Resistance and Possibilities Within Teacher Education

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Contemporary multiculturalism in higher education emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. It was a result of uprisings against colonial regimes globally and activism for civil rights in the United States when the effects of racism and economic dependency were identified as central political reasons for emancipatory social action by historically marginalized and oppressed groups. From this cauldron of international movements for fundamental civil rights, multicultural education as a reform movement materialized. The struggle to incorporate multicultural perspectives into the higher education curriculum, including teacher education, was met with stiff resistance from Eurocentric privileging of access and knowledge. The fight for academic studies with explicit counter-hegemonic content such as Black, Chicano, and Indigenous studies paved the way for eventual calls for inclusion of multiculturalism in higher education.

Despite these initial inroads, what appears to take place in higher education today generally reflects normative sentiments of the nation-state as a monocultural, equal-opportunity entity for all individuals, whereas group identity discrimination is viewed as an aberration rather than a structural practice. Hierarchical group rankings along the lines of race, gender, and religion, however, "are both worldwide and local, and … have enormous consequences in the lives of people and in the operation of the capitalist world-economy" that result in local nationalized interpretations as to "who would be considered 'true' nationals" (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 39). Hence, consistently denied by monocultural nationalists are pervasive racialized "societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races" (Bonilla-Silva, 2005, p. 11).

Since World War II the United States, along with the United Kingdom, has exported an educational model based on universalistic meritocratic assumptions that mask the realities of a political economy of racialized hierarchies globally. This imperial model ignores the demoralizing poverty perpetuated through the political role of international monetary organizations that negatively affect life opportunities for millions, including access to even elementary education in a political environment where tax bases for public services are sacrificed to prop

up finance capital for the upper classes (Foster, 2007; Wroughton, 2008). Correspondingly, access to higher education internationally in the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed an affirmative action rise and a corresponding twenty-first century retreat for historically subordinated people. Even where equitable access to higher education is a stated goal for a nation like Brazil, inadequate secondary education has limited the success of traditionally subordinated populations (Canen, 2005). Tomasevski (2003) explained that globally,

the laissez-faire regime for universities has led to private universities being operated as commercial companies whose shares are quoted on stock exchanges .... A blend of deregulation and privatization has created fertile ground for the mushrooming of private universities. The cost has been removed from the public to the private realm, to individual students, to their families and to corporate sponsorship.

(p. 115)

Furthermore, as demand for higher education increased internationally, public expenditures have declined relative to public funding (Gordon, 2007). Hence, as education entered international trade law as a commodity in the 1990s, access to higher education by low-income and poor students significantly decreased (Tomasevski, 2003).

Because the state—and hence public primary, secondary, and higher education depends on significant revenues from corporate capitalism, state institutions behave accordingly through selections and exclusions, including ideological orientations, that can in turn service capital. This dependency on capital filters into universities and public schools through rules and regulations that influence and often set educational expectations that can be contrary to multiculturalism. In this climate, Mahalingam and McCarthy (2000) warn about "the need to rescue the best intuitions in multiculturalism from a full-scale corruption and incorporation by the interests of global capitalism" (p. 6).

Placed within this international political and economic environment, this chapter uses teacher education as a key example of the contested nature of multiculturalism in higher education. First, an overview is presented of the disjunctive nature of teacher education programs that claim a vision of multiculturalism yet evidence practices absent of a critical perspective. Next examined for their effect on multiculturalism are higher education accreditation standards to which teacher education programs in the United States are expected to demonstrate an adherence. This analysis of accreditation standards focuses on the problematic construction of multicultural and social justice discourse. Following this is a case study of the response and resistance of a local state government and its teacher education institutions within the U.S. state of Washington to efforts to incorporate critical multiculturalism into their programs for preservice teachers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of promising critical multicultural perspectives and practices in teacher education.

# Locating the Critical in Multicultural Teacher Education

Today, multicultural education in higher education is explicitly located within academic studies orientated toward prospective and current primary and secondary school teachers. As an interdisciplinary field of study, multicultural education draws from such disciplines as sociology, history, legal studies, economics, political science, social philosophy, social psychology, and communications studies. Within teacher preparation programs, multicultural education is often located programmatically under the umbrella of the social foundations of education and marginally, if at all, infused across the curriculum.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the growing consensus among internationally recognized multicultural scholars (see Vavrus, 2002, pp. 2-6) was for an emancipatory conception of multicultural education as the best possibility to transform social relations and institutions in order to overcome discriminatory schooling and societal conditions. Sleeter and Bernal (2004) highlight how drawing from critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and antiracist education, a critical multiculturalism can "steer the course of transforming education more strongly" (p. 252). Yet, as Sleeter and Bernal aptly observe, this theoretical consensus for a critical multiculturalism should not be confused with actual higher education practices.

