CHAPTER 1

MULTICULTURAL ANTIRACIST EDUCATION AND WHITENESS

MULTICULTURAL? ANTIRACIST? EDUCATION

Multicultural education emerged out of the protest movements which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Gay (1983) three forces converged during this time, giving rise to an approach to education that was aimed at social change and empowerment for minority groups. These included: "new directions in the civil rights movement, the criticism expressed by textbook analysts, and the reassessment of the psychological premises on which compensatory education programs of the late 1950s and early 1960s had been founded" (p. 560).

During this time, many African Americans and other people of color focused on restructuring educational and social policies, revamping school curricula, developing strategies for redistributing power and representation in schools, and inserting their cultural identities in educational institutions. It was evident to most educators of color that white teachers, especially, knew very little about the lived experiences of students of color and that their teaching practices reified the myth that difference meant deficiency. Early advocates of multiethnic education (as it was often called then), saw curriculum reform and inclusionary practices as strategies for educating teachers about diversity and for addressing the heretofore neglected histories and cultures of marginalized peoples.

Multiethnic education was seen as a beacon for those who wanted to cross the educational borders and challenge existing forms of institutional and cultural racism. African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups demanded that educational institutions reform their cur-

ricula, hire minority teachers, create ethnic studies programs, and give more control to communities over how their schools were structured. They saw their work as being antiracist in nature and as being situated in a sociopolitical context. Thus, their challenges to the educational system were also seen as challenges to the existing ownership of knowledge and to the larger issues of the distribution of power and wealth in our society.

Initially, this alternative educational approach was met with optimism and a readiness to address the inequities within the educational system. New laws were passed supporting bilingual education. Funding was being provided for multiethnic curriculum development. Students with disabilities were required to be mainstreamed. Feminists were pushing for revisions in the curriculum and, overall, the vision of equality seemed to have captured the educational community.

This apparent success brought with it seeds of discontent and a ubiquitous language that has suffered considerably at the hands of educators and policy makers alike since the mid-1980s. "Multiethnic education" became known as "multicultural education." The focus still centered around issues of ethnicity and racial group representation, but a broader view of culture was added in hopes of providing a more inclusive forum for dealing with the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, culture, gender, and exceptionalities within the educational system.

Watkins (1994) suggests that what is occurring in education *today* is that, "Multicultural education operates under the protective canopy of egalitarianism, inclusion, and social justice" (p. 99). Under this "virtuous" canopy, multiculturalists have had to define, redefine, and defend the meaning of multicultural education. Much like the splintering of feminism into feminisms as a result of women of color critiquing the claims of universality in white feminists' notions of what constitutes "equality" and "power," so too, multicultural education has been subject to challenges and critiques about its content, its character, and its universality. Is it about culture? Is it about ethnicity? Is it about race? Does it include an analysis of class? Is it aimed at individual transformation or is its purpose to dismantle educational policies and practices that are racist and discriminatory? Has multicultural education fallen prey to a type of political correctness that has removed most of its power to transform the infrastructure of our school systems?

Many antiracist educators in the field today believe that multicultural education needs to be pervasive and provide open access to marginalized groups on multiple educational levels with "a major aim of the field [being] to restructure schools, colleges, and universities so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will

experience an equal opportunity to learn" (Banks, 1992a, p. 273). Those who support multicultural education question its relationship to school reform, to racial politics, to the distribution of wealth, power, and knowledge in this country, and do so *by making racism, and the problematic of race*, its core tenets (see, e.g., Banks, 1996; Grant, 1995; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Martin, 1995; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Sonia Nieto (1996) reminds us of the importance of racism as a core construct in multicultural education when she states:

> it is easier for some educators to embrace a very inclusive and comprehensive framework of multicultural education [because] they have a hard time facing racism. Issues of class, exceptionality, or religious diversity may be easier for them to face. . . . Racism is an excruciatingly difficult issue for most of us. Given our history of exclusion and discrimination, this is not surprising. Nevertheless, I believe it is only through a thorough investigation of discrimination based on race and other differences related to it that we can understand the genesis as well as the rationale for multicultural education. (p. 7)

Who Defines? Who Decides?

Today, "multicultural education is entrenched in highly selective debates over content, texts, attitudes, and values" (McCarthy, 1994, p. 82). Simultaneously, we are witnessing an increased emphasis on the importance of teachers developing multicultural skills in order to effectively educate immigrant, non-English-speaking students, and children from diverse racial and ethnic groups (see, for example, Banks & Banks, 1993; Banks, 1995; Mallory & New, 1994; Martin, 1995; Ng, Staton & Scane; 1995; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter, 1995b). This increase in the diversity of students, along with the increased demand for teachers to teach to diversity, coincides with the increasing number of educators, policy makers, and academics who are looking for a multicultural cure.

