

## CHAPTER ONE

# Critical Multicultural Education

## *What Is It?*



Multicultural education: Schooling that helps students understand and relate to cultural, ethnic, and other diversity. . . . Multicultural education should be a process to work together and to celebrate differences, not to be separated by them.

—J. Lynn McBrien and Ronald S. Brandt,

*The Language of Learning: A Guide to Education Terms*

Although multicultural education is often talked about as if it were a monolithic entity, as illustrated in the above definition, in fact, the rubric contains a multiplicity of theoretical and practical insights that may even be contradictory. After an extensive review of the literature, Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant (1988) divided the available approaches into five groups: (1) Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different; (2) Human Relations; (3) Single-Group Studies; (4) Multicultural Education; (5) Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. This chapter presents a brief overview of the first four of these existing models in a way that allows for their juxtaposition to what will be referred to as Critical Multiculturalism (a concept that will be used interchangeably throughout this book with critical pedagogy and critical multicultural education).<sup>1</sup> Once Sleeter and Grant's (1988) first four models have been interpreted, an elaboration will be provided to establish which tenets Critical Multicultural Education appropriates and which it rejects. Additional concerns and insights will complement this analysis.

## **Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different**

Proponents of Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different are concerned with helping students from different cultural backgrounds, including those with disabilities, adapt to the mainstream demands of public schooling and society. The ultimate goal of this approach is to “remediate deficiencies or build bridges between the student and the school” (Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 35).

Viewing public education as systemically sound, just, and democratic, educators who embrace this type of multicultural model believe in meritocracy—where the so-called talented are advanced by virtue of their achievements. Proponents of this approach feel that the only reason culturally different people are not succeeding academically, and consequently in the workforce, is because they do not possess the necessary, standard human capital (such as language and bodies of knowledge) necessary to navigate the everyday demands of society. Consequently, advocates of this type of education attempt to prepare students—only those who are considered “in need”—with the crucial skills, values, and information to compete in the classroom and eventually in the job market.

Using educational approaches that are culturally compatible with learners’ backgrounds, Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different is intended to “teach traditional school knowledge more effectively by building on knowledge and skills students bring with them” (Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 43). As a process of remediation, educators who work within this paradigm use what information, skills, learning styles, languages (which may include the implementation of Transitional Bilingual Education) students possess, as well as creative teaching strategies, only to the extent that they act as vehicles for more efficiently transferring the learner into the so-called regular classroom. Such background information is not intended to displace or transform more conventional school content. Although this multicultural philosophy does not overtly discourage people from maintaining their native cultures and languages outside of public institutions, parents/caregivers are encouraged to show support for the school’s agenda.

## **Human Relations**

The main goal of this approach to multiculturalism is to promote positive relations among groups in schools by eradicating stereotypes and encouraging tolerance and unity. The basic idea is to bring about the realization that all people share the universal human experience. It is this common bond, combined with a newly acquired appreciation for difference, that is thought to lead to social harmony

within existing societal structures. Intended to be implemented schoolwide, according to Sleeter and Grant (1988):

the Human Relations approach is directed toward helping students communicate with, accept, and get along with people who are different from themselves; reducing or eliminating stereotypes that students have about people; and helping students feel good about themselves and about groups of which they are members without putting others down in the process. This approach is aimed mainly at the affective level: at attitudes and feelings people have about self and others. (p. 77)

Heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, and role playing are considered important elements of this philosophy of education, as is the open invitation to community members to come into the schools and share information about their cultural backgrounds.

### **Single-Group Studies**

Single-Group Studies is based on a philosophy of identity politics. That is, this model promotes an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of an individual group, for example, women, gays, blacks, or the working class. Unlike the two previous models, advocates of Single-Group Studies argue that schools are socializing institutions, and thus inherently political sites. To engage the ideological nature of schooling—the basic values, beliefs, interests, and intents that inform the learning process—this kind of multiculturalism embraces critical thinking, cultural analysis, and social action and transformation.

Essentially, the Single-Group Studies approach attempts to change attitudes and provide a basis for social action by exposing information (in this case through schooling) about a particular group and about the effects of discrimination on that group. As such, students and teachers are encouraged to question bodies of knowledge in a way that links power, ideology, and marginalization, offering an alternative view of the dominant culture and history of the country from the perspective of the group under study.

Differing from *Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different*, Single-Group Studies is not solely intended for marginalized students. However, unlike Human Relations, which is also meant for all students, this more critical model serves the purpose of “empowering group members, developing in them a sense of pride and group consciousness, and helping members of the dominant groups appreciate the experiences of others and recognize how their groups have oppressed others” (Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 116). This approach also demands

that teachers develop a more profound understanding of students' existential realities and needs, helping them to actualize a better sense of their own histories and the sociopolitical influences that shape their lives in the United States—the logic being that when people possess a deeper understanding of themselves and their communities, they are more adequately equipped to bring about positive social change.

## **Multicultural Education**

Multicultural Education encompasses educational policies and practices that attempt to affirm cultural pluralism across differences in gender, ability, class, race, sexuality, and so forth. Educators who embrace such an approach stress the importance of cultural diversity, alternative life styles, native cultures, universal human rights, social justice, equal opportunity (in terms of actual outcomes from social institutions), and equal distribution of power among groups. Teaching diverse traditions and perspectives, questioning stereotypes, learning the appropriate cultural codes in order to function within a variety of settings, recognizing the contributions of all groups to society (especially those that have been traditionally excluded), encouraging teachers to learn more about their students' experiences and realities, and eliminating negative biases from materials are all deemed important everyday practices. This model also embraces cooperative learning, having high expectations on all participants involved in the learning process, nurturing a positive self-concept among students, and developing forms of evaluation that are free of stereotypical language and that reflect multicultural curricula.

Proponents of Multicultural Education recognize the sociocultural nature of behavioral patterns, literacy practices, bodies of knowledge, language use, and cognitive skills. These educators demand culturally compatible forms of teaching that build on students' learning styles, needs, and realities. In order to accomplish this goal, there is a call within this model to diversify the faculty and staff so that they better reflect the students and their communities.

Similar to Human Relations, though far more involved, Multicultural Education also aspires to bring the community into the schools, and vice versa. Unlike Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different, which simply solicits the passive acquiescence of parents, proponents of this model

believe that when it comes to the education of their children, parents and community members must be more than mere spectators, simply attending graduation ceremonies, open house, or sporting events. They argue that just as citizen participation is fundamental to American democracy, so is it fundamental to school success. . . . Advocates of the Multicultural Education approach want to

see the community involved in budgetary procedures, the selection of school personnel, and curriculum development. (Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 160)

The ultimate goal of Multicultural Education is to transform the entire academic environment and not just the curriculum or the attitudes of individuals.

