is probably its greatest promise. We can best view multicultural education/critical multiculturalism as a process as well as a reform movement that will result in a new type of schooling, presenting novel views of the American experience and helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, and commitments needed to make our nation and our world more responsive to the human condition. In the following sections of this article, I will provide a definition and overview of various approaches to multicultural education, describe its potential to reform schools, and illustrate how these goals may be achieved in the classroom, with a particular focus on the training of preservice teachers.

An Overview of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education has become the common term used to describe the type of pluralist education that its advocates are seeking for all children receiving an education. Supporters of multicultural education (e.g., Banks, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 2003) claim that, at the societal level, its major goals are to reduce prejudice and discrimination against oppressed groups, to work toward equal opportunity and social justice for all groups, and to effect an equitable distribution of power among members of different cultural groups (Sleeter, 1996). Within the field of education, Banks (1993) views the primary goal of multicultural education as transforming schools so that “all students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world” (p. 28). In what is perhaps the most comprehensive definition of multicultural education, Sonia Nieto (2000a) states:

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 reflect. Multicultural education permeates the schools' curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students and families, 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 as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice. (p. 305)

Multicultural education relates to the recognition of values, lifestyles, and symbolic representations. Bennett's (1999) definition of multicultural education provides a foundational explanation to an approach to teaching and learning that, from her point of view, is:

based upon democratic values and beliefs, and affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies ... It is based on the assumption that the primary goal of public education is

to foster the intellectual, social, and personal development of virtually all students to their highest potential. Multicultural education . . . [includes] . . . the movement toward equity, curriculum reform, the process of becoming interculturally competent, and the commitment to combat prejudice and discrimination, especially racism. (p. 11)

Although the promises of multicultural policies are, for the most part, yet to be realized, multicultural education continues to focus on adaptation of the schools to the idea of multicultural education (Ghaffari, 2000). Thus, one of the more effective ways to implement multicultural education in the schools is by preparing preservice teachers in the theory and practice of multicultural education.

Multiculturalism, an established discipline in the field of education, manifests a body of knowledge, texts, and curricula (Banks, 1993; Bennett, 1999; Gay, 2004; Giroux, 1983). Despite the debate about the nature and goals of multicultural education, the discipline has carved out a place in the minds and hearts of educators. An examination of the literature on critical multiculturalism leads to questions about multiculturalism and critical pedagogy: How might these constructs contribute to the ways we think about curriculum and education? And what are the implications for curriculum in general and teacher education in particular? To better understand the various conceptualizations of multicultural education, I briefly discuss traditional and liberal multiculturalism, and provide an explanation of critical multiculturalism, connecting it to critical pedagogy that has been a focus in classrooms.

The Traditional Multicultural Perspective

The traditional perspective is often called conservative multiculturalism in education. Socially, it refers to an antagonistic tension between the recognition of diversity, with the risk of fragmentation, and the necessity of defining a common society with the affirmation of a national identity. Traditional multicultural tenets tend to see culture as fixed, essentialist, and predetermined (Taguieff, 1997). Traditionalists are concerned primarily with the expeditious transmission of the cultural heritage of the dominant society through the fixed body of knowledge and the perpetuation of the existing social order (Banks & Banks, 2007). Individuals such as Franklin Bobbitt, Ralph Tyler, E.D. Hirsch, and advocates of “back to basics” curricula fall into this category. What one assumes as being a universal culture is the manifestation of Western-centrism. This view has failed to “promote a systematic critique of the ideology of ‘Westernness’ that is ascendant in curriculum and pedagogical practices in education... [although its] proponents articulate a language of inclusion” (McCarthy, 1994, p. 89). In fact, the consequences are the perpetuation of established groups’ hegemony and the marginalization of disadvantaged or segregated groups. In education, traditional multiculturalism favors the reproduction of the value of the mainstream society or “cultural production” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). From the traditional perspective, neither mechanisms of racism nor ethnocentric biases regarding Westernness or Eurocentrism are questioned. Hence, from the traditional perspective, the world is as it is.

Conservative Critiques of Multicultural Education

The target of conservative critics is not the multicultural education literature itself; their targets are curricular changes and policies being instituted in schools and universities on a wide scale. Their point of contention is not so much whether education should be multicultural but what that should mean. Ratvitch (1990) insists that the curriculum is already multicultural because “the common culture is multicultural” (p. 10). Stotsky (1991) optimistically explains that reasonable citizens “should applaud the integration of non-Western cultures and the histories of various minorities—women, Hispanics, Blacks, Native Indian communities—into our schools’ curricula” (p. 26).

