

Multicultural Social Reconstructionist Education: Design for Diversity in Teacher Education

By Renée Jeanne Martin

Nowhere have the shock waves of educational reform reverberated more loudly than in teacher education institutions that appear to be at the epicenter of an educational upheaval. Efforts to restructure teacher education by dissolving it, providing easier access for liberal arts graduates to become teachers, creating alternative certification programs, and standardizing curriculum abound (Schulman, 1988; Murray & Fallon, 1989; Holmes Group, 1990; ATE, 1991.) Much of the

reform has centered around values and assumptions that promote dominant cultural ideology and has emanated from groups and individuals outside of education who lack an understanding of the complexities of the impact of diversity upon American schools.

Many of the internal efforts to reform teacher education have merely re-tailored worn-out, hand-me-down methodologies that no longer suit the needs or experiences of a new and diverse generation of students. Issues of diversity and specifically issues of race, class, and gender have been among the most

Renée Jeanne Martin is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, Research and Social Foundations, College of Education and Allied Professions, The University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio.

complex and therefore among the most disregarded components of the educational reform movement. For example, Tetreault and Schmuck (1985) reported that gender was virtually ignored as a category of concern by at least eight of the Commission on Educational Reform reports. When issues of diversity have been a reform consideration, they have often been viewed as problems rather than as opportunities to reconceptualize the nature of the learning environment and what occurs there. Researchers abstractly quote the increasing numbers of students from diverse cultural backgrounds who will populate schools in the future; however, few discuss the positive implications that diversity can have upon the school setting. In the next century, success in the academic arena will be dependant more than ever upon the ways in which educators are able to translate the needs of a diverse student population within the context of an academic environment that has historically ignored those needs.

Current census bureau statistics indicate that by the year 2000, students of color will constitute approximately 65 percent of the student population while 95 percent of their teachers will be members of the white middle class (Murray & Fallon, 1989). Most pupils will not be taught by a single person of color at any time in their school career. This data prompts challenging questions for teacher education. How can schools of education develop teachers who are appreciative of and foster cultural diversity and who have the skills necessary to highlight the abilities and unique perspectives of a diverse generation of learners?

In the preface to *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*, Giroux and Freire noted "The current crisis in educational reform is more than a crisis of authority to be resolved primarily through the language of means and technique—developing better ways to promote the same old content and relations—it is, in fact, a crisis of morality and political nerve" (Purpel, 1989, p. xv). In order to meet this moral and political crisis, teacher education institutions must review and reconfigure their approaches to issues of diversity, and in particular to multicultural education.

Colleges of education have sometimes exacerbated problems relative to diversity by requiring prospective teachers to take isolated classes in women's or ethnic studies or to endure poorly-conceptualized courses in multicultural education, many of which promote approaches such as teaching to the exceptional or culturally different, the human relations model, or the single-group-studies approach (Sleeter & Grant, 1988). Experience in such courses often serves to isolate dominant culture students from microcultural groups, thus widening the gap between them and their future students (Martin & Koppelman, 1991). In addition, some institutions require students to engage in field experiences, often with little or no prior knowledge of issues of diversity. The results can lead to further perpetuation of stereotypes and misconceptions about cultural diversity.

The quest for teacher education is to create a climate that actively integrates pedagogy and culture and challenges the existing norms of domination and power perpetuated in schools. Giroux and McLaren (1989) have argued that "Developing

a radical pedagogy for empowering future generations of students and teachers calls on schools of education to rethink the nature of their programs and their practices” (p.174). In order for this to occur, teacher education institutions must scrutinize all facets of the teacher education experience: the nature of pedagogy, the quality of field experiences, patterns of staffing, modes of supervision, and notions of what constitutes excellence and equity.

Why Multicultural Social Reconstructionist Education?

Although the theoretical underpinnings of social reconstructionism enjoyed popularity primarily during the American depression, it is important to note that this philosophical approach to education is reiterated in the work of contemporary multicultural educational scholars such as Banks and Banks (1992), Grant (1992), and Sleeter (1991). Sleeter and Grant have defined education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist as an approach that “deals more directly...with oppression and social structural inequality based on race, social class, gender, and disability.” They further note “it prepares future citizens to reconstruct society so that it better serves the interests of all group of people and especially those who are of color, poor, female, and/or disabled” (1988, p. 176.)