## **Critical Multicultural Education**

Contrary to common misperceptions of Critical Multicultural Education as a monolithic entity, the vast literature and positions that generally fall under this category not only demonstrate that there are multiple theoretical camps and differences, but also that there is no generic definition that can be applied to the term (Leistyna & Woodrum, 1996). Even the conceptual descriptors used to name such educational endeavors vary a great deal: Paulo Freire (1970) refers to this type of education as “critical pedagogy”; Henry Giroux (1994a) often uses the title “insurgent multiculturalism”; Peter McLaren (1994) prefers the use of “critical and resistance multiculturalism” or “revolutionary multiculturalism”; Donald Macedo (1994) speaks of “liberatory pedagogy”; and bell hooks (1994) embraces the idea of “engaged” or “transgressive pedagogy.”

Regardless of the abundance of names that are summoned to describe Critical Multiculturalism, there are important theoretical insights and practices that are woven throughout these various concepts, which often grow out of a common set of issues and conditions, that provide the focus for critical education within shifting spheres of political conflict. It is with these basic tenets, and through the voices of a number of critical social theorists, that the approaches in Sleeter and Grant’s (1988) typology will be analyzed. However, it is important to first present Critical Multiculturalism’s rejection of conventional schooling.

## **A Critique of the Traditional Classroom**

Critical educators (Apple, 1996; Cherryholmes, 1988; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1983) have argued that traditional conservative technocratic models that dominate mainstream educational programs, which narrowly conceptualize teaching and learning as a discrete and scientific undertaking, embrace depersonalized methods for educating students that often translate into the regulation and standardization of teacher practices and curricula. As such, the role of the teacher, who is “trained” instead of actively educated, is reduced to that of a passive and efficient distributor of information.

Endorsing a mechanical approach to reading, writing, and math, this movement, referred to as “back to basics,” has focused primarily on the transfer of basic skills and knowledge from the instructor to the student through mindless drills and rote memorization of selected facts that can easily be measured through standardized testing. Critical multicultural educators often depict how this pedagogical model, which focuses exclusively on preparing students for the workforce, abstracts education from the challenges of developing a conscious, socially responsible, and politically active student body and citizenry.

Many conservatives (Bennett, 1992; Cheney, 1988; D’Souza, 1995; Hirsch, 1996; Kimbal, 1990; Ravitch, 1995) have argued that attempts to reveal the underlying values, interests, and power relationships that structure educational policies and practices have corrupted the academic environment. As a rebuttal, critical educators assert that such efforts to depoliticize the public’s understanding of social institutions, especially schools, in the name of neutrality and democracy is merely a reactionary ploy to maintain the status quo.

It is important to note that conservatives are not the only ones guilty of this unwillingness, or failure, to name the inherently political nature of formal education. Take, for example, former President Bill Clinton’s two separate and contradicting statements made while he was still in office: “Politics must stop at the schoolhouse door!” and

I support efforts to empower local school districts to experiment with chartering their schools . . . or having more public school choice, or to do whatever they wish to do as long as we measure every school by one high standard: Are our children learning what they need to know to compete and win in the global economy?

Clinton is complicit in perpetuating the idea that politics can be left at the schoolhouse door, though he himself is placing the central value of public education on careerism and global capitalism: “Are our children learning what they need to know to compete and win in the global economy?” Even if he chooses the language of democracy and civic responsibility over neoliberalism when speaking openly about educating the public, Clinton would nonetheless be taking a political stance. As Sleeter and Grant (1988) point out:

Schooling that teaches about democracy is not neutral, but offers a particular point of view. Although this view may be related to freedom, justice, and equality, it is nevertheless a point of view. (p. 110)

Critical pedagogues insist that, as a consequence of mainstream technocratic models of public education, the larger historical, ideological, economic, and cultural conditions out of which today’s social and institutional crises have grown,

generally go unquestioned. It is precisely this lack of inquiry, analysis, and agency that a critical philosophy of learning and teaching hopes to reverse.

### **Critiquing and Appropriating from Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different**

Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different, like traditional pedagogy and curriculum in the United States, is based on an assimilationist agenda. This is clearly the case when any and all materials that are relevant to learners from different backgrounds are only used temporarily and are ultimately discarded. From a critical point of view, this culturally homogenizing process, which in the end contributes to students losing a sense of themselves in order to become “Americans,” is fundamentally antimulticultural and antidemocratic.<sup>2</sup> In rhetoric, advocates of this model claim that people can do whatever they want in their homes, but in public they must abide by certain codes. However, it is naïve at best, and malicious at worst, to assume that the two spheres can exist in isolation from each other.

Similar in many ways to conventional schooling, this depoliticized model of multicultural education also embraces the existence of an objective/neutral and universal body of knowledge that is referred to as “human capital.” Rejecting the idea of a universal foundation for truth and culture, as well as any claim to objectivity, critical pedagogy reveals that educational practices and knowledge are always produced within particular social, economic, and historical conditions, and therefore any understanding of their production and dissemination must be accompanied by an investigation of their relation to ideology and power (Foucault, 1972). Education, for example, as an integral part of the socialization process, is directed by particular beliefs, values, and interests. Knowledge, which in broad terms is understood as the way a person explains or interprets reality, is similarly constructed. Examining schooling, not as a neutral process, but rather as a form of cultural politics, critical multiculturalists argue that, as microcosms of the larger society, educational institutions reflect and produce social turmoil by maintaining dominant beliefs, values, and interests through particular teaching practices and bodies of knowledge that are legitimized, circulated, and consumed (or resisted) in the classroom. This surreptitious mirroring of dominant values, at the exclusion of “others,” is often referred to in the literature as the hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1990; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Vallance, 1973). Giroux (1983) broadly defines the “hidden curriculum” as

those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in

school and classroom life. The hidden curriculum functions not simply as a vehicle of socialization but also as an agency of social control, one that functions to provide differential forms of schooling to different classes of students. (p. 47)<sup>3</sup>

This covert agenda also works to erase or distort the experiences and perceptions of individuals and groups from other social realities that are shaped by the ideologically constructed categories of race, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth.<sup>4</sup>

Critical pedagogy reveals how only those characteristics and practices reflecting that dominant ideology will potentially facilitate academic achievement in mainstream schools (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). With this in mind, the idea of universal human capital that is enthusiastically embraced by proponents of Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different needs to be problematized and replaced. A more appropriate term, “cultural capital,” is extremely helpful in openly naming how different practices, behaviors, forms of language, and meaning are ideologically produced and hierarchically valued in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). From this perspective, knowledge is accurately portrayed as being generated within historical relations of power and not as some form of universal human understanding.