In effect, the response has generally been tepid to multicultural incorporation into teacher education programs. Overall, for the past 40 years teacher education in the United States has successfully managed multicultural expressions and commitments so that individualistic psychological and technical orientations remain the central curricular focus of these programs. In a comprehensive review of higher education programs, Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) poignantly observe:

Although a 'new multicultural teacher education' may indeed be envisioned as the way to meet the needs of students and families in the real world, it is far removed from the demands and traditions of another real world: the institutional reality of colleges and universities, which supports and maintains the status quo.

(p. 954)

Isolated praiseworthy programmatic and individual faculty efforts aside, the tendency in teacher education is to exclude social, economic, and political factors that affect student learning: "many of the fundamental assumptions about the purposes of schooling and the meritocratic nature of American society that have long been implicitly in teacher education remain unchallenged and undermined by the other aspects of preparation" (p. 964). Faculty and programs who make multicultural commitments face a double bind in that this status quo orientation spills over even more dramatically from higher education to primary and secondary government-supported schools, the public spaces in which their graduates work.

This disjunctive condition between critical multicultural advocacy and higher education's too-often status quo position should not be entirely surprising. The roots of critical multiculturalism developed from the ways in which critical theory "problematizes the structures of history that embody who we are and have become" (Popkewitz, 1999, p. 3). Embedded within this critical perspective is the development of a critical consciousness cognizant of unjust social systems that can lead to a sense of agency where mainstream conditions are perceived as capable of being transformed (Freire, 1970). Clearly, critical multiculturalism can strike at the heart of hegemonic positions both inside and outside of higher education and faces, therefore, waves of opposition.

#### Higher Education Accreditation Standards

In the United States, higher education state and national accreditation standards serve to set multicultural and "diversity" expectations and parameters along with a normative climate for teacher education. The following sections examine from a critical multicultural perspective the accreditation standards of the influential National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) that determine "which schools, colleges, and departments of education meet rigorous national standards in preparing teachers and other school specialists for the classroom" (NCATE, 2008c). As of 2006, NCATE had accredited 632 institutions with another 100 colleges and universities in the process of seeking governmental approval for their teacher education programs (NCATE, 2006). Following this is a case study of a state of Washington effort to create a critical, performance-based pedagogical assessment instrument for preservice teachers in its 21 higher education institutions. Revealed in analyses of both of these cases is a resistance to naming a "master narrative" (Huggins, 1991) that demands institutional incorporation of a history of European colonialism, white supremacy, and the implications of this history for the schooling and eventual economic and political opportunities for historically marginalized populations.

## NCATE's Vague Multicultural Advocacy

By the use of the term *diversity* in the absence of any mention of *multicultural*, turn-of-the-century NCATE (2001) standards advanced an assimilationist assessment ideology upon state-level accrediting requirements that drive higher education teacher education practices. A critique of those standards and accompanying assessment rubrics revealed an absence of transformative knowledge grounded in historical foundations of white privilege, property rights, and color blindness (Vavrus, 2002). Seven years later NCATE (2008b) tinkered with diversity expectations that remain in effect until 2015.

#### Multicultural and Global Perspectives

Just one use of the term multicultural is found in the primary text of current NCATE higher education accreditation standards (2008b) by mentioning the

importance of "educators who can reflect *multicultural* and *global perspectives* that draw on the histories, experiences, and representations of students and families from diverse populations" (emphasis added) (p. 36). NCATE's glossary defines a "multicultural perspective" as "an understanding of the social, political, economic, academic, and historical constructs of ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area" (p. 87). The glossary definition is the one place where higher education could be held to a critical perspective. Yet, given the master narrative that surrounds these named historical constructs and the ways in which they continue to be conservatively expressed across the vast majority of preparation programs, the flat language of this NCATE definition does not find its way into rubric assessments that are intended to determine if higher education institutional practices are acceptable. Unacknowledged in this NCATE goal is how the political economy of white supremacy, patriarchy, and class disparities directly impact "students and families from diverse populations."

