

Introduction

*Multicultural Literature and Literacies:
Making Space for Difference*

*Suzanne M. Miller
Barbara McCaskill*

Like baseball, Main Street, mainframes, and fireworks on the Fourth of July, the little red schoolhouse has embodied both the accomplishments and the dreams, both the past and the future, of our American culture. One bell summoned: then, up the little red schoolhouse stairs—or so the story goes—marched eager-eyed students from the world's four corners, up the stairs through one large room to identical aisles of desks and chairs. Visions merged on one lone instructor, one Bible, one pendant flag. Voices rose in unison from matching primers and practice books. Once the students surrendered to their teacher's enchanting mien, handwriting abandoned idiosyncrasy and loops and strokes became uniform and unvarying. With another wave of the chalk-ensconced wand, one literature and one language of the literate—written English—reigned supreme.

This story might have varied from region to region and throughout time zones and space: from loggers' shacks in the 1880s Adirondacks to tenements in a midwestern railroad town, from a boarding school for Christianizing the "savages" out West to an A&M college founded down South for uplifting the African race. In so many of these "little red schoolhouses," the sentiment prevailed that success would be achieved when pupils vied for similar accomplishments and dreams. A seeming agreement arose that students' investments in America's dream relied upon their pledging allegiance to a disapproval and a united distrust of difference. Never mind that only a faction of the few had determined that democracy's face was singular and white. Setting

aside one's difference was a central and loyal gesture of the "little red schoolhouse" education.

And this kind of education, as recounted with particular horror in the personal narratives of Native Americans, has meant more than merely a slap on the wrist of difference. "Civilize Them with a Stick" is the title by which Sioux activist Mary Crow Dog (1990) recalls her boarding school education in 1960s America. Beaten and starved when they sought to keep alive their tribal languages and literacies, Mary and her classmates represent a long procession of so-called heathen children pressured to transform themselves from divergent Indian "problems" to conformist, cartoonish, assembly-line whites:

The kids were taken away from their villages and pueblos, in their blankets and moccasins, kept completely isolated from their families—sometimes for as long as ten years—suddenly coming back, their short hair slick with pomade, their necks raw from stiff, high collars, their thick jackets always short in the sleeves and pinching under the arms, their tight patent leather shoes giving them corns, the girls in starched white blouses and clumsy, high-buttoned boots—caricatures of white people. (p. 30)

In Crow Dog's example, the children's rigid school clothes are clothes of uniformity and sameness, of one culture, white and American, to be shared. Yet the clothes constrict, attempt to inhibit the children's native culture, and in the classroom, narrow the space available for difference. From head to feet, literally, these children are engaged in the clothing of an alien culture, and their skin is rubbed sore and mutilated in order to present them as identical results of a single kind of education. In such children's classrooms, or so it appears, no spaces are allowed for difference.

This twofold process that Crow Dog's description implies—disguising difference in order to eventually dispose of it altogether—also can assume a gentler, well-intended guise in the classroom. In her memoirs *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston (1976, p. 167) remembers the Chinese girls like her in grammar school who were excluded from activities, shouted at, ridiculed, or punished, for their "too soft," "nonexistent," non-American voices. Even one Asian teacher, "lovely and Hawaiian," overlooked the cultural distinctions and Asian-ness accounting for the Chinese girls' silences, and she abandoned them to an empty room while the rest of their classmates practiced for the second-graders' play. These memories that Kingston recalls underscore that when schools in the United States seek the goals of nationalizing,

acculturating, and making citizens of their children, all too often these goals are contingent on the process of eliminating space for difference. Ignored, mocked, or "left . . . behind" when they did not behave like "Americans," Kingston and her classmates learned that at the core of American schools functions an either/or proposition: either students must discard their indigenous cultures, or they will be excluded.

Kingston and Crow Dog remember classrooms that camouflage difference, ultimately to obliterate it, because in those rooms operated the following assumption: that the fundamental function of an American school is to educate its pupils toward a singular, convergent literature and literacy. This assumption still sustains a mighty influence; its adherents suggest that such a push toward cultural convergence would prompt unity in our increasingly disunited times.