Contesting modernist traditions that are based on the notion that emancipation is only realizable through objective inquiry, universal reason, and absolute truth, students and teachers involved in critical multicultural learning and teaching are encouraged to examine the values, assumptions, and interests reflected in bodies of knowledge and representations, link such information to their own experiences if possible, and subsequently pose questions about the construction of knowledge—questions that address whose interests are served and whose voices and narratives have been systematically excluded. For example, educators should immediately question descriptors such as “normal” or “regular,” which are often used to compare the Bilingual and Special Education Programs to the so-called mainstream—terms that dialectically imply that everyone outside of this dominant category is “abnormal” or “irregular.”

Proponents of Critical Multicultural Education would agree with the idea embraced by Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different that all students should possess the tools necessary for navigating the current social order. However, unlike the conservative model that never questions the status quo, there is a call within critical pedagogy for the selective appropriation of dominant discourses—language, interaction styles, and knowledge—so that people of all backgrounds are not only able to survive within the mainstream, but more importantly they are armed to transform it. In this way, teachers and students do not fall into what Freire (1970) refers to as the “banking model of education,” which occurs when educators perceive students as empty containers that need to be filled with preestablished bodies of knowledge. Within the confines of a pedagogy of



transmission, learners are treated as objects that are acted upon, rather than knowledgeable participants in the construction of deep, meaningful, and transformative learning experiences.

By accepting the status quo, *Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different* neglects, or simply ignores, the institutional and socially sanctioned practices of discrimination and oppression. Instead, this model perpetuates the myths of meritocracy and life in a melting pot where the patterns of a so-called common culture miraculously emerge. Through a critical lens, any conservative effort to enforce a common culture, which in actuality is an unnegotiated foundation of values, ethics, meaning, histories, and representations, is viewed as the imposition of a homogenizing social paradigm that severely limits the possibility for a participatory democracy within a pluralistic society.

The reactionary idea of commonality disregards the real inter- and intragroup cultural differences and histories that exist in the United States. For example, as race and culture, class and culture, and gender and culture are inextricably related through discrimination, racially subordinated realities are substantially different from those of whites, as the ruling class is different from the working class, and as men are from women. The key question is, whose perspectives and interests are defining societal norms—the common culture—as well as what it means to be an official member of the nation?

Focusing on the imposition of particular values in society, as well as on the antagonistic relations and the opposition that surfaces as a response to such domination, critical multicultural educators view the contemporary cultural landscape not as a vista of common traditions and memories, but rather as a terrain of conflict. From this perspective, it is democracy alone that is the common element intended to unite the nation and eradicate the abuses of power and inequities that produce and maintain social injustice. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that a participatory democracy thrives on diversity and dissent, and not on coercive acts that rely on symbolic and physical violence to enforce conformity.

Ignoring the fact that U.S. society is not built on a level playing field for all groups, and that the elements of race, gender, class, health, religion, age, and sexuality have been used systematically to marginalize or exclude many people, conservative approaches to multicultural education never engage the politics of difference. Although *Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different* uses the word “different,” the model disallows any exploration of how difference is constructed within unequal relations of power. Working from such a limited and limiting framework, one that focuses exclusively on the so-called other, the concept of difference is often not taken up in terms of recognizing and critically engaging the dominant referent group—the invisible norm of the white, affluent, heterosexual, healthy, Christian male by which all people are measured. Without ever questioning the inhibiting aspects of this dominant referent, *Teaching the Exceptional and*

the Culturally Different implicitly works from a deficit-model orientation that equates different cognitive and learning styles, literacies, language use, and low academic achievement of students from certain groups, with individual or group pathology, cultural deprivation, or genetic limitations.

Instead of recognizing schools as a product of the larger society of inequities and struggles, they are viewed within this reactionary multicultural model as the great equalizers, the all-encompassing panaceas to “cultural and physical deficiencies,” as well as to societal problems. Educational institutions are thus understood as the solution to, rather than perpetrators of, social injustice and demise.

### **Critiquing and Appropriating from Human Relations**

There are a number of qualities that Critical Multicultural Education appropriates from the Human Relations approach to diversity: the idea that education of this kind is for all students and not just those on the margins, the stress on infusing such principles systemwide, and the use of heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, and role playing in the classroom. The two models also mutually embrace teaching social skills and providing an open invitation to community members to come into the schools and share information about their cultural backgrounds. However, Human Relations, like Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different, neglects to analyze the larger social and institutional structures that create intergroup tensions, poverty, disenfranchisement, and oppression. Instead, this multicultural model is built around the idea of cultural relativism, a philosophy in which all cultures are valued equally.

By not addressing structural inequalities and the reality that all groups and experiences are not treated with the same respect in society, Human Relations implicitly accepts the present social order. In fact, by using the word “human” in place of the term “cultural,” this educational model avoids any kind of engagement with antagonistic intergroup relations, collapsing into a kind of benign universal humanism (McCarthy, 1993). As a result, proponents openly reject talking about oppressive practices, claiming that exploration of this sort will exacerbate differences, tensions, and hostility among groups. In reference to such approaches, Paul Gilroy (1987) argues, “They have been concerned not directly with the enhancement of the power of the oppressed or disadvantaged groups but with the development of racially harmonious social and political relations” (p. 117).

In actual practice, Human Relations rarely moves beyond the surface features of traditional foods, clothing, and music. Schooling is consequently dealt with as a public ground where people, given the opportunity, can remove themselves from the turmoil of the rest of the world. Sleeter and Grant (1988) contend that within

multicultural practices of this type, “students may learn to interact pleasantly with Victor and to enjoy Chinese food, but this is no guarantee that they will learn about issues such as the poverty of Chinatown or the psychological devastation many Asian immigrants face when they realize they must surrender much of their identity to assimilate into American society” (p. 98).

