Multicultural Perspectives

Critical Race Theory, Multicultural Education, and the Hidden Curriculum of Hegemony

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PART I
Advancing the Conversation

Critical Race Theory, Multicultural Education, and the Hidden Curriculum of Hegemony

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Embracing a critical race theory perspective, the researcher argues for a revisiting of the role of the hidden curriculum in education, particularly as it pertains to multicultural education. Using the concept of hegemony as a tool for analysis, the author explicates the ways in which the hidden curriculum enables educational institutions to argue in support of multicultural initiatives while simultaneously suppressing multicultural education's transformative possibilities. Through its failure to appreciate the challenges posed by the hidden curriculum, multicultural education gets appropriated as a "hegemonic device" that secures a continued position of power and leadership for the dominant groups in society. The author calls on those who conduct research on multicultural education to turn their attention to the ways in which the hidden curriculum keeps multicultural education stagnant.

When traveling in Cajamarca, Peru, I met a young boy who wanted to know where I lived. Africa? he asked. No, I replied, the United States. He looked at me quizzically and started laughing. They don't have people like you [a woman of color] there, he responded. His laughter and beliefs reminded me of how thoroughly Whiteness is equated with Americanness. (Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible*)

Despite a tendency to equate "Americanness" with "Whiteness" by individuals both outside and inside the United States, the United States is comprised of many different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. In the year 2000, people of color made up 28% of the population and are projected to become 50% by the year 2050 (Hodgkinson, 2000/2001). Further, the youngest segment of the American population is currently the most diverse. In comparison to the 28% of the total American population that is non-White, 37% of school-age children are non-White and by 2025, predictions indicate that half of all school-age children will be non-White (Hodgkinson, 2000). Despite the deepening ethnic makeup of the United States over the last century, the mainstream curriculum of its schools, colleges, and universities remains organized around concepts, events, and paradigms that reflect the experiences of Anglo Saxon Protestant men (Banks, 2001). Over the last 40 years, however, educators and activists have been challenging that curricular foundation with the goal of reconceptualizing it in a manner more representative of the national population.

Multicultural education has become the common term used to describe the type of pluralist education that its advocates are seeking for all children receiving an education, pre-K through college. Supporters of multicultural education claim that, at the societal level, its major goals are to reduce prejudice and discrimination against oppressed groups, to work toward equal opportunity and social justice for all groups, and to effect an equitable distribution of power among members of different cultural groups (Grant & Sleeter, 2003). Within the field of education, Banks (1993) viewed the primary goal of multicultural education as transforming schools so that

"all students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world" (p. 28). In a comprehensive definition of the field, Sonia Nieto (2000) explained:

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the schools' curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students and families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice. (p. 305)

Yet, despite the sound goals and aims of multicultural education, not to mention its 30-plus year history as a research field, it still finds itself struggling to make a significant and sustained impact on the education received by American youth. Although some significant advances have been made in adding multiethnic content to school textbooks and curriculums, multicultural education remains on the margins rather than at the center of educational philosophy and practice (Banks, 1993). No clear, concise reason for multicultural education's struggles has been set forth, and the inherent complexity of the field makes any singular response untenable.

Overview

In the Summer 1998 issue of *Theory and Research in Social Education*, Pang, Rivera, and Gillette (1998) issued a call to both the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and its associated College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) to

wake up and give a public accounting of where they stand on, and what they are doing to address, the issue of race[ism] and its negative impact on K–12 education and the quality of life in the United States. (p. 431)

Pang et al. asserted that,

Race and racism continue to define issues of life in the United States, but are virtually ignored in current official CUFA work, and sterilized in much of the work of NCSS. This is an anomaly, which must be carefully examined and changed. Social studies education, like all forms of education, is not neutral. Social studies education necessarily incorporates social issues, social criticism, and ef-

forts to improve society. It is a field most directly concerned with such topics as race, racism, and racial inequality, and other issues of social justice like sexism, gender bias, and classism. NCSS has the opportunity and the challenge to improve on its less that sterling record of leadership in the pursuit of social justice. (p. 430)

As a newcomer to both organizations who is deeply concerned with issues of social justice, I felt compelled to take up their call in this article. In doing so, I shed light on my own thinking about the challenges faced specifically by the field of multicultural education and how those challenges are related to, and shaped by, the issue of race. Embracing a critical race theoretical perspective, I argue that the goals of multicultural education will continue to be thwarted in practice until a thorough interrogation of the hidden curriculum in educational institutions is brought to the fore of any research agenda on multicultural education specifically, and, by extension, social studies education in general.