As one reviews the history of inclusive education within the last 30 years, one observes that the meaning of multicultural education has a great deal to do with *who* is doing the defining and, in a more pragmatic sense, *who* is actually implementing the multicultural perspective. An added question for consideration is *where* is this kind of education being lived out—in what context? under what conditions? Today, when the advocates for multicultural education are African Americans like Banks (1991; 1992b; 1995), Tatum (1992; 1994) and Gay (1993), or Latinas and Latinos like Nieto (1994; 1996) and Diaz (1992), or Asian

Americans like Pang (1992), the discourse[1] is more likely to include a macroanalysis of the structure of social institutions and the need to dismantle hierarchical systems that consolidate power and knowledge construction into the hands of a few—the few usually being middle- to upper-class whites. This is not to say that due to the subordinate status of these racial and ethnic groups that they all speak the same "multicultural language" or that they all place racism as a core variable for analysis. Quite the contrary. They speak from their own individual class, race, ethnic, and gender positions and offer unique perspectives on the role of multicultural education in our schools. They are not to be seen as representatives of their race or gender or class, nor as educators who are automatically opposed to the dominant discourse due to their marginality. As McCarthy (1994) notes, "minority cultural identities are not fixed or monolithic but multivocal, and even contradictory" (p. 82). Nonetheless, their contributions are important as their identities as educators are located outside the dominant educational discourse—a location that is reserved for the white males and females who occupy most of the positions in our educational systems. The authors cited above have developed a critical perspective due, in part, to their positions as educational "outsiders."

White proponents of multicultural antiracist education like Ahlquist (1991), Cochran-Smith (1991; 1995a; 1995b), Ellsworth (1989), Paley (1979; 1995), Sleeter (1992; 1994; 1995b), and Weiler (1988), though committed to the same goals, don't pretend to see the landscape through the same lens. Both educators of color, and white educators, may work simultaneously to challenge existing educational policies and practices that discriminate against certain racial and ethnic groups under the umbrella of multicultural education, but this challenge is grounded in different life experiences. Being white educators, and having benefited from the present educational structure, we have to be careful not "to reproduce the very practices of domination that we seek to challenge" (Patai, 1991, p. 147). One way to avoid the tendency to reproduce those practices is to commit ourselves to interrogating whiteness within the framework of multicultural antiracist education.

The Teacher as "a" Definer/Mediator of Multicultural Education

Cherry Banks (1992) reminds us that multicultural education is

a process, an idea, and a way of teaching. . . . Multicultural content and insights should permeate the entire social system of the school, because specific norms, values, and goals are implicit

throughout the school's environment, including its instructional materials, policies, counseling program, and staff attitudes as well as its hidden and formalized curricula. (p. 204)

Although Cherry Banks addresses important issues in multicultural education, this perspective, like others, ignores the racial identity of the classroom teacher and the system of whiteness that is the bedrock of the education system in the United States. Though there is an underlying assumption that teaching to diversity automatically makes one sensitive to the Other (however the Other is defined), the reality is that the white classroom teacher can "perform the multicultural tricks" while never having to critique her positionality as a beneficiary of the U.S. educational system.

As Nieto (1996) suggests, "many people may believe that a multicultural program *automatically* takes care of racism. Unfortunately this is not always true" (p. 308). Many multicultural education programs may address culture, race, ethnicity, and gender but they "mute attention to racism (and ignore patriarchy and control by wealth), focusing mainly on cultural difference" (Sleeter, 1994, p. 5). The central construct, as Sleeter suggests, becomes cultural difference when it needs to be "white racism and racial oppression [constructs that] disappear from consideration in the minds of white educators" (p. 5) as we/they develop and implement multicultural programs and policies. White educators are implicated in the norms, standards, and educational models set by white academics and institutions. Subsequently, we frame our perspective of multicultural education in such a way that it loses its original critique of the multiple levels of miseducation for children of color, and of white children as well, and the unequal distribution of wealth and power that exists in our nation and is partially lived out within the confines of our educational institutions.

Reeducating Ourselves

Many of us, as white educators, have only responded to the issue of cultural difference, diversity, and multicultural antiracist education because of historical events that have challenged us to rethink the education being provided to the children of this country. Over the years, people of color have forced "us" to reform, restructure, and rethink exclusionary practices that exist on multiple levels in this society. As white educators, we have been advised by many to teach ourselves (hooks, 1990; 1994) but oftentimes, we remain unwilling to do so.