The main concern of conservative critics is that schools and universities are responding to diversity in an increasingly harmful manner, and that damaging ideas increasingly drive public education, with “myths of multiculturalism fed to all school children by a state monopoly that is masquerading behind the values of

tolerance, diversity, and pluralism” (Stotsky, 1991, p. 26). Furthermore, this “spread of new multicultural perspectives throughout schools has taken place without much notice” (Gray, 1991, p. 13). The public needs to be aware of perilous changes in schools (Gay, 2004) and of dangerous effects of U.S. immigration policies (Auster, 1992). These circumstances lead to changes in schools’ demographics, and teachers need to be prepared to be sensitive to the cultural diversity in their classrooms that results from these changes.

The Liberal Multicultural Perspective

Liberal multicultural education values cultural pluralism, which is, according to Bennett (1999):

an ideal state of societal conditions characterized by equity and mutual respect among existing cultural groups. It contrasts sharply with cultural assimilation or “melting pot” images, where ethnic minorities are expected to give up their traditions and blend in or be absorbed in the mainstream society or predominant culture. (p. 11)

According to Grant (1994), multicultural education proposes to adapt curricula, teaching styles, learning strategies, and communication between school and families. Also, it favors the adaptation of schools to the needs of students and parents. Most teachers who abide by the established practices of liberal multiculturalism try to incorporate some aspects of cultural diversity (such as diversity of religion) into their curriculum, support bilingual education, believe in the typology of racism, and reflect on the impact of ethnocentrism.

Based on the willingness to diversify the curriculum and add cultural content, this approach favors differences and similarities without trivializing and folklorizing cultures proposed in the curriculum. In such a reality, teachers will need to be prepared to understand students from different backgrounds, to teach content that does not represent mainstream culture only, and to learn to communicate with parents. This position sees culture not as fixed and essentialist, as in the traditional position, but as dynamic and flexible. From the liberal perspective, mechanisms of racism question the social construction of superiority and inferiority, discrimination, and exclusion based on physical or ethnic differences, whereas ethnocentric biases revisit the perspective of universality. Hence, from the liberal perspective, the world might be different.

Critical Multicultural Perspective

Historically, multicultural studies have encouraged us to advocate traditionally underrepresented and excluded cultures and to consider them in their own right rather than through the lens of any single culture (Giroux, 1983). Critical multicultural education encourages students to see in a variety of ways so that they may begin to understand the complex web of intersectional and intercultural relationships in the United States today. Contemporary scholars have called for a modification of traditional multicultural education toward a critical multiculturalism that seeks to promote democratic initiatives in curriculum, pedagogy, and social relations in the schools (McLaren, 2003). Critical multiculturalism promotes understanding and participating in a diverse society and supports the efforts directed toward attaining social, cultural and emotional harmony. Critical multiculturalism suggests that, as teachers/learners, we each give ourselves to the process of transformation through our own personal means and in dialog with others (Freire, 1998). Transformation requires teachers to be “impatiently patient” and to become actors in our own development as human beings (Freire, 1994). Slowly, patiently, and with agency, transformation congeals around the central theme of developing a political economy of historical agency (Freire, 1998).

Critical multiculturalism is to be understood as referring to multicultural education operating on the notion that both the teacher and student in the classroom must have the flexibility to draw on the well-ground of history and on the variety of cultural resources that fan out across the myriad groups that make up society and the world. In promoting this framework, I challenge the tendency toward lukewarm curriculum

programs of cultural pluralism that are associated with models of multicultural education. A critical multiculturalism also seeks to safeguard the idea that teachers and students are products, not simply consumers, of knowledge, while at the same time pointing to the social interests and purposes that are implicated in the school curriculum.