For instance, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. (1988, pp. xi-xii) advises that in issues of literacy American education should carry the torch of what he calls "cultural conservatism." In the Preface to the Vintage Edition of his *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, Hirsch underscores the necessity for this conservatism to endure. Prerequisite for students' success, and for the stability and harmony of the nation, Hirsch argues, has been the ability of American schools to transmit "traditional reference points of literate culture," a broad array of facts and vocabulary, traditions and civic principles. These "reference points," Hirsch explains, make for the effective exchange of ideas among the classes, ethnic and racial groups, religious alliances, political organizations, regional divisions, and so on, that make up the diversity that is called the United States. The advantage of cultural conservatism, he writes, is its potential to nourish, stimulate, flower, and maintain the "national communication" so essential for America's prosperity:

If each local school system imparts the traditional reference points of literate culture, then everybody will be able to communicate with strangers. In the modern age, effective communication with strangers is altogether essential to promote the general welfare and insure domestic tranquility. The inherent conservatism of literacy leads to a subtle but unavoidable paradox: the goals of political liberalism require educational conservatism. We make social and economic progress only by teaching myths and facts that are predominantly traditional. (p. xii)

It is only by "accident of history" (p. 106), Hirsch is mindful to point out, that a predominance of these "reference points" of traditional "names, phrases, dates, and concepts" derive from a male, Anglo-

Saxon, Anglophile legacy; “women and minorities and [those] of non-Western cultures” are “right” to press for educational reform. However, key to national progress, and central to the mission of the little red schools, has been and must continue to be the transmission of the mutual “reference points.” Out of these schools must continue to emerge communities of “common readers” who can be assumed to know “What Every American Needs to Know.”

At least, so goes the story. For another look at America’s schools, in the past and in this “modern age,” exposes this paradox: the goals of educational conservatism—national communication, transmission of civic principles, improvement of one’s condition in a pluralistic and changing society—all have been imparted simultaneously with the practice of multicultural literature and literacies.

Hirsch himself acknowledges this simultaneity. He praises as “life-enhancing” this “contranational element” of heterogenous traditions and disparate readerships, only to conclude that “the brute fact of history in every modern nation has been the increasing dominance of the national culture over local and ethnic cultures” (pp. 96–97). Using the example of class—that contemporary Americans have tended to locate themselves along lines of class rather than culture—he argues for a kind of natural selection that favors and demands increasing cultural homogeneity.

His example builds upon two erroneous assumptions. One is that class ascension—economic stability, savings, flexible purchasing power, good credit—results in an instant equalizing among individuals in this society. The other assumes that how an American identifies herself or himself translates directly into how she or he is perceived, and treated, by members of other hyphenated American groups. Both assumptions are rooted in the American ideals of justice, open-mindedness, and success gained through persistence and hard work. The truth is that in America race itself can be a *determinant* of economic advancement, and that advancement works both ways: for example, black people have “passed” into whiteness for access to better jobs and lives; or, on the other hand, communities such as New Jersey’s Ramapoughs have petitioned to be officially recognized as Native Americans for entitlement to government benefits and casino franchises.

The meaning of “the second side of the American hyphen,” what Hirsch uses to refer to the American collective (pp. 95, 99), must encompass our country’s agonies of class *and* race struggle as much as it does our aspirations toward tolerance, collaboration, and economic success. Both in his “Appendix: What Every Literate American Knows” and in passages throughout his book, *Hirsch himself* cites, in alphabetical

order, Muhammad Ali, John Brown, Chicanos, Crazy Horse, Thomas Jefferson (recall his life's contradiction: owner of slaves and founding father of freedom), Eleanor Roosevelt (recall her resignation from the Daughters of the American Revolution), Sojourner Truth, and other examples of this heritage of agitation revolving around issues of racial difference. Ours is not a pristine, spontaneously generated ethos that originated and continues to be shaped free and independent of the factor of race. Attesting to this dynamic is the ongoing proliferation, on or near the doorsteps of our little red schools, of multicultural literature and literacies (and white ones are included!) that borrow from and signify on and navigate the unhyphenated mainstream.

