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Engaging the Multicultural Education Terrain

A Holographic Montage for Engagers

Multicultural education's history has been tumultuous, dynamic, polarized, embracing of diversity, controversial, explosive, nurturing and, vehemently, nonneutral. The authentic teacher in the multicultural education (MCE) terrain is a hero, a risk taker, a poet of pedagogical nuance who is willing to traverse the topography of the MCE terrain; to learn along with her students; to not understand along with her students; to deconstruct and reconstruct along with her students; to "be" in a learning dynamic that can be as explosive or as mundane as our individual and collective everydays. *Speaking the Unpleasant: The Politics of (non)Engagement in the Multicultural Education Terrain* is our endeavor to address the multidimensional pedagogical polemics of this terrain. The authors in this volume address several discrete and many times disparate issues all located within a

context of understanding the complexity of pedagogy in a terrain of nonneutrality with a diversity of learners, many of whom have no desire to "engage" an education that is multicultural.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a holographic montage for the reader for journeying within the MCE terrain as it is mapped within this volume. Lincoln and Guba (1985) speak to the holographic concept: "Images of systems and organisms [that] are created by a dynamic process of interaction that is (metaphorically) similar to the holograph, the three-dimensional images of which are stored and recreated by the interference patterns of laser beams" (p. 56). Lincoln and Guba capture the essence of this metaphor by quoting Schwartz and Oglivy's (1979) work:

> *With the holographic metaphor come several important attributes. We find that the image in the holograms is created by a dynamic process of interaction and differentiation. We find that the information is distributed throughout—that at each point information about the whole is contained in the part. In this sense, everything is interconnected like a vast network of interference patterns, having been generated by the same dynamic process and containing the whole in the part.* (pp. 13–14) (Emphasis mine)

The parallel of "holographic," in my mind, is the mastery of a multicultural education, of multiculturalism as a *way of life*, and its interconnected and dynamic processes as manifested in the everyday. This also implicates the term *engagement* and how teacher educators working alongside and with preservice teachers come to shed pedagogical light on the complexity of engagement *and* nonengagement within teaching and learning. The issues raised, discussed, and sometimes partially resolved are within the narrative of the personal. Each author or set of authors, with their unique and challenging understanding of the terrain, struggle to reveal to the reader how they, as transformative pedagogists, "speak the unpleasant" in a political milieu that automatically ensures controversy. The various chapters document several contesting issues raised within foundations, multicultural education, and/or varied methods courses with the diversity of preservice teacher education students and teacher educator colleagues that sometimes "get it," while others naively embrace, still others, misinformed or "stuck" within their individual systems of privilege or oppression crudely attack, many times disregard, or consciously minimize concepts, practices, and the diverse and embracing pedagogy of an multicultural education. As the various authors struggle along with the bevy of students and colleagues, they generate and recreate multicultural education's ideological core that

further enriches the multidirectional continuum of hope and possibility; extend our knowledge base for comprehending the educational despair that has so plagued our diverse communities; and provide intellectual stardust to the educational universe that will engender a liberatory and democratic education struggling for social justice (see Estrada & McLaren, 1993).

The exponential growth of the MCE literature is well represented in this volume. More telling are the collective passions of experience illustrated herein, witness to the immensely complex *and* growing pockets of hope found within teacher education sites across the country (see also the collected works of Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995)—renaissance of an education that both liberates and embraces the practice of diversity and promotes pluralism in a democratic context for social justice. As well, pedagogical authenticity is evidenced in these authors' narratives. Knowing the teacher education community is composed of a rainbow coalition of an ideological magnitude that is hard to imagine, I would like to share with the reader a holographic montage, generative notes, if you will, that will hopefully challenge and further our thinking of how we, as teacher educators, go about embracing a multicultural education and its practices within the context of a teacher education that authenticates democracy, legitimizes social justice, and delegitimizes the hegemonic subtleties of educational discrimination and injustice, while simultaneously celebrating cultural, ethnic, and linguistic renewal and affirmation.