Criticizing modern society, Sleeter and Grant (1994) aimed at “the elimination of oppression of one group of people by another” and expressed their hope “that the entire educational program is redesigned to reflect the concerns of diverse cultural groups” (p. 209). This perspective recommends that all students take into consideration all aspects of educational practices—including curriculum concerns, instruction, different aspects of the classroom, and support for the regular classroom—to include as much diversity as possible. Other school-wide features can “involve students in democratic decision making...involve lower-class and minority parents actively...involve schools in local community action projects...[and] include diverse racial, gender, and disability groups in non-traditional roles” (p. 211). Sleeter and Grant (1994) argue that school goals have to “prepare citizens to work actively toward social structural equality; promote cultural pluralism and alternative life styles; [and] promote equal opportunity in the school” (p. 211). Although some authors have insisted that the development of learning skills is necessary for students to become critical, conscious, and socially active, others have focused on establishing congruence between what happens inside and outside the classrooms regarding students’ sociocultural backgrounds. For them, multicultural education is political or social reconstructionism. Therefore, the movement toward equity targets issues of accessibility to a rich and sound curriculum, within which all students will represent themselves when they attend school and, later, when they project their active and successful lives as wise citizens refuting predeterminism.

From the critical-radical perspective, racial and ethnocentric biases are not only questioned but also involved in transformative actions regarding all aspects of educational practices and social changes that are pluriethnic, pluricultural, democratic, equitable, and inclusive. Hence, from the critical-radical perspective, the world must change. The process of becoming a multiculturally competent teacher includes the commitment to denounce stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination, as well as racist attitudes and ethnocentric biases toward transformative actions at school and in society, which may lead to problems in traditional classrooms where multicultural educational issues are not addressed. According to the literature, though the debate over multiculturalism in education rages on, many critical educators have spent years developing a critical multiculturalist’s pedagogy. Objectives of a critical multicultural approach include: (1) altering traditional student-teacher power relations; (2) emphasizing and nurturing an appreciation for diversity and global processes; and (3) facilitating a democratic and inclusive classroom environment. Overall, practicing critical multiculturalism in the classroom alters the traditional student-teacher power relations, nurtures an appreciation for an understanding of diversity, and empowers students to think critically about the world in which they live.

The critical aspect of this perspective of multiculturalism is found in its move beyond the goals of a promotion of pluralism and an appreciation of diversity to providing students with the tools to critique the relationship between power and knowledge and the related discourses that hold down certain members of society. A critical approach to multicultural reform needs to make salient connections between knowledge and power. Such an approach would bring the entire range of traditional and contemporary arrangements within schools, and between schools and communities, into focus for reexamination with a view toward transformation. Thus, in both theory and practice, the ideas of critical pedagogy are a part of critical multiculturalism (McLaren, 2003).

Multiculturalism and Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is concerned with the use of power in the teaching and learning dynamic, such as what knowledge is produced and by whom it is selected. It is also concerned with ways to provide students with means to resist oppression, improve their lives, and strengthen the democratic process for everyone, thus

insuring progressive social change and social justice. According to McLaren (2003), critical pedagogy is concerned with a critique of society, around issues of power and developing students' critical abilities to work toward the transformation of society. McLaren also suggests that critical pedagogy focuses on the relationship between educational ideas, policies, practices, and larger oppressive political and ideological perspectives. Teachers using this approach engage students in critical questioning of their own beliefs and assumptions (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1992). Since Freire's revolutionary work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), radical (critical/feminist/multicultural) educators have endeavored to change the face of education by democratizing the student-teacher power relations into a more emancipatory form and by including the work and experiences of previously under- or unrepresented groups (Giroux, 1988a). Critical pedagogy tends to take a theoretical and political approach to education, focusing on the needs and autonomy of individual students and emphasizing the importance of critical thinking (Freire, 1970, 1985, 1994; Giroux, 1983, 1988b; McLaren & Hammer, 1989; Shor, 1980, 1992). While feminist and multicultural educators share these theoretical and political concerns, they concentrate on linking macro-social elements of gender, racial/ethnic, and sexual discrimination and oppression with the micro-social elements of the classroom (Aptheker, 1993; hooks, 1994; Kanpol, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Luke, 1994; Maher & Tetrault, 1994; McLaren, 2005; Rich, 1979; Scanlon, 1993; Schieder, 1993; Spelman, 1985).

Critical pedagogy and liberatory praxis theories have become a focus in classrooms at the university level (hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1988b). Obidah (2000) defines critical pedagogy as a "systematic interrogation of schools and schooling processes that enables educators to see terrains not simply as sites of instruction or as arenas of indoctrination and socialization but as cultural terrains that promote and/or negate student empowerment and teachers' self-transformation" (p. 1040). Giroux (1988b) states that critical pedagogy "takes into consideration how the symbolic and material transactions of the everyday provide the basis for rethinking how people give meaning and ethical substance to their experiences and voices" (p. 10). This type of pedagogy begins with human agency, with a view of teachers as transformative intellectuals who usurp traditional notions of power and authority in the classroom and allow intellectual and critical spaces to exist wherein students may make meaning and find power for themselves (Obidah, 2000).