In putting the issue of race squarely in the middle of my analysis of the challenges facing multicultural education, I explore how doing so lends itself to the utilization of Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony as a possible way to retheorize our understanding of the hidden curriculum. Indeed, hegemony can serve as a useful tool of analysis for understanding the ways that the hidden curriculum helps to maintain the dominance of popular mainstream academic knowledge (Banks, 1995). Moreover, as a hegemonic device, the hidden curriculum helps keep current multicultural paradigms functioning in a manner that causes multicultural reforms to be "sucked back into the system," rather than creating "radically new paradigms that ensure justice" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). Ultimately, I end by calling for a research agenda on multicultural education that embraces the theoretical perspectives of critical race theory as a starting point for those who are genuinely interested in addressing the failure of U.S. educational systems to "properly educate the majority of culturally and racially subordinated students" (Lynn, 1999, p. 611).

A Critical Race Theory Perspective on Multicultural Education

Recently, several scholars in the field of education have applied critical race analyses (which come out of legal studies) to education including Ladson-Billings (1998), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Solorzano (1997, 1998), Solorzano and Yosso (2000), and Tate (1997). According to Solorzano and Yosso:

CRT in education is defined as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and

interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of African American and Latino students. CRT asks such questions as: What role do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination? (p. 42)

Indeed, because of the types of questions that arise when critical race theory is brought to bear on education, the current state of multicultural education has recently become a topic for interrogation by critical race theorists. For example, in an exercise to make a parallel analogy between critical race legal theory and traditional civil rights law with that of critical race theory in education and multicultural education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that the multicultural paradigm currently popular in the United States functions in a manner similar to civil rights law in that it is regularly subverted to benefit Whites. Ladson-Billings and Tate asserted that "the current multicultural paradigm (like traditional civil rights law) is mired in liberal ideologies that offers no radical change in the current order" (p. 62). Consequently, they concluded their article by stating that, "as critical race theory scholars we unabashedly reject a [multicultural] paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail" (p. 62).

"Why is it that multicultural initiatives get 'sucked back into the system,' preventing them from offering any substantial changes to the current order?"

Inspired to join these scholars in their thinking about multicultural education from a critical race theory perspective, I want to explore more thoroughly how it is that multicultural education, which seeks to alleviate racial injustice for people of color, ends up subverted to benefit Whites. Why is it that multicultural initiatives get sucked back into the system, preventing them from offering any substantial changes to the current order? Clearly that is not the intent of multicultural educators. Indeed, according to prominent multiculturalists (Banks, 2001, 2002; Gay, 1994, 2000; Nieto, 1999, 2000; Sleeter, 1996, 2003), the ultimate goal of multicultural education is to move us towards the creation of concepts, paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream knowledge, not help keep it in place. "Transformative knowledge," as Banks (1995) labeled it, is undergirded by an acceptance that, "all knowledge

reflects the power and social relationships within society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society" (p. 6). So why has the task of replacing mainstream knowledge with transformative knowledge been such a difficult one for multicultural education?[1]

Essentially, I believe that the difficulty lies in the failure to understand that transformative knowledge is dangerous. It threatens those dominant groups in our society who have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the mainstream academic knowledge that supports the maintenance of dominant structures, long-present inequities, and the current power arrangements in the United States that often serve to subordinate racial minorities. Herein lies the heart of the matter—the intertwining of power and race. The teaching of transformative knowledge poses a serious threat to the dominant power structures operating in American society that privileges Whites over all other racial groups. Thus, as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) noted, the struggle for a critical multiculturalism (as distinguished from other forms)

necessitates the attempt on the part of teachers and other cultural workers to take back power from those educational, political and economic groups who have for far too long been able to shape school policy and curriculum in ways that harm students from low status groups. In a critical multicultural school, students and their family members would study both how power shapes their lives and what they can do to resist its oppressive presence. (p. 28)

Thus advocates of critical multiculturalism believe that the teaching of transformative knowledge empowers traditionally marginalized groups—most often racial minorities. However, the empowering of marginalized groups potentially alters the prevailing power relations. Therefore, it would be irresponsible, if not downright naive, to assume that those threatened by transformative knowledge intend to stand idly by while the system is challenged.