Early social reconstructionists were concerned with educational indoctrination and maintained that education is not a neutral process. In addition, they sought to expose ways in which the interests of the dominant culture are served and reproduced in schools. For example, such researchers have interrogated the nature of schooling by asking questions such as: How do the interactive patterns between teachers and female students encourage or discourage opportunities for female students to become academically successful? Or What impact does a student’s social class have upon the opportunities accorded individual students? In what ways does Anglo-centric curriculum favor certain groups of students and deny others opportunities for meaningful learning?

According to Stanley (1985), social reconstructionists investigate ways in which to “ameliorate these conditions by assisting in the reconstruction of our culture and institutions in accordance with democratic values and social and economic justice” (p. 384). Multicultural social reconstructionist education fosters the notion that future teachers and their students should be educated to challenge social stratification, analyze oppression, and take an active role in restructuring unequal relationships (Sleeter & Grant, 1985, p.101). It is an approach that honors diversity and views it as positive rather than problematic. Accomplishing these objectives is a primary goal of the multicultural social reconstructionist approach.

In order for multicultural social reconstructionism to become a reality in schools, teacher education institutions must create a climate that fosters several conditions simultaneously. The first condition is that multicultural social reconstructionist principles must be infused throughout the entire teacher education

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curriculum. Infusion of such principles into teacher education programs need not be complicated; however, it is paramount that teacher education students become acquainted with critical theory, from which multicultural social reconstructionism emanates. It is also imperative that this theoretical discourse permeate the entire course of study. Students must be taught to analyze schooling in ways that call into question the nature of what and how we teach and that will require fundamental change in how we view the teaching and learning processes.

Courses in teacher education must provide opportunities for students to investigate and explore the routinized nature of what occurs in classrooms. There is a need for students to identify how daily classroom practices or “business as usual” promote or inhibit cultural identity. For example, research indicates that while male children are allowed to call out answers in class, female students are often discouraged from this practice (Sadker & Sadker, 1991.) The impact that such behaviors have on socializing students into traditional roles of masculinity and femininity is well documented. However, seldom are students in teacher education made aware of the implications for these types of behaviors upon the academic and social outcomes of their students.

Diversity and the issues surrounding it, such as classism and homelessness, sexism, homophobia, sex-role stereotyping, racism, and lack of attention to cultural diversity permeate the school setting and can readily be infused into the educational context. Dawson (1981) noted the following regarding multicultural education—”adopting it does not require a completely new educational structure, but there is a need to redesign, delete, and integrate new content that reflects contemporary knowledge, research, and accurate information” (p.5). And Purpel (1989) has written that responding to the moral and spiritual crisis in education does not mean that we must create “anything that is ‘new’ or ‘original.’” The idea is to create education that is “quite different from the mainstream of contemporary educational practice...something that is preferable” (p. 156). Issues such as racism, sexism, or classism can be incorporated into virtually any content area. The absence of the accomplishments of women and people of color from textbooks in science or art history can be the source for a project to create a compendium of overlooked scientists or artists that teacher education students can later incorporate into their own teaching. The failure of educational psychology texts to address variations in cognitive styles among microcultural learners can serve as the basis for an investigation of the way in which dominant ideology is perpetuated in that discipline. For example, students can read the work of Shade (1989), Saracho (1989), or Gollnick and Chinn (1990) and critique and contrast their work about cognitive styles with what is presented in more traditional educational psychology texts. The focus upon male dominated team sports in physical education and the impact that focus has upon the lives of women and girls is evident in the studies conducted by Lock (1990) and Griffin (1985). Students in physical education courses can be educated to create curriculum that challenges masculinized notions

of competitive athletics, a curriculum that would be more fully inclusive of the capabilities of a wider range of the student population. These examples illustrate only a few ways in which multicultural social reconstructionist principles can be infused.