One strategy for becoming more critical about multicultural education *as antiracist education* is for white teachers to be more self-reflective about our own understandings about race and racism and for us to challenge our own constructions about what it means to be white in this country. How do we, as white teachers, become more self-reflective? How do we learn to acknowledge our own sense of ourselves as racial beings actively participating in the education of young people? How are we to take action *against* discriminatory educational practices and take action *for* liberatory educational practices? How do we become multicultural antiracist people?

There is no absolute panacea for the challenges raised by these questions. However, an examination of how white student teachers make meaning of their whiteness and how that meaning informs and influences their beliefs about race, racism, and multicultural antiracist education is needed. What has emerged for me in thinking through these issues is the notion that we, as white educators, need to examine our racial identity in hopes that such an examination will contribute to new ways of teaching and learning that disrupt racist educational practices. Examining our racial identities *and* problematizing the system of whiteness in which those identities are created leads to what Terry (1975) calls "a *new white consciousness*: an awareness of our whiteness and its role in race problems" (p. 17). Terry states that "Too many whites want interpersonal solutions *apart from* societal changes" (p. 2). The consciousness I suggest must go beyond the "interpersonal solutions" and enable white teachers to perceive educational inequities that exist in our schools as being related to larger societal inequities and to mobilize for change.

WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY

The lack of self-reflection about being a white person in this society distances white people from investigating the meaning of whiteness and prohibits a critical examination of the individual, institutional, and cultural forms of racism. As Katz & Ivey (1977) suggest—and it continues to ring true today—being unaware of one's racial identity and being unable to conceptualize the larger system of whiteness "provide[s] a barrier that encases white people so that they are unable to experience themselves and their culture as it really is" (p. 485).

For white educators, in particular, this invisibility to one's own racial being has implications in one's teaching practice—which includes such things as the choice of curriculum materials, student expectations,

grading procedures, and assessment techniques—just to name a few. What is necessary for white teachers is an opportunity to problematize race in such a way that it breaks open the dialogue about white privilege, white advantage, and the white ways of thinking and knowing that dominate education in the United States.

Being White

What exactly does it mean to be white? Terry (1981) suggests that,

It is a question . . . that confounded my life and launched me on an exciting and, at times, frightening odyssey. . . . To be white in America is not to have to think about it. Except for hard-core racial supremacists, the meaning of being white is having the choice of attending to or ignoring one's own whiteness. (pp. 119–120)

Katz (1978) posits that,

Because United States culture is centered around White norms, White people rarely have to come to terms with that part of their identity. Ask a White person his or her race, and you may get the response "Italian," "Jewish," "Irish," "English," and so on. *White people do not see themselves as White.* (p. 13)

Helms (1993) notes that,

if one is a White person in the United States, it is still possible to exist without ever having to acknowledge that reality. In fact, it is only when Whites come in contact with the idea of Black (or other visible racial/ethnic groups) that Whiteness becomes a potential issue. (p. 54)

In interviewing a group of white teachers, Sleeter (1993) quotes one of her interviewees as saying:

What's the hangup, I really don't see this color until we start talking about it, you know. I see children as having differences, maybe they can't write their numbers or they can't do this or they can't do that, I don't see color until we start talking multicultural. Then oh yes, that's right, he's this and she's that. (p. 161)

Sleeter goes on to say that "white teachers commonly insist that they are 'color-blind': that they see children as children and do not see

race" (p. 161). She then asks a poignant question of these white teachers: "What does it mean to construct an interpretation of race that denies it" (p. 161)?

Another white educator, Peggy McIntosh (1992), "thinks that whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege" (p. 71) and that "many, perhaps most, of our students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see 'whiteness' as a racial identity" (p. 79).

These authors, among others, contend that white people's lack of consciousness about their racial identities limits their ability to critically examine their own positions as racial beings who are implicated in the existence and perpetuation of racism. This invisibility to their own race allows white people to ignore the complexities of race at the same time that it minimizes their way of thinking about racism and about race as being "important because white Americans continue to experience advantages based on their position in the American racial hierarchy" (Wellman, 1993, p. 4).