To Conceptualize a Holographic Montage

In the literature as well as in the popular culture, politically correct symbols have anesthetized how we come to think of conclusive concepts pivotal to an MCE. A critical vigilance is paramount. How these authors symbolize, deconstruct, and reconstruct the language of an MCE is central to this volume, to curriculum discourse, and to the teaching and learning enterprise. The holographic montage has several interrelated understandings. We know that language, culture, race, ethnicity, class, gender and orientation, and exceptionality backgrounds, to name a few, matter as we work with students in schools nationwide every day. We know that students interact with and engage one another in a variety of ways. We know that students engage school personnel, especially teachers, for academic purposes, talk to them at times socially and, many times, create significant and consequential one-on-one conversations. Characteristic to schooling is the knowledge that learners bring with them an array of experiences that many times authenticate their daily

experiences and provide contextual safety nets for their learning. More-over, we know schools and the environments fostered within are agen-cies of socialization that do much more than engage learners academi-cally. Besides academic learning, the schools advance an array of sociocultural interactions that are implicit, explicit, tacit, and overt (Giroux & Purpel, 1983). The multiple learning matrices that unfold cre-ate the contextual learning environments within schools that are simul-taneously academic, social, personal, interpersonal, and more.

As education must be linked to the lifeforms of self and social em-powerment in order for schooling itself to be a force in the continuous struggle for democratic action as a way of life (Giroux, 1988a), so too must be our collective actions as teacher educators. As a teacher educa-tor, I have best realized multicultural education's chaotic calmness by not falling prey to the linearity of teaching and learning and/or to the lure of "control" (see Foucault, 1979) but rather to its morphogenetic qualities (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Qualities that depend on the var-ious contextual perspectives that inform and ground a multicultural ed-ucation (i.e., cultural, ethnic, racial, gender and sexual orientation, class, disabilities, geographic region, etc.). Each learner brings into the learning terrain a holographic montage for democratic action and liber-atory pedagogy that is socially constructed. Rather than having the teaching and learning enterprise serve as a function of the state that maintains and reproduces the existing social order (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992; Freire, 1970; Macedo, 1993), a holographic teaching and learning montage depends on the engagement of all learners, teachers and students alike, and their contextual perspectives. Rosaldo (1993) identifies this succinctly as "space between order and chaos." The peda-gogical consciousness revealed throughout this volume is one where the authors, the creators of a multicultural education "space," voice their desires, plans, whims, strategies, moods, goals, fantasies, inten-tions, impulses, purposes, visions, or gut feelings relative to their peda-gogical subjectivities (see Rosaldo, 1993). The overlays of this holo-graphic montage are culturally shaped and influenced by the authors' biographies, their social situations, their historicities, their political lo-cation. In essence, the authors' location transpires within a temporal structure that ensures that everyday life will "retain its accent on real-ity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 28; see also Rosaldo, 1993). Thus, the MCE terrain is authenticated in tacitly personal ways where the practice of democracy and social justice for and with learners occurs in "seren-dipity with the moment."

The "serendipity with the moment" is by no means a relativist's whim (see Guba, 1990, 1993). The "moment" is enmeshed in a demo-graphic and socially dynamic overlay, an overlay that all of us know too

well. Culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct students now con-
stitute over 30 percent of the K–12 population nationwide. Latinos and
Latinas represent well over 40 percent of this growth while Asians and
Pacific Islanders show an increase of over 100 percent. In the early
nineties the population of those eighteen years old and younger was al-
most 40 percent Latino and 33 percent African American in contrast to
25 percent for white European Americans. The serendipity with the mo-
ment also constitutes who will be teaching and learning *with* the next
generation, a population more diverse and of color— 45 percent by the
year 2000. More striking is the teaching population (both preservice and
inservice), over 85 to 90 percent (depending on the region) of teachers
remain white and female. Better said is the realization that only twelve
to fifteen percent of our present teaching professionals are composed of
ethnically distinct minorities (Chávez Chávez, 1995). The writers in this
volume such as Cross's "Mediating Curriculum: Problems of Nonen-
gagement and Practices of Engagement"; De León, Medina, and Ortiz's
"Engaging Special Education Practitioners with Language and Culture:
Pitfalls and Challenges; Goodman's "Lowering the Shields: Reducing
Defensiveness in Multicultural Education"; and Lesko's insightful
"(E)strange(d) Relations: Psychological Concepts in Multicultural Edu-
cation" all too well understand the urgency of a multicultural education
and provide spectrographic color to the rainbow of hope, provide bea-
cons for methodological direction, and serve, almost too quietly, as ped-
agogical examples of courage.