As well intended and accommodating as the effort may seem, ranking literature and literacies into some cultural Great Chain of Being is a process that, as with the mythic red schools and the schoolrooms of Kingston and Crow Dog, leads to exclusion rather than accommodation. At the bottom of the Chain crouch the unstable, secondary multicultural literatures and literacies, soon destined to devolve into nothingness. On the top looms an *ens perfectissimum* of one literature and literacy: omnipotent and omnipresent. All too often this ranking is an effort that masks insidious implications. At best, what is accomplished is that the different forms at the bottom, like atoms, no longer can be seen. A Chain or continuum or scale or series, whatever it is called, is another method of minimizing difference, eventually to expunge it altogether from the scene.

Hirsch's "cultural conservatism" can too easily bend toward civic harmony yet blind us to difference. His suggestion that "to be conservative in the means of communication is the road to effectiveness in modern life" implies one direction of effective communication. His argument obscures the many directions that effective communication has taken in American life. For example, beginning with enslavement, African Americans have had to struggle for access to the pen and book and so have used spoken language as a means toward progress and liberation. The street corner speech, the radio rap, the sermon, the song, the slogan, the ritual of the protest march and rally—all these oral forms and spoken or sung words have been used by African Americans as means of effective communication.

When Hirsch applauds the "conservative" passages of the Black Panthers' newspaper alluding to the Declaration of Independence and the Bible, he ignores the fact that this written discourse assumed its fullest meaning when coupled with the intonations and nuances of African American speakers! Seeking the support and aiming for the uplift of impoverished, undereducated African American youth, the

Panthers shrewdly calculated that their radical ideas must be rapped and heard as well as written and read. Though appearing to allow for disparate ideologies, Hirsch's praise of the "conservative," implies that any such different discourse is uncivil and divisive. Geneva Smitherman (1988, p. 148), in her "Discriminatory Discourse on Afro-American Speech," argues that these different means of communication have been treated not as "African *differentness* but African derived *deficiency*." This "deviant model," she says (p. 149), "views black speech (and black culture, generally) as deficient and pathological."

Across class lines, an enduring cultural legacy of many cultural communities has been the centrality, artistry, and galvanizing force of *oral* as well as written forms of expression. But the important oral literacies in the histories of many American cultural groups in America have all suffered. As Gayl Jones argues,

Oral stories, seen merely as the "first stories" of a pre-literate culture, are often dismissed as crude rather than appreciated as the continuing, complex, inventive heritage of African, African American, Native American, and other Third World literatures. Many of the writers within these traditions draw upon their oral heritage for the power and diversity of its narrative forms and storytelling techniques. (1991, p. 1)

Jones and many other cultural critics contend that the very existence of these oral discourses provides evidence that multicultural literature and literacies are and always have been critical, essential, to the process of creating a multidimensional picture of how Americans communicate between and within groups.

The "brute fact," as the histories of individual Americans show, is not so much a hegemony of one national literature and literacy, but an interplay and transmutation and polymorphization of many literatures and literacies within and without the official borders of the schoolroom. Simultaneously with the vision of national "reference points" and mutually literate "common readers" have existed a vision and a practice that demonstrate how making space for difference, paying attention to many literatures and many literacies, need not impede national progress, curb meaningful communication, or foment backwardness and division. Making space for difference need not mean disintegrating national identity, heritage, and culture.