Grounded in a relativistic stance on culture and identity, a major problem with Human Relations in the classroom is that the attitudes and beliefs of educators are often taken for granted. When advocates of this approach identify the need to question the affective domain of teachers, this often translates into an innocuous call for individuals to be more sensitive to differences and more inclusive. In fact, many well-intentioned educators working from within this conceptual framework believe that they can be more welcoming and just by miraculously leaving their own cultural baggage and biases at the schoolhouse door. Rather than confronting any potentially negative, inhibiting, and exclusionary ideologies that inevitably enter the classroom, they are in many cases rendered invisible. The idea that personal politics can be left at the door gives the erroneous impression that teachers can in fact be neutral distributors of information, and that objective truth is attainable.

From a more critical perspective, teachers are viewed as working and speaking from within historically and socially determined relations of power and privilege that are based on such markers as their race, class, ability, sexuality, and gender. Diametrically opposed to ignoring educators’ attitudes and beliefs, critical multiculturalists call for the ongoing process of self-reflection and self-actualization. This evolving awareness, or presence of mind, is intended to help people not only understand the sociohistorical and economic nature of their own cultural assumptions, and how they may affect the educational process, students, and the school’s overall social relations, but also the asymmetries of power that exist within the institutions where they work and live. This ability to interrogate the values and beliefs that inform knowledge also allows educators and concerned citizens to recognize the ideology of groups, such as teachers unions and school committees, that control school life, as well as “the hierarchical and often authoritarian relationships of school management, the conservative nature of school ideology, the material conditions of the classroom, the structural isolation teachers often face, and the fiscal and ideological constraints imposed by school boards on faculty” (Giroux, 1983, p. 56).

Educators need to reflect deeply on the assumptions that they carry about learning, evaluation, and different cultural identities. Self-actualization and prejudice reduction are essential to social transformation. However, self-actualization and prejudice reduction do not in and of themselves address where the “self” or the prejudice comes from. By solely looking within oneself, an individual is unable to make the links to the larger sociopolitical reality that shapes the psychological so as to be able to change it.

It is also crucial to recognize the fact that consciousness raising should not simply be about the process of unlearning. Of equal importance is developing an understanding of where and how such values and beliefs were produced so that any such sources can be confronted and eradicated if need be. For example, when it comes to actual classroom practices, Antonia Darder (1991) argues, “Another significant factor in the production of self-awareness in teachers is the ability to decode and critique the ideologies inscribed in the forms of structuring principles behind the presentation of images in curriculum materials” (p. 87).

When Human Relations manages to move beyond the mere sensitizing of teachers and students, and focuses on changing their attitudes, such a philosophy in action often implicitly individualizes and psychologizes oppression, decoupling one’s personality from the sociohistorical factors that in fact shape human subjectivities. Instead of examining the inherently ideological and thus political nature of identities and educational practices, and the systemic nature of multicultural tensions, this approach abstracts the historical from the present, the institutional from the personal, and thus, the social from the psychological. It deals with discrimination as if it were the product of ignorance or personal acts of mean-spiritedness, rather than the result of socially sanctioned practices and institutions. Cameron McCarthy (1993) observes: “Within these frameworks, school reform and reform in race relations depend almost exclusively on the reversal of values, attitudes, and the human nature of social actors understood as ‘individuals’” (p. 293).

Trapped by the inherent myopia of this paradigm, it is no wonder that there is little to no call for an in-depth transformation of the ways in which society and public education have been organized. If discrimination can be reduced to the level of personal attitudes, disconnected from the cultural institutions and everyday practices that have in fact shaped those personality traits, then there is no need to question reality beyond an individual’s consciousness and actions.

Within the Human Relations model of multicultural education, those who discriminate or abuse particular students are said to be “ignorant.” The use of the term “ignorance,” by apologists who are looking for excuses for particular forms of individual behavior, actually conjures up images of a lack of experience, as if a person simply doesn’t know any better. However, the experience of ignorance is not empty of content. On the contrary, it is full of information that is worked deeply into the fabric and texture of identity. Such experience not only distorts social reality, but it also deskills people from understanding what guides their thoughts and feelings.<sup>5</sup>

Psychologizing the world also manages to create an individualized and relativistic understanding of difference, which has the tendency to lead to a color-blindness mentality that disarticulates students’ identities in the classroom from the diverse social realities of the everyday. When educators attempt to look at students

all in the same way, as well-intentioned as this may be, the lack of acknowledging and engaging the ideological markers of difference, especially within a project of social change, has negative consequences (Nieto, 1992). That is, teachers can't value all students if they deny any engagement with their different life experiences, especially those related to and shaped by homophobia, ableism, sexism, classism, and racism. Unfortunately, the Human Relations philosophy of empty humanism and benign pluralism obfuscates the reality that difference exists within historically determined asymmetries of power in which some identities are valued and encouraged, while others are disparaged and discouraged. Responsible educators working toward more democratic structures and social justice can't simply hide behind what appears to be an objective and just way of interacting with all students in the very same ways.

One of the major obstacles of critical transformative education in the United States is that theory of any kind is often devalued among educators. Such ambivalence is not surprising when it comes to schooling considering the fact that most educational theory has been removed from everyday practice and left in the hands of academic "experts" who have little contact with the actual classroom dynamic. Furthermore, theories of learning and teaching are often uncritically passed down to future teachers to inform more efficient ways that students can assimilate basic skills.

This divorce of theory and practice is reflected in a system of public primary and secondary schooling that continues to be inundated with the practical: pre-packaged methods, teacher-proof materials, and standardized evaluation. Within these rigid and disempowering pedagogical conditions, educators generally have no opportunity to develop an understanding of the historical specificities and pre-suppositions that inform such practices (Bartolomé, 1994), let alone those that inform the larger social order.

Advocates of the Human Relations approach to multicultural education actually work against the possibility of understanding and creating social theory. Psychologizing people's behavior—collapsing the world into the realm of the individual, at the expense of recognizing the sociohistorical construction of the psyche—makes it virtually impossible to interpret, critique, and draw generalizations about what socially takes place around and within people. Educators who exclusively embrace the individualization of life thus run the risk of crippling the possibilities for theorizing what it means to be associated with a particular group or shared experience.