Along with the demographic realities mentioned above, the making
of a holographic montage is consciously and unconsciously splashed
and, many times, saturated with entrenched perspectives about race,
ethnicity and culture, gender, and class that to this day permeate the
teacher education curriculum (see Banks and Banks, 1996; Chávez Chávez
1995; Giroux, 1993). The serendipity of the moment includes countless
examples in the literature that illustrate the contradictions and myths
held by preservice students and teacher educators alike (Fernández-
Balboa and Marshall, 1994; Fuller, 1994; Goodwin, 1994; King, 1991;
Pang, 1994; Sleeter, 1992). Preservice students and teacher educators
who "live" and "experience" the everyday justify racial, cultural, and
economic status by negating and/or marginalizing the sociocultural and
economic disparities that exist and, in turn, place little value on the con-
textual importance of diversity and difference in a multicultural society.
Smith's "Challenging Privilege: White Male Middle-Class Opposition in
the Multicultural Education Terrain" and Rumann's "The Struggle for
Cultural Self: 'From Numb to Dumb'" address this realization—one that
should compel us as teacher educators to responsibly examine society in
its multicultural contexts and how and whom we educate and why.

Framing a Holographic Montage in Postmodern Terms

One point becomes remarkably clear, the liberating knowledge construction of a multicultural education pedagogical discourse must be impacted by ontological, epistemological, and axiological presuppositions that *mirror* and *value* the diverse and pluralistic communities that schools serve. Said another way, in framing a postmodern holographic montage teacher educators' respect for and embracing of diverse and pluralistic communities must include ideological conceptualizations of "to be," "to know," and "to know how to do the 'right' thing" (Chávez Chávez, 1997). In order to serve our socio-learning communities we must embrace their totality—a multinarrative totality that is juxtaposed with a diverse and pluralistic context and practices social justice. The whole of a multicultural education cannot be understood by dichotomizing its essence into a series of unconnected learning units. It can best be appreciated by its processual nonlinearity that captures a synergistic whole (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). A multicultural education is also steeped in a teacher education that deconstructs and reconstructs the personal-social (ontological), the "to be" constructs that simultaneously—consciously or unconsciously—*engages* what all learners bring into the teaching and learning enterprise. A social reconstructionist's multicultural education presupposes a critical constructivist perspective (see Guba, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993; O'Loughlin, 1992). O'Grady's "Moving Off Center: Engaging White Education Students in Multicultural Field Experiences," Bahruth and Steiner's "Upstream in the Mainstream: Pedagogy against the Current," Díaz-Rico's "Toward a *Just Society*: Recalibrating Multicultural Teachers," O'Donnell's "Engaging Student's Re-Cognition of Racial Identity," and Cahill and Adam's "Identity and Engagement in a Multicultural Education," all in this volume, have declared this perspective crucial in order to engage preservice teachers to struggle with their modernist's/positivist's selves, an identity that is deeply embedded into the "act" of schooling.

Earlier in the decade, Guba (1993) noted that the postpositivist paradigm enjoyed hegemony. In dispute of this claim Hidalgo, Chávez Chávez, and Ramage (1996) argue that one simply needs to inspect many of our fragmented school structures around the country and to observe how teachers and students think about and participate in the factory school metaphor yoked with mediocre "compromises"—compromises tolerated by large bureaucratic structures (Sizer, 1984, 1992). Notwithstanding, there are educational oases that exude goodness, responsibility, and caring as well as academic standards for all students that far exceed the norm of everyday schooling (see Chávez Chávez,