Issues of diversity are related to all facets of the curriculum and to all aspects of learning and they, like the diversity of the student population, remain a virtually untapped resource in teacher education. Employing a pedagogical approach that centers curriculum around the lived experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds rather than promoting a hegemonic, teacher-centered curriculum that merely revolves around classroom management techniques redistributes the power and intellectual resources in the classroom. According to Britzman (1991) "In reality, every pedagogy is influenced by the complex social relations between teachers, students, school culture, and the larger social world" (p.232). In order to make the links between the acts of teaching and learning more meaningful, teachers must find ways to weave the biographies of their students into the tapestry of the larger social context in which students live those biographies. Britzman writes further that "the knowledge of students always mediates how they understand the work of learning" (p. 225). Diversity is a fact of life in American society. In order to construct pedagogy in which students can actively participate, it is necessary to incorporate relevant and meaningful classroom experiences that investigate dimensions of diversity in the society that can then affirm student identity and enable them to appreciate the familiar and the unknown.

Analyzing Issues of Oppression in Teacher Education

It is vital that teacher education students become cognizant of and confront the impact of their own racial, ethnic, and cultural identity upon teaching and learning. They can be educated to understand the ways in which they have benefitted from and been affirmed by dominant cultural ideology. They will then be able to recognize the inherent nature of the power that they will have as prospective teachers and the ways in which educational institutions have socialized them into traditional roles of power and domination.

Issues of diversity can be integrated at all levels of the teacher education institution. Employing this multicultural approach assumes that teacher educators themselves have investigated the nature of oppression in their teaching and have found ways to mitigate the complexities of teacher and student relationships within their own classrooms. Doing so requires, among other things, a clear conceptualization about the nature and type of multicultural approach that a teacher education institution should pursue.

Historically, there has been confusion regarding approaches to multicultural education. However, currently there appears to be renewed interest and a proliferation of literature about the topic. (See Andrzejewski, 1989; Baker, 1983; Grant &

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Sleeter,1989; Gollnick & Chinn, 1990; Hernandez,1989; Schniedewind & Davidson,1983; Sleeter,1991). A solid foundation of such literature should be integrated at all levels of teacher education programs. The institutional nature of oppression and issues of diversity in schools and society can be critiqued and implemented as cogent curricular components. Teacher educators can incorporate research regarding the effects of racism, classism, and sexism in all disciplines, thus enabling their students to examine and reevaluate the inconsistencies between the myth and reality of educational theory and practice in schools. For example, reading school ethnographies such as *After the School Bell Rings* (Grant & Sleeter, 1986) or *Ain't No Making It* (MacLeod, 1987) or using Anyon's (1981) work on social class or Oakes' (1985) research on tracking can give teacher education students important insights into issues of race, class, and gender. Uniting the issues under the rubric of institutional oppression enables prospective teachers to become aware of the ways in which some students are advantaged while others are inherently disadvantaged in schools.

Once the fundamental multicultural approach is made explicit, issues of diversity can be incorporated into discussions, projects, research papers, and classroom activities that include but should not be limited to textbook appraisal, classroom management, cooperative learning, tracking and grouping, the nature and use of standardized tests, and curriculum in all content areas. Setting up a foundation for the investigation of issues of diversity will enable the student to actively critique other teacher education experiences and will lay the groundwork for an exploration of personal assumptions and ideologies regarding the role of the teacher. Students in teacher education can then begin to address teacher-centered curriculum, classroom management strategies, theories of cultural transmission, and the extent to which each of them will be able to negotiate such practices in school settings.

Changing the Faces of Teacher Education

There is a critical need to alter the composition of the teaching force to be more inclusive of greater cultural diversity. The teacher education institution can act as a catalyst in that regeneration. In 1980, people of color comprised approximately 12.5 percent of the total teaching force in the United States. As noted earlier, current projections indicate that percentage will deteriorate to about five percent by the beginning of the next century (Wilson & Melendez, 1987). In particular, teacher education administrators and faculty should be representative of a range of diverse microcultural groups. Their representation should not be limited to positions in minority affairs, women's studies, ethnic studies, or multicultural education courses. Students of color need teacher educators and administrators with whom they can readily identify; however, all students need women and men from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, with varying physical abilities, and representative of a variety

of lifestyles, who can better acquaint students with a range of personalities and teaching styles.