Compounding these problems is NCATE's (2008b) definition of "global perspective" as "an understanding of the interdependency of nations and peoples and the political, economic, ecological, and social concepts and values that affect lives within and across national boundaries ... for the exploration of multiple perspectives on events and issues" (p. 87). Mainstream higher education multiculturalism with a NCATE human relations global perspective masks the interlocking elements of discrimination against marginalized populations, profit accruement on the backs of such groups, the prioritizing of military expenditures, and the decline of public funds for schools (Vavrus, 2002). Absent is any hint of the role that state-supported corporate globalization backed by the threat of military force and economic sanctions plays out in the twenty-first century to further dispossess millions of people throughout the world. Conducted under a hegemonic guise of protecting and expanding "free trade" and "democracy," corporate globalization negatively affects the availability of public goods and services. Inescapable are the negative effects of a decline in public resources for non-military expenditures that could be available for fundamental human needs, including public education opportunities (see, for example, Tabb, 2001).

## Global Solidarity Alternative

Although generally deemed outside the higher education of teachers, a critical multicultural approach of global solidarity for emancipation of oppressed populations can offer higher education pragmatic insights into what it might actually mean to meet NCATE's (2008b) expectation that beginning teachers "demonstrate classroom behaviors that create caring and supportive learning environments" by being able to "communicate with students and families in ways that demonstrate sensitivity to cultural and gender differences [and] develop a classroom and school climate that values diversity" (pp. 20, 34). An emphasis on global solidarity for emancipation can help teacher education make important connections between globally oppressed peoples and domestic

disenfranchised populations, the families and communities from which increasing numbers of school-age children and youth come. The seriousness for a recognition by higher education institutions about the importance of global solidarity cannot be overemphasized where, for example, in the United States alone "children living in poverty increased by 15% between 2000 and 2007" (Fass & Cauthen, 2008, ¶1) and 39% of all children live in either low-income or poor families (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008).

#### "[L]inguistic diversity"

NCATE (2008a) announced that it added "linguistic diversity to the rubrics" (¶7). NCATE's ahistorical approach to "linguistic diversity," however, fails to help higher education institutions to (a) incorporate a critique of the imperialistic determination of a nation-state's acceptable languages and (b) consider the origins of contemporary "English-only" movements in the United States by monocultural, anti-immigration groups (cf. Bartolomé; Kubota, this volume). Critical multicultural education, in contrast, posits the importance for teachers to see their work within a historical context of exclusionary practices of schooling that are naturalized and privileged in everyday discourse of the nation-state.

# "[P] otential impact of discrimination"

To its diversity standard NCATE (2008a) inserted the statement "*Candidates are helped to understand the potential impact of discrimination based on race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and language on students and their learning*" (emphasis in the original) (**9**7). In a settler nation, however, such as the United States, that openly defined itself on a political economy of white male supremacy, discriminatory effects continue to be experienced—not just as a "*potential impact*," as NCATE phrases it—by various historically subordinated groups. It is an important step, though, for NCATE to have named commonly recognized categories of oppression. Nevertheless, NCATE refuses to go further to guide higher education to *explicitly* incorporate into their discourse the historical legacy of how these exclusionary practices and polices were aimed at specifically identified populations by those in economical and politically privileged positions, and how this is manifested in contemporary schools and society.

## Culture Abstracted from Social Justice

Under NCATE (2008b) standards, colleges and universities are expected to default to teacher dispositions articulated by the 50-state leadership of the Council of Chief State School Officers (1992) nearly two decades ago in the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards. In these standards, INTASC (1992) employs a conservative, human relations multiculturalism—equivalent to liberal or benevolent multiculturalism—through abstracted references to "cultural sensitivity," "cultural norms," "cultural differences," and "human diversity" (pp. 14-15, 21-22). Framing diversity

in these ways results in many teacher education programs embracing a cultureof-poverty ideology that avoids critiques of the *formation* of classes under a capitalist economy (Vavrus, 2008).

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INTASC standards, disconnected from social justice, apparently continue to "represent a shared view among the states and within the profession of what constitutes competent beginning teaching" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, ¶2). An analysis of INTASC and NCATE 2001 standards, taken together, concluded:

Rather than a voice of multicultural authenticity, NCATE and INTASC multicultural indeterminacy is most likely a compromise among those nationally involved with managing professional teacher education. This condition reflects various political interpretations and positions on the actual existence, importance, and appropriateness in contesting potential racist exclusionary practices.

(Vavrus, 2002, p. 55)

This conclusion continues to hold with NCATE's newest standards for higher education, despite NCATE's best intentions with its ambivalent social justice assertion (see NCATE, 2007).

# White Privilege and Resistance to Critical Multiculturalism

In the late 1990s, the 21 higher education institutions in the U.S. state of Washington successfully lobbied the state legislature to drop a testing requirement on pedagogy in lieu of a performance-based student teaching internship evaluation system that would be used uniformly across all institutions. Although by 2004 the final document did make significant strides to broaden expectations for multicultural inclusiveness (see Office of the Superintendent, 2004), certain critical multicultural language was intentionally excluded by means of political pressure.