We can return to Kingston's childhood for an example. During her girlhood, in contrast to the individual activity stressed in American school, pupils in the afternoon Chinese school "chanted together, voices

rising and falling, loud and soft, some boys shouting, everybody reading together, reciting together and not alone with one voice" (p. 167). In the decades before court-ordered integration of America's public schools, teachers of segregated African American classes took a polyrhythmic approach to the three R's that mixed McGuffey's Readers and recitations of Whitman and Poe with their own distinctive spin on the ritual of Morning Assembly. With a program that might begin with a prayer and the singing of "Columbia, The Gem of the Ocean," continue with announcements and readings from the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and Langston Hughes, and end with the singing of James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the Morning Assembly at an all-Black school at once acquiesced to Hirsch's unhyphenated American culture and made space for students to keep their distinctive cultural legacies alive.¹

We need only glance at last year's calendar of events from Any School, U.S.A., to gather an additional indication that the mythic schoolhouse is enlarging for those literatures and literacies of all of us Americans. Along with the Presidents' birthdays, Columbus Day, and similar events, receiving attention are Women's History Weeks, Black History Month, Cinco de Mayo, and The Holocaust. Although the extent of their inclusion, the weight of their importance, and the degree to which they are taken seriously can leave much to be desired, their presence attests to the dynamism of our multicultural society. They are continuing evidence that space can be made in our classrooms for difference.

This volume articulates the means of making space for cultural difference in classrooms and communities. We confront the process of teaching multicultural literature and literacies, yet in doing so we engage more than teachers. In fact, the writers of this volume converge on the issue of multicultural literature and literacies from three respective positions: writing literature, writing policy, and teaching.

We use the term *writer* with a generous meaning that applies to every contributor in the book. *Writer* conveys a meaning that accounts for both creative and critical writers, those discussing literature and those discussing teaching; it conveys a meaning that does not oppose the roles of teacher and artist, but sees them as continuous; and, finally, *writer* suggests a meaning that resists the assumption that a particular kind of writing, or that writing about a particular kind of subject, is more scholarly and authoritative than another point of view. In fact, as most of the contributors speak, they occupy such multiple roles as teacher/literary critic/creative writer and teacher/theorist/policymaker,

among other combinations. With essays on literature, policymaking, and education, the groups of writers discuss pedagogical strategies, program philosophies, aesthetics and poetics, and research agendas that have arisen from the debates on multicultural literature and literacies.

Our volume emerged from dialogues which began at the Fourth Gutenberg Conference on Literature and Literacy in a Multicultural Society, University at Albany, March 1-2, 1991. The conference was organized more along the lines of a graduate seminar than the typical model that calls for three presenters to read, the audience (and quickly!) to respond, with no one ever getting to see the papers. Prior to the conference itself, all of the participants received the working papers of the featured writers so that they could read and reflect upon them at a leisurely pace. Once the conference actually convened, all the participants, including the featured writers, divided into randomly selected groups to discuss the papers. After discussion within these smaller groups, the writers received an additional opportunity to share their reactions with and invite suggestions from the entire conference body. Out of the conference has come this book.

Because the writers discussed their topics face to face and honed their ideas through actual conversation with each other,² the essays in this volume gained power from the apparent interplay of ideas. The writers' creative and critical interests at times overlap; their meanings of *multicultural society* at times diverge. They all agree, however, that making space for difference means managing three important tasks: (1) making room for the voices of the "different" ones themselves; (2) prompting discussion and debate, a give-and-take among these voices, and between these voices and the mainstream; and (3) holding fast against the shouts that wish to drown out all conversation and dictate difference on their terms.

Making space thus hinges on stimulating dialogue. Accordingly, the separate essays in this volume reflect the dialogues that refined them; they are interwoven in their themes and references. The writers build upon issues raised in preceding sections, and they extend or challenge the discussion of issues raised by other essays. In the first section, for example, Reggie Young and Valerie Babb call attention to each other with the similar themes of literacy as liberation and empowerment. Alan C. Purves and Alpana Sharma Knippling reconnoiter in their critiques of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Occasionally the writers comment directly upon each other's ideas, as when Purves taps back to Ron Welburn to explain how using Welburn's essay in this book transformed his "Reading Poetry" course. And the

editors of this volume have replied to Violet J. Harris's call for identification of resources on multicultural literature and literacy. Included in this volume is a guide to selected resources, to institutes, conferences, organizations, libraries, museums, clearinghouses, and publishers.

Defining *literature* in different ways and for different purposes, the writers relocate the multicultural class from dreaming and reflection to action and reality. These writers possess distinct ideologies—they offer many interpretations of how multicultural literature can be incorporated into communities, schools, and individual classrooms.