Thus, white people's lack of consciousness about their racial identities has grave consequences in that it not only denies white people the experience of seeing themselves as benefiting from racism, but in doing so, frees them from taking responsibility for eradicating it (Elder, 1974; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Hacker, 1995; Hardiman, 1982; Katz, 1976; Moore, 1973; Wellman, 1993). Being unable to conceptualize "whiteness," white people are unable to see the advantages afforded to the white population within this country. Furthermore, they fail to see how these advantages come at the expense of the disadvantaged.[2]

The Emergence of a White Racial Identity

Over the years, many sociologists, psychologists, and educators have argued that racism is a white problem and a problem that needs to be addressed by the white community (see, e.g., Corvin & Wiggins, 1989; Feagin & Vera, 1995; hooks, 1994; Katz & Ivey, 1977; McIntosh, 1992; Ryan, 1976; Sleeter, 1993; Wellman, 1993; West, 1994). These authors assert that if white people would become aware of their own racial beings, accept the reality of white privilege that exists in the United States, and act to alleviate the forms of racism that emerge from this imbalance of color-power, then they would be more effective in dealing with the racism in this country. The focus, they argue, has to move from "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1976) and looking at a "view of race . . . that still see[s] black people as a 'problem people'" (West, 1994, p. 5) to a view of white people as profoundly implicated in the main-

taining of racial oppression and deeply affected by white racism.

During the 1970s and 1980s, perspectives on racial identity centered on the consequences of racism on the victims. Rarely were the implications of racist attitudes for the dominant group considered. Though there were some scholars studying how white people view themselves as racial beings (Elder, 1974; Katz, 1976; Moore, 1973), it has only been within the last two decades that theorists have begun to investigate white racial identity and propose stage models of white racial identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1993; Ponterotto, 1988). These models attempt to conceptualize the process by which white people come to understand their racial identity. Though the stages and phases may differ in name, the processes are similar in each model. The white person progresses through a developmental continuum of "statuses" where she or he is confronted on multiple levels with the issues of whiteness and its meaning in contemporary society (Helms, 1994).

This confrontation may take multiple forms, but is most clearly viewed in terms of its impact on one's racial identity. As Wellman (1993) so cogently notes, "What is crucial to American identity, . . . is not that Americans hate black people. Rather the fundamental feature of their identity is that they do not know who they are without black people. Without the black Other, the American [white] Self has no identity" (p. 244). Though Wellman situates the white identity in terms of its relationship to the Black identity, the formation of white racial identity, and the need for transformative strategies for thinking about whiteness, is not limited to the white-Black relationship.

As Wellman (1993) notes regarding his research for the book, *Portraits of White Racism,*

> Although this book focuses on the issues dividing black and white Americans, the analysis is applicable to relationships between white Americans and other peoples of color. The differences and relations between European Americans and Asian, Latino, or Native Americans are also rooted in the organization of racial advantage. (p. 4)

Similarly, the developmental stage models are investigations into what constitutes whiteness and are conducted, not in isolation, but in relation to white people's attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors toward people of color. Helms developed the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale to assess attitudes related to her stages of racial identity. Recently, the WRAIS has been used to study the relationship between

racial identity attitudes and counseling interactions (Carter, 1993; Helms & Carter, 1991; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991). Researchers have also begun to investigate the relationship between racist attitudes and racial identity among whites (Block, Roberson & Neuger, 1995; Carter, 1990; Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994; Claney & Parker, 1989; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Yang, 1992).

IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF WHITENESS

Though educational literature is inundated with new and improved suggestions for training teachers about multicultural education, what the literature lacks is innovative research into the relationship between white racial attitudes, beliefs, and how white teachers make meaning of whiteness and its relationship to multicultural education. Using the stage models of racial identity theories would be one strategy for examining white racial identity in white student teachers. Another method would be to investigate white student teachers' notions of their whiteness in relation to typologies that have been developed by Jones (1972) or Terry (1975). These typologists have presented various "white-types," attempting to examine how white people construct notions of themselves as "white."

In this participatory action research project (which from now on will be referred to as PAR), I examined white racial identity, and the meaning of whiteness, through a different lens. Rather than a developmental model consisting of statuses and various transitions to the formation of a healthy racial identity, or a model that relies on assessing the types of white people the participants might be, I looked at white racial identity as a social activity that is constantly being created and recreated in situations of "rupture and tension" (Minh-Ha, 1996). Like Cochran-Smith (1991), I believe that teachers are both critics and creators of the knowledge that circulates in their classrooms and that they are forever creating (and re-creating) their identities.

One way for white student teachers to become creators of their *racial* identities, is through a commitment to (1) investigating whiteness, (2) educating themselves about the relationship between their racial identities and the existence of racism within U.S. society, and (3) taking constructive action in the naming of racism and the renaming of what they can do about it within the context of multicultural antiracist education.