Resistance existed among various legislators and the state superintendent of public education. In 2002, conservative state legislators, along with the state's Business Roundtable, placed pressure upon the state superintendent of public education to withdraw an introductory conceptual framework to the student teaching internship evaluation instrument. Specific concerns centered on the inclusion in the introduction of a section titled "White Privilege and Color Blindness." This section originally included the statement "Teacher candidates represent an outdated dominant cultural model when their K-12 students are primarily engaged in traditional Eurocentric, white privileged learning materials and instructional activities." This critical multicultural discourse that critiqued white privilege, color blindness, and related concepts was removed by the state (Vavrus, 2003).

Another source of resistance to a critical multicultural incorporation came from those teacher educators who viewed certain disciplines as color blind and

outside the purview of multicultural education. This included faculty from the natural sciences and special education, the former a field disproportionately white that perceives itself color blind and outside of history and politics, while the latter is disproportionately filled with children of color and those from low-income families. Large universities faced opposition in efforts to orient legions of adjunct supervisors to new multicultural perspectives. A smaller number of teacher educators claimed that the inclusion of a critical multicultural perspective acknowledging a racialized, hierarchical society was "political" and, therefore, represented a "social agenda" that should be excluded from the assessment of teacher candidates in their full-time internships (Vavrus, 2003). Resistance continues to originate from higher education faculty who prefer a minimalist assessment instrument that can eliminate multicultural pressures (S. Walton, personal communication, March 31, 2009).

This case study of 21 colleges and universities working in collaboration with the state can help explain that *resistance to critical multicultural perspectives* stems from the following proposition: A significant number of people in higher education positions of institutional leadership, especially those who are white, consider themselves color blind and politically neutral and, therefore, see as irrelevant issues of race and racism. This hypothesis then leads to the following *ideological sources* that appear to underscore higher education resistance:

- Racism is a historical artifact that is only manifested through aberrant individual behaviors, rather than a regular experience for many children and youth of color.
- Schools and classroom are sites of fairness, not of institutional racism.
- Eurocentric curricula offer superior academic experiences.
- Academic achievement is independent of lived histories, even for those who experience forms of subordination through racism, classism, and sexism.
- Students of color and poor whites come to schools with knowledge deficits and lack the competence to succeed academically.
- The source of student academic failure rests with the family and community, not the learning environment of the school and a teacher's disposition toward social justice (Vavrus, 2003).

These ideological assumptions held by many educational leaders have also had the following *effects*: Significant numbers of higher education faculty—including those in teacher education—avoid multiculturalism because the subject of race creates discomfort for them and because they lack a critical multicultural knowledge base. Hence, teachers who graduate from these higher education programs tend to defer to a color-blind belief system that is a common discourse in their public school workplaces (Vavrus, 2003). Likewise, Pollock (2008) observed through her work for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, "Educators who resisted claims that their own everyday practices

and interactions in schools and districts were harmful to students of color routinely dismissed students' and parents' experiences of unequal opportunity as too small to count as discrimination" (p. 138).

# Promising Critical Multicultural Perspectives and Practices

Sleeter and Bernal (2004) note that critical multicultural education "tends to emphasize, more than the other fields, individual agency and institutional practices by highlighting what teachers can do" (p. 253). Sleeter and Bernal, however, confront the nexus of this theory–practice dilemma: "Since practice is often uninformed by complex understanding of oppression, culture, and power, one might ask if it is truly possible to use oppositional discourses in mainstream schools" (p. 254). In the context of the above-outlined U.S. accreditation-driven cases of National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and the state of Washington, Sleeter and Bernal identify a significant challenge for critical multiculturalism to transform higher education practices.

As a pragmatic starting point, higher education teacher education programs should explicitly and legitimately incorporate studies on race, racism, and antiracism. Critical race theory, which provides a theoretical foundation for these concepts, is a perspective sorely missing in most education programs. Because critical race theory begins with the premise that "racism is normal, not aberrant" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv), critical multiculturalism is well served by incorporating this perspective into pedagogical and institutional approaches. Critical pedagogy, then, can serve to link historical studies of white privilege and property rights with critical race theory that highlights legal foundations of exclusionary practices.