One of the topics that the writers explore is how texts have been constructed in many communities to ensure identity, spiritual power, history, freedom, and social survival as much as to promote educational achievement. Babb offers her own course on "White Male Writers" as an example of this strategic reconsideration of texts. Similarly, the policymakers herein reflect upon the roles that literature has played in privileging American economic and political orders. They posit making room for multicultural literatures as forging the path for national transformation and parity. For the educators represented in this book, some who occupy simultaneous roles as artists and policymakers, *literature* refers to many kinds of texts, such as the slave's narratives, that might be classified as artifact or document in a traditional literature classroom. Harris critiques the latter distinction as part of a conservative, additive philosophy easy to enact and difficult to erode.

In their dialogue on multicultural literacy, the writers in this volume present a variety of definitions: ones that center on ethnic and racial identities, ones that accent writing and reading processes, some that call attention to communities created by shared stories and mutual beliefs, others that emphasize communities revolving on polyphony or heteroglossia—the voices of multiple groups interacting at once and seeking audience and mutual understanding instead of ascendancy. Welburn writes of coming to literacy in such a polyphonic world: "This combination," he recalls, "of Native and African, . . . [of] rural and small-town birth and urban upbringing, have all profoundly affected my listening and seeing as a poet and writer." And Young describes his own creation of a shared story for his West Chicago home, a novel, *Crimes in Bluesville*, that will define the West Side and express its residents' pride with its themes of education, identity, and individual and social change. By writing a culture into being, his novel can provide a kind of "spiritual healing" for those cut off from a sense of their own humanity.

Writing and reading from a cultural perspective is presented in these chapters as a promising means of celebrating difference. Teachers preserve culture, as does Hasna Muhammad when she has her seventh-grader tell his family stories. She says he told them "like a true griot," and she adds, "I told him that." To this end of empowerment, Gonzales mounts an argument for "reading against the grain" in California's secondary schools, for reading so that politics, culture, and status become part of studying texts. As students read and write multicultural literatures in the schools, the further promise of creating a new consciousness is held. Suzanne K. Sutherland works toward students' changes from qualities of intolerance and alienation to a "bonding with the school" concurrent with improved academic achievement. Muhammad works toward qualities of "acceptance, tolerance, and coexistence." All of these qualities Miller finds to be components of a "dialogic consciousness," a reasoning that relies upon difference to empower individuals and contribute to social justice.

A *multicultural society*, many of our writers argue, means a society committed to resurrect—rather than merely accommodate, or to absorb only then to silence—the neglected literary contributions of America's peoples of color. "The shortest month of the year," as Muhammad chides, "is not the only time to pull African American history from the shelves." Who it is that names an institution or nation a "multicultural society," and the hierarchies that "*multicultural*" might disguise, are "questions of pedagogy" that press Sharma Knippling as much as those of choosing texts, foregrounding readings, or revising curricula. What the teacher does, she argues, is largely constrained by the status of literatures and multiple cultures within the university as well as within the society. Investigating these constructions of culture inside and outside the university's walls are necessary and productive pedagogical strategies.

All herein would seem to agree that refining the meaning of *multicultural society* and making space for difference involve reconsidering social histories and institutional hierarchies and reevaluating the exclusive attention in classrooms on teacher-student(s)-text(s). As Purves warns, "What may have worked for an age of insular nationalism without electronic media does not suffice in a global village where all inhabitants claim equal status." The "little red schoolhouse" story may not quite have disappeared; but with this volume the scaffolds have been raised and the overhaul begun. With this volume several wings and stories are attached, the criteria for its blueprints reevaluated, and more than one dominant cultural perspective permitted inside. Walking

on scaffolds, however, requires great will not to fall: it requires communication, coassistance, concentration, and care. Collaborating for change, these writers sooner or later confront—head-on—forces seeking to undermine or destroy it.