Race, Multicultural Education, and Challenging the Status Quo

In exploring the malleability of the definition of multicultural education, Kincheloe and Steingberg (1997) noted that although one can never be quite sure of what individuals are suggesting when they use the term *multiculturalism*, one might reasonably assume that they are alluding to issues of race, class, gender, or culture. However, they assert that, "in public conversations,

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[1]For a more thorough investigation of transformative knowledge and of the challenges for multicultural education, see Banks (1993, 1995).

multiculturalism is a term used as a code word for race" (p. 1). For educators of color (and their critical White allies), multicultural education is viewed as a major vehicle for improving the quality of education received by children of color.

Once again, were multicultural education ever to achieve its goals of challenging racism and the inequitable treatment of oppressed and marginalized groups, it could potentially serve to challenge the dominate power structure operating in our society—a power structure in which access to resources, social awards, and the power to shape the norms and values of society are afforded to those possessing White skin. Following this line of thought, then, a theoretical analysis utilizing the notion of hegemony is particularly useful in understanding the ways in which multicultural education is prevented from actualizing its goals and becoming a significant threat to that power structure. Indeed, in looking at the relevance of the concept of hegemony for the study of race and ethnicity, Stuart Hall (1986) argued that employing a Gramscian perspective has the potential to rework and transform some of the existing theories and paradigms employed in the analysis of race and racism. In addition, he noted that Gramsci challenges us to rethink the ways that we perceive "the state" as operating in an "exclusive, coercive, dominating, and conspiratorial manner" (p. 26) to maintain its position of power. Instead, Hall argued, its position is maintained through hegemonic strategies in the guise of ideology, negotiation, and education.

Drawing a connection between the "educative" role of the state, its position in the construction of hegemonic strategies, and racist practices, I argue that the hidden curriculum can serve as a hegemonic device for the purposes of securing, for the ruling class (and other dominant groups in society), a continued position of power and leadership.[2] Indeed, Hall (1986) affirmed that within the educational realm, the state does not preserve the superiority of its ruling class through domination or conspiracy. Rather, true to the symbiotic nature of hegemony, it is preserved through on-going negotiations, with concessions granted to subordinate groups to secure their compliance. For as Gramsci (1971) himself noted, "Undoubtedly, the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and tendencies of

the group over which hegemony is to be exercised" (p. 116).

In other words, regardless of whatever challenges multicultural education may present, real or imagined, to dominant groups, it cannot be forcefully disposed of or dismissed. Rather, multicultural education becomes incorporated as a terrain on which those in power attempt to negotiate the "oppositional voices" of multiculturalist and multicultural educators, securing for themselves a continued position of leadership (Storey, 1998, p. 128). Multiculturalists' "oppositional voices" are effectively channeled into "ideological safe harbors," where they cannot disrupt the system. In this way, the process of hegemony is sustained.

Consequently, I argue that multicultural education has become a victim of this process of hegemony. As such, the forms we actually find multicultural education taking today are of an "ideologically safe" nature. Curricular add-ons, special units for Black History or Women's History month, sprinkled with "Heroes and Holidays" celebrations remain the staple of multicultural initiatives in the classroom. Yet, however valuable these practices might be, they are a far cry from the deliberate questioning of power relations in society, the interrogations of the persistence of racist, classist, and sexists systems of oppression, and the fervent quest for social justice that are associated with more critical forms of multicultural education. It is the forms of multicultural education "mired in liberal ideologies" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62), the ones that take minimal effort to accommodate and do not force teachers to stray too far away from the standard curriculum, that are welcomed, and encouraged, in schools.

Consequently, the more challenging forms—those with the potential to significantly alter the curriculum, alter teacher pedagogy, and alter the very ways in which we think about education—continue to experience great difficulty in making their way into classrooms. The result is an educational community that gets to pat its collective back for its multicultural efforts and for fostering an appearance of broad consensus (another manifestation of hegemony) for maintaining a place of prominence for multicultural education in the schools as an important goal. Yet, truly transformative multicultural initiatives—those that would push race and racism (and related forms of oppression) to the forefront of their agendas—get relegated to the margins and kept in safe harbors, so as to never reach land.