Critical pedagogy offers multicultural education a perspective on teaching and learning that can foreground such concepts as ideology, hegemony, resistance, power, knowledge construction, class, cultural politics, and emancipatory actions. Moreover, critical pedagogy can bring

students to a place they have never been before in higher education: a terrain of discomfort where knowledge is too complex to simply give it out for use on multiple choice tests or convergent questions ... [T]he assumptions teacher candidates bring to the classroom about teaching are challenged, analyzed, and debated.

(Kincheloe, 2005b, pp. 101–102)

This process, however, is marked by complaints from teachers who perceive the discourse of critical pedagogy as inaccessible and difficult to apply in practice (for example, Kehily, 2002).

#### History, Agency, and Teacher Identity Formation

To effectively overcome concerns of inaccessibility, critical multiculturalism must first be built on a historical foundation to counter master narratives that represent

an oppressor's triumphant story of the nation-state. As related to practitioner objections to critical pedagogy, individual teacher education students exposed to critical history can perceive themselves as individuals outside this history. Students who encounter critical histories of white supremacy and sexism, for example, often deflect this information away from their identities in a manner that does not threaten stable status quo notions of themselves. Instead, what is needed is "the ability to historicize, at every moment, the present people and events we encounter individually and collectively" (Bracher, 2006, p. 121). What this suggests is a focus on the kinds of identities teacher candidates are being asked to form and what kind of agency is being sought from such constructed identities.

Each teacher's identity is fluid, situation specific, and historically contingent on power relations that constitute a society's cultural, political, and economic practices. Yet, too many programs take a cookie-cutter approach to stamping out teachers whose identities conform to constricted notions of "professionalism." A challenge for critical multiculturalism is how to help education students develop dispositions based in a critical consciousness so that they can come to see possibilities for resistance and transformative agency. Such an approach can act on Kincheloe's (2005a) observation that "[t]eacher education provides little insight into the forces that shape identity and consciousness" (p. 155).

#### Critical Autoethnographies and Teacher Identity Formation

The use of autobiographies is not new in teacher education. In multicultural education the primary purpose has been to deepen individual understandings of positionality (Vavrus, 2002; cf. Hanley, this volume). The outcome, however, is not always what critical multiculturalists anticipate. An unfocused autobiographical assignment on "diversity," for example, can result in color blindness along with racial inequalities being "rearticulated to maintain [white] privilege rather than disrupt it" (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 329).

Autoethnographies offer a more focused alternative to the autobiography. With an ethnographic approach, identity formation can be linked to social phenomena rather than imagined as historically autonomous from political forces. The autoethnography as "the personal text [serves] as critical intervention in social, political, and cultural life" (Jones, 2005, p. 763) and "reveals concretely realized patterns in one's own actions rather than the actions of others" (Roth, 2005, p. 4). When applied to a teacher's pedagogy, the process of excavating personal history in order to articulate a teacher's identity becomes "a way to put that identity on the line and risk needing to reform and recreate the self while also attempting to transform curricula" (Samaras, Hicks, & Garvey Berger, 2004, p. 915).

To create a *deep* critical pedagogy that supports critical multiculturalism and increases teacher accessibility necessitates "the purposeful incorporation into critical pedagogy social-psychological forces that interact with individual subjectivities in the formation of identities and subsequent behaviors" (Vavrus, 2006b, p. 92). This curricular strategy combines critical texts that education

students interrogate through seminar dialog and related lectures and workshops with autoethnographic narratives. Students are provided specific writing prompts that tie multicultural content to individual lived experiences. This can be done for a variety of multicultural topics, such as issues of race, gender/sexuality, and globalization/alienation. A final writing prompt, regardless of the multicultural topic, can ask teacher candidates to consider how this autoethnographic knowledge that they have revealed to themselves now affects formation of their respective teacher identity. This inevitably can be the most difficult prompt for education students to consider because they have come to realize that they are not outside the history that unfolds in front of them each day and that their identities shape the kind of learning environments and curricular experiences they will create in their primary and secondary public school classrooms. Through autoethnographies written under a critical pedagogy, education students regularly come to understand that they hold the agency to make critical multicultural commitments that can transform classroom practices and the life opportunities of their students (Vavrus, 2006a, 2006b, 2009).

#### **Closing Comment**

A critical multicultural curriculum is the one place in higher education where the dispossessed are no longer marginalized. When historically marginalized children and youth and their families and communities are placed in the center of higher education, a new urgency arises to transform public education so that *all* students can experience equity and hope. Substantial barriers remain to meet this goal, as evidenced from the discourse of master narratives and efforts to manage multicultural expressions. Pedagogical possibilities exist to help education students form identities that can confront the social inequities in our schools. Individual higher education faculty can lead the way, but it will take commitments across institutions for this to bear emancipatory fruit.

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