1997; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Lightfoot, 1983; Meier, 1987; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Historically, however, the modernist, positivist's paradigm has effectively perpetuated its hegemony (see Cuban, 1993; Kliebard, 1995). In response to the reproductive and segmented and hegemonic constructs of modernism (see Apple, 1982; 1989; 1992), we find educators as those in this volume who are rethinking and reconstructing their teaching realities by demanding of themselves an unprecedented language and practice embracing diversity in its everyday context—human form (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966)—language that requires democratic and liberating metaphors and that appropriates a critical, constructivist stance. Many times, however, we find it difficult to wean ourselves from our own modernist schooling; others have made a decisive leap that has brought hope and possibility (Giroux, 1988a, 1988b) to the educational enterprise (see Nieto's "From Changing Hegemony to Sharing Space: Creating Community in Multicultural Courses"; Téllez and O'Malley's "Exploring the Use of History in Multicultural/Multilingual Teacher Education"; and Anderson, Bently, Gallegos, Herr, and Saavedra's "Teaching within/against the Backlash: A Group Dialogue about Power and Pedagogy in the 1990s" as examples in this volume). Rejecting the modernist's perspective *en toto* would be a mistake, its roots do contain progressive and democratic features (see Giroux, 1991; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993; Hidalgo, Chávez Chávez, & Ramage, 1996) on which postmodernity continues to build. Mark Dressman's "Confessions of a Methods Fetishist" (in this volume) honestly addresses how he and his pre- and inservice students have been caught up in the mire of positivist's righteousness that blinds rather than informs. In his poignant story, Dressman, in his struggle to break from a savage unreflective hermeneutic, demystifies his own pedagogical ignorance as a monomyth by making sense of his modernist's schooling. Multicultural education, we believe and as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1993) have so eloquently described, draws upon the progressive and democratic features of modernity as well as the postmodern insights into "the failure of reason, the tyranny of grand narratives, the limitations of science, and the repositioning of relationships between dominant and subordinate cultural groups" (p. 296).

Communication for Engagement

Within this volume we also struggle with the location of truth and its communication. Truth is a descriptive term that describes a quality and that is also descriptive. Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979) argue "how do you describe blue or big when the meaningful referents are themselves changing?" (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 56). McLaren (1989) insightfully argues that "truth," be it educational, scientific, religious, or legal, can

be described not as a set of "discovered laws" but that which must be understood within the realms of power and knowledge relations and which somehow correspond with the "real." Truth cannot be known except through its effects. Truth, argued McLaren (1989), is relational and dependent on history, cultural context, and relations of power operative in a given society, discipline, or institution. Pedagogical truth exemplified in this volume communicates truth and knowledge within a multicultural learning and teaching context that is inextricably bonded with socially constructed epistemological, ontological, and axiological constructs—constructs that should be analyzed as whether they are oppressive or exploiting and not on the basis of whether "true" or "false" (Maxcy, 1992). A compelling perspective is best described in this volume by Gaile Cannella who addresses the notion of truth as deciphered by teacher educators as fear barriers. In "Fostering Engagement: Barriers in Teacher Education" she describes the "fear barriers" that teacher educators must resolve—barriers that "can result in the elimination of critical multicultural education without ever giving [preservice] students opportunity for engagement." Important here is what Rosaldo has contested as the monopoly for truth. In his decentering of the dominant anthropological discourse, Rosaldo (1993) emphasized that culture must be studied "from a number of perspectives, and that these perspectives cannot necessarily be added together into a unified summation" (p. 93). Thus, in my view, the practice and communication of a multicultural education is one with an array of pedagogical perspectives that are idiosyncratic to the contextual *and* processual experiences the teacher and the learner brings *at that moment of engagement.* A holographic montage for engagers, I believe begins with this realization.

My desire is to leave the reader with a sense of the galactic magnitude that multicultural education embraces. Multicultural education's inherent complexity demands that pedagogists *apprehend* and *value* the personal-social knowledge complexity that fountains from diverse and pluralistic contexts. Placing MCE within the location of a postpositivist/naturalist paradigm (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985) can serve as a relevant and preeminent springboard to the teacher educator responsible for the supply and quality of future teachers who, without a doubt, *will* teach in diverse and pluralistic environments. The naturalist axioms as construed by Lincoln and Guba address the communication of reality, truth, and the relation to the knower. This epistemological construction—that is, "to know"—helps teacher educators to *communicate* pedagogical perspectives that demystify dominant structures that rationalize and perpetuate hegemonic subjectivities and accommodate the existing regimes of truth (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). This informs educators to responsibly envision the complexity of engagement, that is, "to know how to do the right thing" as they struggle for pedagogical authenticity,