The creation of critical spaces is fundamentally tied to the struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on social justice—a shared goal of multicultural education (Banks, 2008). McLaren (1994) elaborates on the concept of critical pedagogy that "should conceive of reality—most importantly classroom reality—as a multiplicity of social relations, embodied metaphors, and social structures which cohere and contradict, some of them oppressive and some of them liberating" (p. 201). Perceiving the classroom reality in this way creates an avenue for each individual teacher to address how his or her "self" potentially becomes an embodied metaphor in the course of teacher-student interactions. In terms of implementation, Grossberg's (1994) model of a progressive pedagogical project is outlined below:

- First model – Hierarchical pedagogical. A practice that assumes the teacher already understands the truth to be imparted to the students.
- Second model – Dialogic practice. The aim of this model includes allowing the silenced to speak, and only when absolutely necessary does it claim to speak for them. According to Obidah (2000), a pitfall to this practice is the assumption that students are not already speaking, simply because educators do not hear them.
- Third model – Praxical pedagogy. According to Grossberg, praxical pedagogy "attempts to offer people the skills that would enable them to understand and intervene into their own history" (1994, p. 17). One pitfall in the use of this type of practice is assuming that people are not already intervening in their own history and, more importantly, that educators know the right skills to utilize in the process every time. Grossberg cautions that "there are no universal skills which we can offer independent of the context into which we want to intervene, and, more important, into which our students want to intervene" (1994, p.17).

- Fourth model – Pedagogy of articulation and risk. Grossberg (1994) asserts that such a practice, while refusing the traditional forms of intellectual authority, would not abandon claims to authority. Refusing to assume ahead of time that it knows the appropriate knowledge, language or skills, it is a contextual practice that is willing to take the risk of making connections, drawing lines, and mapping articulations between different domains, discourses and practices, to see what will work (p. 18).
- The fourth model delineates a pedagogy that keeps the practice of teachers on its toes and is inclusive of all the moments when teachers falter, hesitate, and come face to face with their own limitations (Obidah, 2000). A pedagogy of articulation and risk also seems to include the moments when teachers assert their knowledge, but it also includes space within the assertions for students' questions, contestation, and even resistance (Wink, 2005). Such responses then inform and/or alter the teacher's knowledge (Obidah, 2000).

Debates on multicultural education can lead an educator to question pedagogy's influence on, and effectiveness in, conveying the knowledge of multiculturalism. Questioning pedagogy led to my investigation of critical pedagogy, models for implementing practices based on the theories, and their impact on curricula. Advocacy for critical pedagogy, however passionate and forthright, is one thing. Actually implementing it is another. What follows is a discussion of critical multiculturalism from a teaching perspective.

Critical Multiculturalism: Teaching Perspective

Critical multiculturalism raises an individual's critical consciousness about his or her class, gender, racial (and other) identity, or beliefs that have been shaped by the dominant perspectives, ideologies, and educational practices rooted in such ideologies; it urges him or her "to question and rethink these paradigms and in the process empowers him or her to move toward learning to teach for educational and social equity and change" (Ukpokodu, 2003, p. 19). The primary theoretical precept that grounds this view and practice of critical multiculturalism comes from the scholarship on critical theory and critical pedagogy, especially the works of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Joe Kincheloe, Christine Sleeter, Maxine Greene, and Peter McLaren, to mention a few.