The basic theoretical underpinning of Human Relations is that educators need to be more sensitive and affirming. The inherent problem with this conceptual approach, in practice, is that striving solely for sensitivity and a safe environment creates a paradigm of interaction that is based on the idea of good relations and not necessarily on consciousness, social critique, and action. In most cases, the

formation of a comfort zone does not allow for critical interrogation of ideas and assumptions. This not only puts some serious constraints on the role of critical dialogue, but such a model allows discriminatory values, beliefs, and actions to go uncontested. Multicultural education is thus reduced to the nice, neat, and sweet of food and fun. As Ana Maria Villegas (1988) states, “Culturally sensitive remedies to the educational problems of oppressed minority students that ignore the political aspect of schooling are doomed to failure. Worse still, they give the illusion of progress while perpetuating the academic problem, and by extension, the social inequalities they mask” (p. 263).

Perhaps creating comfort zones is a strategy to keep peoples’ eyes and ears open to the issues being discussed; however, if education never moves into the unknown and the uncomfortable, and silenced voices are never heard from, then oppressive institutions and identities remain virtually unchallenged. It is crucial that multiculturalism gets beyond the politeness muzzle of solely affirming diversity, which discourages individuals from intellectually rigorous discussions. This is not intended to be an argument against acknowledging where people come from, being sensitive to the plight of others, or creating a safe environment to dialogue. Rather, it’s simply a contention that without critical engagement, sensitivity alone can not adequately address what needs to be changed in schools and society.

Educators need to create a space that allows for a more critical and democratic exchange of ideas in which everyone’s location, experiences, and perceptions in their private and public lives become the point of departure for dialogue and a text for debate. In examining the social construction of knowledge, values, and interaction across difference, the idea is not for the process to be abusive by silencing participants or placing their identities on trial. Rather, the process is to be unsettling only to the degree that it forces all of those involved to recognize and challenge their role in accepting and perpetuating oppression of any kind. By not confronting the sources of stereotypes, and by hiding behind superficial, positive portrayals of all groups, Human Relations works to create and perpetuate what Macedo (1994) refers to as “the social construction of not seeing” and “complicity through denial”—both of which contribute to cultural reproduction of the status quo.

### **Critiquing and Appropriating from Single-Group Studies**

In theory, Single-Group Studies has a good deal in common with Critical Multicultural Education. These two approaches embrace a schoolwide discussion of the group’s contributions and struggles in society. Perhaps the strongest connection between the two camps is the mutual recognition of, and engagement with, the

ideological and thus inherently political nature of schooling. This entails questioning bodies of knowledge and providing alternative perspectives and counter-discourses—languages of critique and demystification capable of contesting oppressive beliefs and practices. Such interaction is intended to rupture stereotypes, myths, and social inequities.

Single-Group Studies and Critical Multicultural Education also call for the development of political awareness among classroom participants, which necessitates constant engagement with history, as well as with teachers' and students' existential realities, in ways that develop the kinds of cultural analyses and personal connections that are fundamental to transformative education. Unfortunately, instead of having students explicitly link their actual lives to the legacy of discrimination being explored in the classroom, Single-Group Studies, in practice, has a tendency to deal with oppression as disconnected from the here and now. Even worse, as noted by Sleeter and Grant (1988), a softer form of this model often turns into “the four Fs: fairs, festivals, food, and folk tales” (p. 121). Generally collapsed into one course, such an approach to diversity and discrimination frequently consists of simply adding on to the existing curriculum, instead of achieving the ostensible goal of challenging and changing the entire educational process.

One of the major flaws of Single-Group Studies—a common problem among all mainstream models of multicultural education—is that it has a tendency to essentialize and thus objectify and stereotype identities. Essentialism ascribes a fundamental nature or a biological determinism to humans through attitudes about experience, knowledge, and cognitive development. From a monolithic and homogenizing point of view, the category of gender, for example, appears as a gross generalization and single-cause explanation for individual character and behavior. As such, this model is inclined to ignore intragroup differences across social class, health, race, religion, sexuality, and so forth. Pointing out the limitations of such a reductionistic propensity, Sleeter and Grant (1988) observe, “Specifically, ethnic studies often focus on the males of a given ethnic group; labor studies often focus on the working-class males; and women’s studies often focus on white, middle-class women” (p. 129). It is as if the multiple forms of diversity—the complex and interconnecting relationships that speak to a more dialectical understanding of the politics of difference—exist in isolation from each other.

An additional recurring problem with a pedagogy based on identity politics is that experience is often left at the level of description, that is, storytelling is welcomed at the expense of theoretical analysis. Such an atheoretical posture gives the erroneous perception that subject position (the place that a person occupies within a set of social relationships, often determined by gender, class, race, language, sexual orientation, religion, age, and ability) leads to presence of mind. In other words, when a subordinated person shares experiences of discrimination, this narration, in and of itself, would necessarily bring about the

intra- and interpersonal political awareness to understand such oppressive acts. McLaren (1995) warns of this very pitfall:

Either a person's physical proximity to the oppressed or their own location as an oppressed person is supposed to offer a special authority from which to speak. . . . Here the political is often reduced only to the personal where theory is dismissed in favor of one's own personal and cultural identity—abstracted from the ideological and discursive complexity of their formation. (p. 125)

The pretense that location predisposes presence of mind is like saying that a patient who is sick, who feels the pain, necessarily understands why the disease exists, how it works, and how to combat it. If subject position ensured consciousness, then the white working class and white women would not be so easily diverted, as they historically have been, by issues of race and sexuality, and would rise up in solidarity with others against their own oppression (Allen, 1994; Baldwin, 1985; DuBois, 1935; Frankenburg, 1993; Hill, 1997; hooks, 1981; McIntyre, 1997; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Roediger, 1991; Wallace, 1990). It is only with exposure to a multitude of competing information, and in dialogue with the disempowered, that all of those opposed to the present social order can work from a position of awareness to one of informed solidarity.<sup>6</sup>

Countering the reductionistic tendency to conflate location and consciousness, Critical Multicultural Education requires the kinds of theoretical analyses and dialogue necessary for explaining why it is that something (a particular experience) occurred in the first place. For educators influenced by Freire's wisdom, it is important to keep in mind that the concept of dialogue is not simply about having a conversation with students and their respective communities. Rather, this type of discursive relationship is meant to facilitate critical interaction that focuses on the kinds of ideological analyses of knowledge and experience that lead to political awareness and action capable of eradicating oppressive practices, institutions, and identities, both in schools and society.