In addition to their problems with defining literature and literacy, the writers in these sections admit the many impediments to teaching and reading multicultural literatures. The tension of whether to approach multicultural literature to emphasize similarities or diversities is one recurring question among the groups. All argue for emphasis on both connections and differences, but in varied ways. Sharma Knippling sums up this Hobson's choice that teachers invariably face when she describes one student's astonished response to the reading list—"only Indian literatures in English"—for her course in multicultural literature. "Why *should* a course in Indian literatures in English," she reflects, "be considered multicultural? Then again, why shouldn't it be. . .?" An additional dilemma—she, and Purves all concur—involves how to respond to students who read ethnic literatures only from one dominant cultural perspective.

Other problems of creating change by introducing multicultural literatures into schools include the politics of canon formation. In the history of Anglo-American academic life, literature has sometimes taken on the cast of sacred text, and interpreting "the great books" has become, or so it seems, the job of priests and priestesses who extract truth and wisdom about universal human nature from the mysteries of aesthetic scripture (Scholes, 1985). But in the past twenty years many have lost faith in this naive vision of human nature as always the same. If we each are constituted by our time and place and languages—by our cultures—then literary texts, too, are products of culture, constituted by the cultural vision of an author and values of her or his time, a partial vision, not universal truth.

Some have been unable to put aside the historical pretense to a secular scripture, however, and still work at justifying the process of canonization of great books. In this volume, Alan C. Purves and Catharine R. Stimpson provide a historical and political context for the caprice of this canon formation, and the partial vision of culture that it has privileged. Both problematize notions of texts as "instruments of inclusion" or "agents of acculturation." Both suggest how canon civil wars and canon cease-fires reflect the changing purposes for literature and, to quote Stimpson, "the consequence[s] of turbulent, impure historical dramas." Expanding the canon to include multicultural literatures is a conscious political act in a long history of literary politics, brought to us, Stimpson shows, not by divine inspiration but by some

version of "Great Books, Inc." And both caution that these canon quarrels not blind us to the more important goals of changing how we teach and of changing, as Purves considers, our assumptions behind what we teach, or "what it is we are about when we teach."

As much as they discuss issues of canonicity, the writers evaluate limits to change that inevitably arise from these reasons: the pragmatic and inviolable demands of the academic calendar, ignorance of culturally specific learning styles, ignorance of the literatures themselves, the availability or purchasability of texts, and nativistic backlash. Classroom sizes, competing agenda, and the accessibility—or lack thereof—of resources for teacher training and scholarly research also pose difficulties in integrating multicultural texts into the syllabus. Even how various groups define "resource," Harris's essay suggests, must be critiqued. "Resources exist," she assures! They include not single chapters on multiculturalism at the end of mainstream texts but "summer institutes, conferences, organizations, librarians, scholars, texts, and teachers [themselves] who specialize in or possess knowledge about multicultural literacy and literature."

Such commonsense solutions stitch a common thread through the essays of Gregory A. Morris, Phillip C. Gonzales, and Suzanne K. Sutherland on curricular change within public school districts; and linking one group to another—teachers to resources, writers to teachers, distributors to presses, academia to communities—is a theme that binds all thirteen essays in one multicultural quilt. They engage in a mutual effort to challenge traditions that deny the richness of our cultures and the voices of diversity. They elaborate a multicultural aesthetic and exhibit this aesthetic in their individual essays.

Social interaction as the basis for change may be the most prominent collective theme in this volume. In and out of schools, individuals serve as literacy bridges, moving a silent student or group to voice identities, articulate beliefs, and assume a new awareness of culture, self, and difference. From in and out of classrooms, the writers in this volume act to transform communities, huge school districts, individual schools or classrooms, and themselves. They gather forces of change, not naively conceived, but optimistic in the face of knotty problems, tensions, questions. Spurred at first by changing demographics, desegregation, racial achievement gaps, alienation, bias, inhumanity, they work as bridges toward change in the "house of culture" (Stimpson, this volume). All of them in some way echo literacy bridge and teacher Paolo Freire (1970): that our cultures, our institutions and communities, ourselves, "are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection."