In addition, there must be intense efforts to recruit and retain students of color in order to stimulate them to pursue teaching degrees. Monetary incentives, scholarships, and mentoring programs are critical to the development of a multicultural teaching force for the next century. Teacher education institutions should be at the forefront of highlighting the accomplishments of educators and students of color. Colleges of education can provide potential students and their parents with information about university teacher education programs. They can contact talented minority teachers and enlist their aid in the recruitment of students of color, and form clubs and organizations that recognize their academic accomplishments and acquaint junior high and high school students with opportunities in teacher education. Most importantly, colleges of education need to become a vital and visible part of the communities in which they exist. Addressing issues of diversity in a variety of public forums and leading the way with innovative programs to bring multicultural education to the schools can send messages to the community about the importance of teachers as change agents. Introducing students of color and their parents to university experiences can engender an interest in teacher education.

Encouraging culturally astute teachers from all segments of the population is a task that must become a national priority. Teacher education institutions can have an impact upon the creation of such priorities in the state and federal legislation governing schools. They can utilize their influence with business people and legislators to create mandated educational provisions that attend to issues of diversity and thus send clear messages to prospective teachers that schools need and desire diverse talents. At least three states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa) have addressed issues of diversity in mandated teacher education courses and have successfully implemented multicultural teacher education strategies (Martin, 1986).

Linking Home and School Cultures

Restructuring schools means creating a new vision of education by bridging the gap between the home cultures of students and their communities with the culture of the schools they attend. Multicultural social reconstructionist education serves as the nexus between the culture of the student and the culture of the school. Teacher education students acquainted with issues of diversity in the student's home and community can approach field experiences with information that empowers them to better cope with the impediments that many students face in the school environment. Teacher education curriculum needs to be inclusive of opportunities for its students to experience the entire spectrum of the learner's environment.

For example, students should become acquainted with the patterns of racial integration and the socioeconomic status of students in the school districts in which

they experience their field placements. Distinct characteristics for survival and success exist in the learner's environment whether the environment is urban, suburban, or rural. Teacher education institutions can help prospective educators critique the environments in which they will teach so that as educators they will be better equipped to comprehend what occurs there to sustain or undermine the quality of students' academic lives. Future educators can thus come to a fuller understanding of what it is that occurs in the external environment that is or is not transferable to what schools require students to do to be successful.

Sleeter and Grant (1991) have written that "Ideally, education should help all students include a perspective of history from the students' point of view and be selected and constructed in relationship to the students' desires, visions, descriptions of reality, and repertoires of action" (p.50). Teacher education institutions must help prospective educators find ways to link the cultural traditions of the home with those of the school. The importance of establishing a positive link between the culture of the home and the culture of the school has been well documented (Clarke, 1988; Shade, 1990; Sizemore, 1988). Integrating the experiences of the learner within the context of her or his home culture is critical to the learner's success in school. All children enter school with rich cultural backgrounds that need to be affirmed by the culture of the school. Teacher educators and cooperating public school teachers can create opportunities for field experience students to interact with parents and the communities in their field sites.

Some teacher education institutions are investigating ways to immerse prospective educators more fully in the home cultures of students whom they will be teaching. This can be done by including field experience students in parent-teacher visits and conferences. These occasions provide opportune moments for cooperating teachers to model effective interactive behaviors with parents. They allow teacher education students to link observations between two spheres that can contribute to a child's academic success. In addition, teacher education faculty should work with students in field experiences to enable them to become aware of ways in which they can address the concerns of parents and citizens in the community. Students should also become acquainted with political organizations and advocacy groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or other civil rights groups. Exposure to such groups gives prospective educators a range of alternative lenses through which to view their students' and helps to create congruity among the various educational factions in students' lives.

Students in teacher education must be challenged to seek new avenues and taught to avoid detours that have traditionally deprived professional educators of links with their students. Field experiences in which students are exposed to rather than shielded from the concerns of parents and members of the community should be an integral part of the field experience program. All too often, white middle class teachers of culturally diverse students fail to comprehend the nature of the

community and home environments of their students. Bridging the gap between their perceptions and the realities of those environments can provide prospective educators with an important vehicle for achieving academic success for their future students.