Freire, McLaren, and Fairclough are especially concerned with inequities, issues of domination, and social privileges as well as self-reflection, equalitarianism, social justice, and education for human conscientization. McLaren (1997) contends that it is:

important to remind those who participate in the struggle for liberation from White patriarchal capitalist exploitation that they must never cease to resist new forms of consumption and desires that sometimes seek to supplant the basic needs of the people. (p. 12)

Ukpokodu (2003) defines teaching from a critical multicultural perspective as a:

learning paradigm in which teachers and students consciously engage in the construction of knowledge, critique the various forms of inequities and injustices embedded in the educational system, and strive to gain the empowerment needed to engage in culturally responsive and responsible practice. (p. 19)

Teaching from a critical multicultural perspective means interrogating the social system from a critical and social justice standpoint (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1998; Shor, 1992; Sleeter, 1996). This means providing preservice teachers opportunities to question their cultural, social, and philosophical perspectives and identities so that they may develop the quality of mind necessary to work with and support the academic goals of students from diverse racial, cultural, socioeconomic, gender, and language

backgrounds. In order for preservice teachers to be successful in today's classrooms, a thorough attempt to understand diversity and multicultural education is necessary for them to become better equipped to meet challenges in the classroom.

Teacher Preparation and Multicultural Education

Ideally, a critical approach to multicultural teacher education will help preservice teachers develop the habits of mind or critical consciousness needed to work with students from diverse racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. Preservice teachers need to move beyond the idea that multicultural education entails simply developing superficial multicultural units or celebrating culturally diverse heroes and histories. Aspiring educators need to recognize the hidden curriculum (Lewis, 2001) — specifically the racism and oppression that are embedded in the school culture—and develop means to expose and expunge these covert prejudices (Banks, 2008).

Preparing teachers for our postmodern world has become a major challenge (Banks, 1996). The field of teacher education, in general, has been slow in advancing and imagining teacher education in both its theory and practice within an existing postmodern paradigm (Banks, 2008). While society has changed drastically over the past four decades, many teacher education programs and K-12 school districts continue to frame and carry out their daily rituals within a traditional modernist model (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Due to numerous historically constructed reasons, these traditional models: (1) cater to the working world's demand for increased tracking and de-skilling (Fine, 1991); (2) adhere to the values of capitalism and all its inherent ramifications (Shapiro, 1990); (3) perpetuate the cultural construction of teacher work and the understanding of the ways in which gender shapes classroom practices, leading to teaching as a White middle class and female-dominant occupation devoid of power (Apple, 1990); (4) discourage teacher education professors from dealing with the world of popular culture and utilizing the field of cultural studies as a form of pedagogy (Giroux, 1995); and (5) complicate the exploration of or admission of our own social and cultural deficiencies (Kanpol, 1995). These issues in and of themselves have evolved because of the changing structures of society.

Teaching multicultural education from a critical perspective means engaging preservice teachers in understanding their cultural and social identities as well as their socioeconomic positions and how these aspects of their character may affect teaching and student learning. Preservice teachers need to understand that teaching and learning occur in sociocultural-political contexts that are not neutral but based on relations of power and privilege. More specifically, preservice teachers can achieve this understanding by examining their identities and their socialized selves, which have been constructed by their sociocultural circumstances, and by exploring the ways in which these circumstances influence their understanding and relationships with others, especially students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Teaching multicultural education from a critical perspective involves taking risks to move preservice teachers beyond their comfort zones to experience diversity firsthand, which can be accomplished through field experiences, study abroad programs, and/or virtual interactive field experiences (Malewski, Phillion, & Lehman, 2005). These types of multicultural experiences should be incorporated into the total education of all children. Thus, multicultural education should permeate the schools' curricula (Nieto, 2000b).

Conclusion

Despite the continuation of these debates, multiculturalism has become (though at times reluctantly) an accepted paradigm in curriculum formation on all levels of education, and the establishment of this discipline has now led to other issues and concerns (Banks, 2008). Some of these concerns focus on the underlying assumptions upon which conceptions of multicultural education are based (Hoffman, 1996; McCarthy, 1994; McLaren, 2003). Concepts such as culture and identity, which are integral to curriculum, are objects of particular scrutiny.

In sum, changing the present content of the school curriculum is not an adequate and sufficient model for meaningful curriculum reform in the area of race relations in schooling. A critical multicultural education needs to look at the constraints and barriers to teacher creativity and innovation in the institutional culture of schools, in the educational priorities set by district offices, and especially in teacher education programs in colleges and universities.

Finally, efforts to redefine the curriculum in the name of multiculturalism must progress beyond the narrow prescription of incremental addition and replacement. A critical approach to multicultural reform must make salient connections between knowledge and power. Such an approach would bring the entire range of traditional and contemporary arrangements within schools, and between schools and communities, into focus for reexamination with a view toward transformation. In the words of W.E. Dubois (1868 – 1963), Education must not simply teach work...it must teach life.

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