### **Critiquing and Appropriating from Multicultural Education**

Critical pedagogy, like Multicultural Education, recognizes the importance of cultural diversity, alternative life styles, maintaining native cultures, universal human rights, social justice, equal opportunity (in terms of actual outcomes from social institutions), and equal distribution of power among groups. Both models call for teaching diverse traditions and perspectives, questioning stereotypes, learning the cultural codes to function within a variety of settings, recognizing the contributions that all groups have made to society (especially those that have



been traditionally excluded), and encouraging teachers to learn more about their students' experiences and realities. They also embrace learning cooperatively, having high expectations on all classroom participants, nurturing a positive self-concept among students, and developing forms of evaluation that are free of stereotypical language and that reflect a diverse curriculum.

Although Multicultural Education and critical pedagogy, in theory, have a great deal in common, critical educators argue that in practice this is not the case. Similar to Human Relations, Multicultural Education often endeavors to simply affirm diversity and identities through positive images of subordinated groups and does so in a limited fashion by focusing on color coordination (disconnected from issues of ideological differences among people from the same racial/ethnic group), food festivals (in which multicultural education is reduced to having fun), cut-and-paste add-ons to the existing canon, and group-based methodologies (which often essentialize and objectify students by making them fit to the method, rather than the other way around).

Not paying enough attention to structural inequalities and student agency, Multicultural Education, through a superficial pedagogy of inclusion, often becomes a romanticization and celebration of differences, without any interrogation of the power differentials that give rise to exclusive practices, distorted representations of otherness, and social strife. As previously discussed in the critique of Human Relations, the insistence upon solely affirming diversity creates a pedagogical process that is reduced to an empty form of pluralism which largely ignores the workings of power and privilege. Consequently, diversity is not experienced as a politics of cultural criticism and change—a process of engaging all lived experiences for their strengths and weaknesses, nor is it embraced as an ongoing democratic struggle to achieve social justice. When activities in schools are based on fun and superficial exposure to other cultures than that of the dominant group, and artificially cleansed of any analysis of harmful institutional structures, social practices, and identities, there can never be the kinds of edifying conditions that generate presence of mind and social activism among educators and students. Giroux (1994) warns of this radical omission:

In opposition to quaint liberalism, a critical multiculturalism means more than simply acknowledging differences and analyzing stereotypes; more fundamentally, it means understanding, engaging, and transforming the diverse histories, cultural narratives, representations, and institutions that produce racism and other forms of discrimination. (p. 328)

As argued earlier, curricula and pedagogy can either affirm or exclude certain voices and lifestyles. What is worse, in the hands of unreflective teachers, they can demean, deny, or disfigure the lived experience of many people who are

not part of dominant groups. Instead of simply adding elements of diversity to existing classroom content, educators need to recognize that the ways in which conventional subject matter often blatantly ignore or distort the realities of the oppressed is not a mere matter of circumstance or oversight, but rather, they are more often systematic ideological impositions intended to shape public memory along the lines of race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability. Otherwise, educators risk embracing a pedagogy of content addition, which does not question the basic structures of public schooling, nor does it contest the ways in which such institutions are implicated in the politics of difference and domination.

Multicultural educators often mention the importance of not treating lightly such events as black History Month, and that any philosophy of diversity should be interdisciplinary and ever present throughout the curriculum. However, far too often, there is little attempt to point out the oppressive cultural conditions within which the need for such an emphasis evolved. As Darder (1991) states:

Often the dominant culture is able to manipulate alternative and oppositional ideologies in a manner that more readily secures its hegemony. The celebrations of Cinco de Mayo and Martin Luther King's birthday are prime examples of how these initially radical concepts—intended to resist cultural invasion—have been appropriated in such a fashion that they now do little to challenge the real basis of power of the dominant culture. (p. 43)

It is extremely important that teachers and students develop a more critical sense of knowledge, its inextricable link to ideology and power, and the risks of the co-optation of meaning.

When mainstream models of multicultural education do address the politics of the curriculum, it is usually in a limited fashion that superficially points out the problems with Eurocentrism. However, instead of using Eurocentrism to name white supremacy, the term more often than not functions in a relativistic manner to simply quantify and balance out classroom content by focusing on how often a certain world view is or isn't mentioned. This level of critique does not confront and challenge knowledge bases and the construction of identities, but rather, it collapses into the benign idea that educators need to teach all cultures. One seriously debilitating result of this relativistic approach to difference is that white students are effectively taught to disregard the fact that they are also historical and ideological beings that are racialized, gendered, and sexualized. Louis Castenell and William Pinar (1993) maintain that, "The 'Eurocentric' character of the school curriculum functions not only to deny 'role models' to non-European American students, but to deny self-understanding to 'white' students as well" (p. 5). With this in mind, any model of multicultural education based on

a pedagogy of inclusion that simply functions to raise self-esteem is not only working to boost the confidence of stigmatized students, but also to celebrate the development of oppressive identities.

Rather than merely filling in the blanks of the existing Eurocentric curriculum with superficial elements of diversity, educators need to encourage, among all students, a great deal of self-reflection and self-actualization. This, in part, entails a discussion about content omissions and structured silences, as well as why history has been written in certain ways. It is important to recognize that the call to critically examine existing curricula is not a demand to throw the baby out with the bath water, so to speak. That is, “We need not necessarily indiscriminately abandon the traditions of Western civilization; instead, we need to engage the strengths and weaknesses of such a complex and contradictory tradition as part of a wider effort to deepen the discourse of critical democracy and responsible citizenship” (Giroux, 1992, p. 105).

It is not only what teachers teach that is important but how they teach. Educators can have very progressive content but an authoritarian style of interaction that excludes the perspectives of students. Regardless of intention, this style represents a pedagogy of imposition rather than exposition. By including all voices in the classroom, and having theory work through students, rather than on them, teachers move away from the traditional relational restraints—that is, the limits of the relation of knowledge imparter to passive recipients. Real dialogue, which demands critical reflection, debate, and negotiation, affords the necessary conditions for everyone, especially students, to act as knowers, learners, and teachers, and to reach beyond their own cultural boundaries. It is extremely important for teachers to also participate as learners if they hope to truly discover who their students are, what they need, and how best to accommodate or demystify those needs.