Diversity and the Field Experience

Selection of field experience sites that are representative of cultural diversity is essential to the development of the student's professional teacher preparation. Once students have been exposed to issues of diversity in their teacher preparation coursework, they should experience it firsthand in their field experiences. While some communities may not have wholly integrated or culturally diverse populations, teacher education students should be exposed to rural, suburban, and urban settings that contain students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. The presence or absence of diversity can provide students with a critical dialogue to explain the social world while critically assessing it (Fay, 1987). A dialogue that encourages prospective educators to actively question what is absent in the community, school, or curriculum will enable teacher education students to move beyond the boundaries of traditional views of relationships in schools.

Paramount to the success of student field experiences is the relationship between the student and the cooperating teacher. A wide array of research (Alper & Retish, 1980; Dispoto, 1980; Haberman & Harris, 1982; Karmos & Jacko, 1977; and Puckett, 1985) indicates that the cooperating teacher is the most highly influential and often the most neglected variable in the field experience component. It is important that the multicultural goals articulated in the university course work be reiterated in the public school field experience sites. Copeland (1979) found that "Student teachers' ability to use many skills they learn during their university training depends not only on the quality of the initial training they receive, but on the environment in which they must practice use of those skills: their student teaching classrooms" (p.194). Because student teachers tend to mirror the behaviors of cooperating teachers, it is particularly important that students be placed with cooperating teachers who model the multicultural goals of the university teacher education program. A two-year study conducted at a large midwestern university among 500 student teachers mid-way through their student teaching experiences found that while 56 percent of the student teachers who were surveyed acknowledged that they had received some multicultural education in their university course work, 60 percent noted that the classrooms in which they were teaching were not reflective of multicultural education, and 79 percent responded that their cooperating teachers had given them no support in the implementation of multicultural/non sexist teaching strategies (Martin, 1992). The selection of cooperating teachers who are well-versed in multicultural education is of primary importance if those goals are to be reflected in the field experience.

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In order to acquaint cooperating teachers with multicultural education and encourage them to serve as supervisors and resource personnel for field experiences, teacher education institutions should offer a variety of incentives such as fee waivers, stipends, and creative graduate course credit packages. Although there should be infusion of multicultural education in all graduate course work, it may be necessary to develop a set of core courses that acquaint graduate students with the issues and concerns that undergird multicultural education. Other alternatives include inservice initiatives jointly sponsored between universities and public school districts that incorporate nationally recognized multicultural programs such as GESA (Gender/Ethnic Expectations and Student Achievement) which reduce disparity between teacher and student interaction and aid teachers in restructuring curriculum. These programs can be valuable tools for helping teachers and administrators actively apply multicultural education, thus enabling them to transform their own schools. Universities may also wish to compile and publish multicultural curriculum materials and strategies authored and implemented by cooperating teachers. Identifying a cadre of cooperating teachers who are well-versed in the teacher education program's goals and enlisting their efforts in the reformation process is essential to the success of multicultural teacher education.

The development of a system of supervision and evaluation to assess the student's ability to engage in multicultural teaching behaviors in field experiences is another essential component in the teacher education curriculum. There should be active and purposeful evaluation of all components of student field experiences to insure that multicultural goals are being implemented and reinforced. Students who are not proficient at multicultural infusion, and who engage in racist, classist, or sexist behaviors, should be evaluated and helped to remediate those behaviors. This requires that persons supervising field experiences be conversant with the goals of the teacher education program and able to offer field experience students information, guidance, and alternative strategies that will engender an understanding of the complex nature of diversity in American public schools. Field experience personnel should be able to intervene and guide students through opportunities to critique, evaluate, and construct alternative teaching and learning behaviors that alter oppressive conditions in schools. Giroux (1988) has argued that as transformative intellectuals, educators "must first...analyze how cultural production is organized within asymmetrical relations of power in schools...and then construct political strategies for participating in social struggles designed to fight for schools as democratic spheres" (p.102).

In order to transform schools into sites where democratic principles are valued, teacher education students must be taught to delve into the nature of power and its relationship to issues of diversity. They must be emancipated from the "one size fits all" teacher education courses and methodologies that underscore traditional levels of domination and subordination. Instead, teacher education institutions should focus upon the development of curriculum and instructional approaches, staffing

practices, recruitment and retention incentives, and field experiences based upon multicultural social reconstructionist principles that will empower prospective educators to create alternatives to the racist, classist, and gender biased strategies that currently undermine the democratic ideal of equitable outcomes for all segments of the American school population.

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