Welburn begins the first section, "Defining Difference: Perspectives on Writing Literature," with an account of the instructive legacy of tales and music that has enriched his listening and seeing as an African American/Native American writer and poet. Turning to examples from written traditions, from the slave narratives to modern American novels, Babb connects reading and writing historically to issues of cultural inclusion and exclusion, of access and denial, of political identity and social equity. The historical importance of literacy within Black communities and its relationship to liberation is a similar focus in Young's chapter. In his story of barriers to full literacy, Young argues for the healing and humanizing benefits to specific African American communities—such as his own West Side ("wrong side") home in Chicago—that possess their own texts written from an insider's perspective. And McCaskill connects these themes of liberation and literacy to her syncretism of a variety of literacies—visual and aural, written and read, public and personal—in the classroom. All attempt to define literature and literacy in the context of cultural identities within a multicultural society.

In "Making Space: Perspectives on Writing Policy," the five writers draw from recent events in multicultural education in order to examine school policy. Purves and Stimpson analyze both theoretical problems of canon formation and such practical issues as censorship and ambiguities of purpose. Sutherland offers one approach to canons in her essay on the NEH-sponsored summer institutes with the University of Houston and the Houston Independent School District. As national models for school-university collaborations, these institutes enabled teachers to read and select multicultural literatures, to reassess their views, and then, returning as group leaders in their own schools, to revise their classroom practices. Morris describes how the creation of a multicultural education task force in the Pittsburgh Public School district catalyzed the middle school curriculum with the cultures of five American groups. He traces the rationale for this multiracial, multi-ethnic, and multicultural (Triple M) project; and like Sutherland, he describes the importance of collaborating with teachers to select texts, create curricula, and develop new pedagogies. Connecting to these on the West Coast is the California Literature Project for training and retraining teachers who work with large populations of Latino/Latina students: Gonzales portrays the subtle attitudes that ethnic literatures may shape and analyzes how learning to teach students to take a critical stance toward all texts, a "reading against the cultural grain," can empower teachers and students.

Harris begins the final section, "Making Space for Difference: Perspectives on Teaching," with an overview of the components which enable teachers to implement multicultural curricula. After defining the underlying philosophic approaches to literacy in the schools, she emphasizes the need for curricula that provide diverse learning contexts for diverse learners. Sharma Knipling contributes to this list of productive pedagogical strategies by suggesting that teachers scrutinize definitions of literary artifacts and cultural identity, and she suggests that university teachers must investigate constraints on the status of literatures and cultures within the university's own institutional structure. At any educational level, Muhammad's essay warns, an additive approach to multicultural literatures is inadequate and ossified. Also, she cautions that a multicultural environment in itself may not promote multicultural literacy: through reading and writing, listening and talking, students must study how culture affects their own lives. Junko Yokota explores important considerations in selecting and teaching Asian American literatures if teachers and librarians want their students to understand Asian American cultures and feel pride in their heritage. These transformational principles put forth here by Muhammad, Sharma Knipling, Yokota, and Harris are confirmed in Miller's account of a "dialogic pedagogy." She derives a very similar set of principles for creating change by synthesizing results from ethnographic studies of successful literature discussion in multicultural classroom contexts.

It is not a coincidence that our entire volume is framed with essays (Welburn, Young—Muhammad, Sharma Knipling) that discuss the centrality of personal narrative to multicultural literacy and literature projects. As Muhammad has observed among her adolescent students, personal examinations of culture become an essential prelude to engaging cultures in the literature:

Memoirs, autobiographies, and other forms of personal narratives serve as guiding lights in the students' personal writing endeavors. From journal entries to autobiographical short stories, the various forms of personal narratives lend themselves to the maturation that occurs during adolescent and teen years. They provide a close, safe place for students to discover and to react to the culturally diverse world around them.

Writing and speaking words and images in their own personal narratives has enabled Muhammad's students, and many more, to retrieve the term "multicultural society" from an impalpable, twilight

place and to consider its connections to their own felt, daily lives. Inspiring actions such as these explode the roof off the consecrated old red school!