Unfortunately, instead of tapping learners as rich sources of information and guidance, the majority of curricula activities within uncritical approaches to multicultural education attempt to affirm diversity by randomly providing such superficial aspects as flag displays, units on particular countries, and food. Educators seem to prefer to use abstract objects and practices from the outside world, rather than the living breathing cultural entities—the students themselves—as text for exploration and debate. Although affirming aspects of distant cultures is a step in the right direction (as long as it’s not stripped of its actual meaning), without serious consideration of the existential realities of people here in the United States, multicultural education can accomplish very little. A great majority of the people who are perceived as culturally different in schools in the United States have roots elsewhere, but the reality is that many of their cultural characteristics are more the result of local developments than more privileged citizens care to recognize or believe. This points to a central problem with Multicultural Education—and with all

mainstream approaches for that matter: its proponents usually work from an a limited theoretical, ahistorical, and depoliticized understanding of culture.

While the first four models in Sleeter and Grant's (1988) typology readily make use of the word "culture," none of them, even the more progressive approach of Single-Group Studies, offers a comprehensive explanation of the term. Beyond the typical depoliticized, ahistorical, and thus vacuous conception of culture as artifacts, social practices, and traditions, in the critical sense it also embodies the lived experiences and behaviors that are the result of the unequal distribution of power along such lines as race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and ability (Fanon, 1952; Foucault, 1972; Marx, 1859; Spivak, 1987; Williams, 1958). Therefore, culture is perceived as being shaped by the lived experiences and institutional forms organized around diverse elements of struggle and domination. Critical multiculturalists argue that as people interact with existing institutions and social practices in which the values, beliefs, bodies of knowledge, styles of communication, and biases of the dominant culture are imposed, they are often stripped of their power to articulate and realize, or are forced to rearticulate, their own goals. From this perspective, cultures in the United States develop in relation to (whether it's actual human contact or through institutionalized norms) and not in abstraction from each other.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, many educators who are actively engaged in current multicultural practices reduce the idea of culture to national origin. This assumption not only boils down the myriad of identities within a nation to one homogenized image, but it also fragments groups of people with borders, pulling culture out of its antagonistic intergroup and transnational relations and institutional formations. It also creates deterministic connections that are fundamentally racist. For example, talking about Nigeria to a young black man, born and raised in the Bronx, often removes the classroom from the immediacy of the lived experiences of the learner. Such an exercise risks implying that there is some genetic link between the student and a faraway land.

Hopefully, Critical Multicultural Education will lead to a recognition of the community learning patterns and world views that youth(s) bring to school with them. As Joyce King (1994) states, "Teachers need sufficient in-depth understanding of their students' background to select and incorporate into the education process those forms of cultural knowledge and competence that facilitate meaningful, transformative learning" (p. 42).

The reduction of culture to the idea of nation has also led to a trend in mainstream discussions of multiculturalism to talk about immigrant experiences. Although an understanding needs to develop about students who have recently endured cultural and geographical transitions, such an effort should not conceal the reality that many of the students that are not academically succeeding in public schools have been in the United States for generations—African

Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, Chicano/as, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, and so on. Rather than being the byproduct of immigration, such groups are the victims of enslavement, genocide, colonization, and conquest.

Understanding immigration is important; however, it is imperative that educators problematize their understanding of this phenomenon. Contrary to researcher John Ogbu's (1987) idea of "voluntary immigrants," most groups do not come to the United States by choice. In fact U.S. foreign policy in places like Latin America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean has led to mass destruction and chaos, forcing people away from their homes (Bhabha, 1994; Chomsky, 1993; Gilroy, 1993; Said, 1993). Teachers need to develop a more profound awareness as to why people make their way to the United States. Educators need to move beyond the anti-multicultural, conservative ideology that claims that "you immigrants came to our house for dinner and now you want to decide what's on the menu."

Although Multicultural Education, in theory, is intended to encompass issues of race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality, often this approach reduces culture to unelaborated inclusions of race and ethnicity, at the exclusion of all other markers of identity. As such, it neglects to engage how these multiple and interconnecting relationships that define a politics of identity and difference shape the cultural realities of everyday life. For example, capitalism and social class are often not considered significant issues when dealing with raising consciousness about multiculturalism. In fact, they are generally not understood as culturally formative entities. Consequently, economic exploitation and the concomitant social antagonisms and cultural values, beliefs, languages, and world views that are shaped by class relations are rendered invisible, as are the ways in which schools act as socializing agencies for capitalist logic and as sorting machines for a hierarchically divided labor force (Anyon, 1980; Aronowitz, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Saltman, 2000; Willis, 1977).

The ways in which culture is produced through the media are also overlooked by most models of multicultural education. From a critical perspective, pedagogy—that is, how, and in what context, people learn what they learn—does not simply take place in schools. The electronic media (for example, television news, movies, and music) not only serve up information, but they also shape human perceptions. These media are not simply expressive or reflective, they are also formative in that they can influence how people see themselves and others. What inevitably becomes a struggle over identity and representation (that is, over who has the power to articulate experience, fashion identities, define the nature of problems, and legitimate solutions) contributes to shaping the sociocultural relations of everyday life—how people look at, feel about, fear, and interact with one another and how they perceive themselves.

As popular culture has a tendency to produce and maintain stereotypes and

destructive identities, Critical multiculturalists argue that there is a serious need in public education to have students develop critical media literacy, so as to be able to deconstruct the ideologies embedded in the images that they are constantly subjected to and protect themselves against, and rewrite, any harmful messages (Durham & Kellner, 2001; Dyer, 1993; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1996; Hall, 1997; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Jhally, 1991; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Said, 1993; Strinati, 1995). By investigating the historical situatedness of particular forms of representation, and how such images are constructed and for whom, the class participants can examine and extend their understanding of the ways in which multimedia can work toward both a liberatory self and collective definition, and toward distorting perceptions of social reality that can act maliciously as agents of containment and cultural reproduction. Thus, students develop the ability to recognize and confront their own cultural assumptions, especially those that are the result of the vicarious teachings of popular culture. Embracing critical media literacy, David Sholle and Stan Denski (1994) argue that active classroom participants should be posing such questions as:

What names do the media give as they define the world? What language do they speak as they shape the central concepts of our culture? How does the symbolic system work? And who does it work for? What are the institutional determinants of media messages? Under what constraints do media producers work? How do the prevalent symbolic and institutional systems mesh with other systems? How do they mesh with other such social values as democracy, freedom, equality, culture, progress? (p. 141)

These are the kinds of inquiry that lead to a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical realities that shape peoples' lives—demanding a great deal of self-reflection about the ways in which subjectivities, dreams, and behaviors are ideologically and discursively mobilized.