that is, "to be" within a transformative paradigm (Chávez Chávez, 1997). Moreover, as we nurture our transformative selves we formulate informed and viable options and alternatives with all students that realistically capture the ontological and sociocultural diversity that populates classrooms. In turn, an intrinsic and undying respect for the histories, perceptions, cultural, and linguistic life practices of learners will take root (See Hidalgo, Chávez Chávez, & Ramage, 1996, for an indepth discussion.). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) insightful understanding of what I consider a "transformative paradigm" may serve as a metaphorical tool to soulfully and intellectually personalize our epistemologies; in other words, to ethically understand and communicate our tacit subjectivities. Furthermore, as we reflexively practice a pedagogy that embraces the holographic qualities of differences and the subjectivity of the everyday, we then become unselfishly *engaged* with our perspectival epistemologies; hence *we can see our engagement in the context of our own concerns when engaged with the Other.* In turn, "knowing how to do the 'right thing'" is a result of having multiple perspectives so needed in order to not be "blinded by our own biases" (see Chávez Chávez, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Conclusion

The historicity of a multicultural education is relevant to our struggle and to our holographic montage. Since multicultural education's early, raw, turbulent beginnings, human agency's natural development has transformed multicultural education into a polished integrated whole because it has consistently questioned (in diverse ways) the established educational order. This volume is a convergence of liberatory pedagogical practices for teacher educators by teacher educators, who by their actions and inherent passion for teaching and learning see pedagogy as a dignified enterprise and see the politics of education essential to dreaming for and acting toward social justice. The pedagogical discussions within this volume are constructed by dreamers, dreamers with political and social analysis, with sociocontextual ideologies that promote intellectual pursuit for the betterment of liberatory education and a classroom pedagogy grounded in social justice. We are most cognizant of the technocratic teacher (Giroux, 1988b) who is looking for "the" method, "the way," in order to develop instrumental ideologies that emphasize an technocratic approach that further stifles dreams not only in the teacher but also imprisons students' intellectual horizons. This volume's consistent text is that a multicultural education is the marriage of thought with deed; it is the demystification of standardized epistemologies that

delegitimate dominant authority and hegemonic control of learners and that authentically respects the intellectual and contextual matter learners hold and bring to the learning process (Chávez Chávez, 1995).

The cultural workers (see Giroux, 1993) in this volume serve as the principal agents in the educational enterprise who never lose sight of their students and thoughtfully examine and address a variety of underlying and sometimes confounding insights within the multicultural education terrain. The language these teacher educators use to *image* a multicultural education will enhance the discourse and practice in the multicultural education terrain. This volume illustrates the complexity of a multicultural teacher education, while at the same time putting to rest the reductionist clichés that minimize already normative practices. The holographic montage created in this multicultural education "space" encompasses and undergirds an education that is multifaceted and inherently dynamic. Our vision of teaching and learning for the years 2000 and beyond must be transfixed on what has been—a diverse and pluralistic historicity with what is to come. The writers in this volume are committed to a multicultural education and have illustrated their commitment by their pedagogical practice.

Speaking the Unpleasant: The Politics of (non)Engagement in the Multicultural Education Terrain is an investment by its many writers who implicitly practice a multicultural education as a way of life. Although important for teacher educators to understand and internalize aspects of an multicultural education as addressed in this volume, adding activities that are multicultural to an established syllabus will not be enough. What is needed is a resolve to life ways that will consciously/ unconscious and unconsciously/conscious (see Introduction) inform and ground practices that contextualize and value teaching and learning in a diverse and pluralistic context that in "serendipity with the moment" authentically values the Other. The various authors in this volume provide pedagogical images and overlays to the holographic montage critically revealing the entrenchment of the status quo. By their practice, these authors recast educators' personal responsibilities and commitment to the democratic challenges teacher educators have in a diverse and pluralistic context. Hence the authors in this volume exude a commitment to the values of a diverse and pluralistic society. *Speaking the Unpleasant: The Politics of (non)Engagement in the Multicultural Education Terrain* is a poignant reminder to the everyday struggles that are ever so prevalent in teacher education enterprises within agencies of higher education and at local sites. "Speaking the unpleasant" can only be actualized when we as teacher educators *show* how we practice a multicultural education pedagogy rather than *tell* how to practice a multicultural education. The authors herein *show*.