This connection of the personal examination of culture to examinations of literature and literacies was also established by the philosopher and social scientist W. E. B. Du Bois. In his *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois recounted his own experience as a freshly minted Fisk graduate teaching in a one-room, segregated Tennessee schoolhouse. His assignment was to teach the black sons and daughters of sharecroppers under a single roof. The terrain which these children inhabited—craggy, mountainous, wooded—seemed to vivify the steep battle they faced to overcome the poverty, racism, ignorance, and disease that militated against any possibility of their successfully becoming educated, mature adults.

At first, however, this challenge did not loom as much as other, more cosmetic, considerations. "I was haunted," Du Bois recalled (p. 99), "by a New England vision of neat little desks and chairs, but, alas! the reality was rough plank benches without backs, at times without legs." To further erode his "neat" presuppositions about what and what not a schoolhouse should be, Du Bois' own desk was not pedestaled auspiciously in the manner of the day. Instead, his privileged perch was modestly composed "of three boards, reinforced at critical points." His chair, "borrowed from the landlady, had to be returned every night." The school itself, a mere "log hut," had formerly been used to store grain.

Yet the young Du Bois remained unperturbed by this contradiction between reality and expectation, and he initiated encounters among the children there that reveal how our assumptions about culture and being cultured can belie what stands before our own eyes. In spite of the hardships and obstacles that his pupils often endured—ceaseless crop rotations, sudden disease and death, harassment by not-so-neighborly whites—Du Bois became both inspired and invigorated by the eagerness, industry, and potential in the class. Straight out of one of the most esteemed institutions for black youth, straining with lessons he thought he had mastered, Du Bois became a student to the lessons of his students. When a pupil had been kept too long away from studies to tend to younger siblings or assist parents in the fields, he would march upon the home and "put Cicero 'Pro Archia Poeta' into the simplest English with local applications" (p. 100) and convince the family of the importance of that student's return. Whether the studies of the day were "simplest" or complex, Du Bois learned to consider the "local applications" of literature and literacies to his students' own felt daily lives.

What kept this realization at the fore of all of Du Bois' scholarly achievements was the "longing to know" that "hovered like a star" (p. 99) in the eyes of his students during those Tennessee mountain days. As he wrote these words in *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois must have meant to remind his American readers of the North Star. This star only decades before had guided the slaves, the grands and great-grands of his students, to freedom and fulfillment of the "longing to know." Upon emancipation, the challenge to Americans, black and white, had been to shape a system of education offering the star's most salutary, transformative benefits. In a similar spirit, this volume is offered as an additional guiding light, toward a society that grants its children not one cramped pew, but circulation and scores of rooms.

Notes

1. Barbara is grateful to her mother, Mrs. Inez Owens McCaskill, for reminding her to be mindful of this fact. Her mother's experiences growing up in the 1940s and 1950s at Manley Taylor School and Spencer High School in segregated Columbus, Georgia, have contributed to this description of Assembly.

2. Exceptions to this are Phillip C. Gonzales and Junko Yokota, who were engaged after the conference had ended in order to contribute their essays on Latino/Latina and Asian/Asian American literature and literacies. Nevertheless, they share themes and references similar to those of the remaining writers.

References

- Crow Dog, M. (1990). *Lakota woman*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of Black folk*. New York: New American Library.
- Franklin, J. H. (1990). A life of learning. In H. L. Gates, Jr. (Ed.), *Bearing witness: Selections from African-American autobiography in the twentieth century* (pp. 350-368). New York: Pantheon. (Reprinted from *Race and history: Selected essays 1938-1988*, 1989, pp. 277-291).
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Bergman Ramos, Trans.). New York: Seabury.
- Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (1988). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. New York: Vintage.

- Jones, G. (1991). *Liberating voices: Oral tradition in African American literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kingston, M. H. (1976). *The woman warrior: Memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts*. New York: Vintage International.
- Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual power*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Smitherman, G. (1988). *Discriminatory discourse on Afro-American speech*. In her and Teun A. van Dyk (Eds.), *Discourse and discrimination* (pp. 144–175). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.