As previously mentioned, proponents of Multicultural Education and critical pedagogy recognize the social construction of behavioral patterns, literacy practices, bodies of knowledge, language use, and cognitive skills. Advocates of such models demand culturally compatible forms of teaching that build on students' learning styles, and that adjust to their needs and cultural realities. In order to accomplish such goals, there is a concerted effort to diversify the faculty and staff of schools so that they reflect the student body and the public at large. The basic idea is that teachers from marginalized groups could potentially bring a great deal to the school community in terms of providing role models, alternative worldviews, critiques of oppressive practices, and ideas and energy for reworking the system in order to meet the needs and interests of all students.

While the struggle to gain representation of different groups on school faculties and staff is crucial, educators should be weary of the misconception that the mere presence of different people implies presence of mind, or that color coordination ensures ideological diversity. In other words, having Colin Powell, Linda Chavez, and Richard Rodriguez at the table—three extremely conservative public figures—would not represent the interests of a great many racially subordinated people, women, the poor, or gays and lesbians. On the contrary, multicultural education of any kind should not only be interdisciplinary in content, but it should also draw upon the lived experience of people from a diversity of backgrounds and ideologies who cross and engage the multiple and shifting interconnecting relationships that constitute a pedagogy and politics of identity and difference. Multicultural education needs to develop from, and thus reflect, the plethora of communities that make up this country.

As with all other models of education that attempt to work with diversity, Critical Multicultural Education embraces the active participation of parents/caregivers and the public at large in the process of schooling, because, as Sonia Nieto (1992) states:

The research is quite clear on the effectiveness of parent and community involvement: In programs with a strong component of parent involvement, students are consistently better achievers than in otherwise identical programs with less parent involvement. In addition, students in schools that maintain frequent contact with their communities outperform those in other schools. (p. 81)

The problem is that most mainstream multicultural research, literature, and practices fail to define what exactly involvement and community mean. There are multiple, even contradicting, definitions of parent involvement in public education.

While critical multiculturalists support the idea of being sensitive to diverse needs and perceptions of parents and caregivers, they also call for a more profound relationship between families and schools, one that moves beyond parent/teacher conferences, bake sales, and extra curricular activities such as sports. They believe that there should be shared responsibility and decision-making power in the conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation of school change. This collaboration (not competition) is intended to be based on respect for parents'/caregivers' insights about their children and the educational process. Critical models of school/community collaboration work to move away from the reality that parent involvement policies and opportunities are usually controlled by very particular contingencies in the schools that neglect to solicit decision-making input from the individuals and groups that they claim to serve.

Unfortunately, far too often the rhetoric of parent/community involvement in mainstream practices of power sharing reduces concrete engagements of

deliberation and action to mere lip service. In their research, Marianne Bloch and Robert Tabachnick (1994) argue:

The rhetoric and the reality of parent involvement, despite the good intentions of actors and participants in such programs, appear to us to be symbolic reform. The concept of parent involvement, as currently used in the schools we've examined, is an "educational quick fix" that is constrained by economic, ideological, and social relationships of power as well as perceptions of unequal expertise. (p. 289)

Consequently, many efforts to democratize schools do not go beyond the inclusion of a few token parents. Dale Snauwaert (1993) warns "that the so-called community empowerment approaches to school restructuring and school-based management are also designed primarily to increase efficiency rather than to empower the community" (p. 95).

The critical problem with most mainstream efforts to create a school/public partnership is that parental involvement is often not recognized as being determined within specific and unequal relations of power and cultural capital. However, the reality is that attempts at such coalitions are "often based on a mainstream, middle-class model that assumes that parents have particular outlooks, resources, and time frames available for schoolwork" (Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins, 1997, p. 202). The constraints of discrimination along the lines of social class (which includes employment prestige), language, gender, race, and so forth, that act as boundaries between school personnel and parents, dramatically affect the ways in which people are actually able to participate in the educational process. Referring to broader political struggles in society, Nancy Fraser (1994) adds, "Discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality. These functioned informally to marginalize women and members of the plebeian classes and to prevent them from participating as peers" (p. 81). Taking into consideration these subtle forms of exclusion, let alone more overt manifestations of cultural devaluation, indigence, and disrespect, it should come as no surprise that low income people, persons with disabilities, religions other than Christianity, gays and lesbians, and racially subordinated families are rarely found on school boards or at PTA/PTO meetings.

Refusing to acknowledge that society unjustly values certain cultures and languages over others only serves to reproduce the very same hierarchy of power and exclusion in the guise of participation. In the best interest of democratic deliberations, Fraser (1994) argues that we can't simply set aside inequalities of status, as if we are all on the same playing field—what she refers to as "a space of zero-degree



culture” (p. 82). Such discrepancies need to be acknowledged, and the exclusionary practices dismantled.

### **Concluding Comments**

It would be impossible to capture the diversity of perspectives and issues that are part and parcel of a critical multicultural philosophy of education, especially since there is no universal theory of critical pedagogy. However, this chapter is intended to help people jump on board the debates over diversity and democracy. Educators are encouraged to realize that any uncritical approaches to multicultural education can invite surface reforms, but merely recognizing differences among people, and ignoring such related problems as racism, social justice, and power as a broader set of political and pedagogical concerns, will not lead to a transformation of the exclusionary structural and ideological patterns of any unjust society.

Critical Multicultural Education is enormously important for developing theoretical frameworks that historically and socially situate the deeply embedded roots of racism, discrimination, violence, and disempowerment. Rather than perpetuating the assumption that such realities are inevitable, avoidable, or easily dissolvable, this philosophy of education invites everyone, especially teachers and students, across all disciplines and spaces, to further explore and act upon the relationship between these larger historic, economic, and social constructs and their inextricable connection to ideology, power, and identity. In this way, people can engage in real praxis, and develop, as they interact with one another, their own possibilities for the future.

### **Taking a Look at the Research Findings**

In order to examine the developmental efforts of the Changeton Central Steering Committee, the basic theoretical foundation of what has been described in this chapter as Critical Multiculturalism will be used. The interpretation and discussion sections will first summarize what the CSC accomplished and then compare and contrast these efforts to mainstream and critical models of multicultural education. The investigations of Chapters Five through Nine will consider whether or not the CSC’s conceptualization of multicultural education (in its Mission Statement; its efforts at professional, pedagogical, and curriculum development; and its attempts to diversify the staff and to create a partnership with the community) takes into consideration issues of power and ideology.<sup>8</sup>