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[2]The hidden curriculum, as I am using it here, consists of those things that children learn through the everyday experience of attending school, rather than the conscious, deliberate, and evident educational objectives of the school (often found in course syllabi, lesson plans, courses of study, and other official, public documents). More specifically, it consists of the implicit messages given daily to students about socially derived and socially legitimated conceptions of what constitutes valid knowledge, "proper" behavior, acceptable levels of understanding, differential power, and social evaluation (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Jackson, 1985).

A Hidden Curriculum of Hegemony?

As I mentioned earlier, Gramsci's notion of hegemony can serve as a useful analytic tool for understanding how and why dominant power structures are

maintained through the hidden curriculum of schools. Indeed, although hegemony, as it is generally understood, is most closely associated with analyses of economic and ethico-political systems (Storey, 1998), it cannot be sustained on one front of struggle alone (i.e., solely through the economic functioning of a society). Instead, it manifests itself in the political, economic, social, and cultural terrains of society as a dynamic process of negotiation between the dominant and subordinate classes.

As Gramsci (1971) argued, hegemony is never simply domination imposed from above. Instead, it is maintained through the winning of the consent of subordinate groups by the dominant one(s). A major means for winning this consensus involves the universalizing of the dominant groups interests as the interests of society as a whole. Thus, as Storey (1998) noted, despite the existence of oppression and exploitation in society, there is still a relatively high degree of consensus because subordinate classes appear "to support and subscribe to values, ideas, objectives, cultural and political meanings which bind them to and incorporate them into the prevailing power structure" (p. 124).

If we view schools then as microcosms of society, children (particularly those who belong to the subordinate classes of our society) are taught the values, ideas, objectives, and the cultural and political meanings of the dominant class. Although there is certainly a degree of this instruction going on through the formal curriculum (e.g., government and civics courses), it is widely dispersed through the hidden curriculum. Indeed, the hidden curriculum has its origins in both cultural reproduction and consensus theories of schooling that support the argument that children are subjected to considerable elements of socialization in schools that are not part of the formal curricular content.

Theories of cultural and social reproduction hold that, contrary to an understanding that schools function as the levelers of the playing field and are places where students, as products of education, are given the knowledge and skills necessary to fill in "the productive roles in the economy simply waiting to be 'fairly' filled," schools are actually reproductive of the socioeconomic structure that already exists in society (Giroux, 1983, p. 258). Radical reproduction theorists argue that schools are reproductive in three primary ways:

1. Schools provide children of different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they will need to occupy their respective places in a labor force that is stratified by gender, class, and race.
2. Schools are culturally reproductive in that they function to distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, language, and modes of style "that constitute the dominant culture and interests" (p. 258).
3. Schools are understood to be a part of a "state apparatus that produces and legitimates the economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state's political power" (p. 258).[3]

What is of particular interest here is the ways in which the hidden curriculum serves as primary conduit of this sociocultural reproduction. Margolis (2001) noted that the hidden curriculum is often understood to represent the conscious and unconscious socialization of students through the "norms, values, and belief systems embedded in the curriculum, the school, and classroom life, imparted to students through daily routines, curricular content, and social relationships" (p. 6). Therefore, the hidden curriculum by definition goes hand in hand with the reproductive forces of schooling. Moreover, the third notion of reproduction mentioned provides additional support for an understanding of the hegemonic functioning of schools in securing and legitimating the cultural, social, economic, and political meanings and ideologies that maintain state power. Consequently, schools, through their organization, structure, and curriculum (both formal and hidden), aid in the maintenance of hegemony by acculturating students to the interest of the dominant group and the students are encouraged and instructed, both explicitly and implicitly, to make those interests their own.

The process of universalizing the dominant group's interests relies quite heavily on the garnering of consent and consensus. Apple (1990) noted that schools play a critical role in privileging a belief in consensus over notions of conflict. Again, the hidden curriculum comes into play, working tacitly to ensure that consensus is seen as a more valuable outcome for society. Apple argued the subject of social studies, as it is taught in schools, provides some of the most explicit instances of "hidden teaching" and serves as a site for the implicit education in consensus. He asserted:

> An examination of much of the literature in social studies points to an acceptance of society as basically a cooperative system … This orientation stems in large part from the (perhaps necessarily unconscious) basic ideological assumption that conflict, and especially social conflict, is not an essential feature of the network of social relations we call society. More often than not, a social reality is pictured that tacitly accepts "happy cooperation" as the normal, if not best way of life. (p. 93)

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[3]The common critique of reproduction theory is that it leaves little room for notions of human agency and resistance. A possible response to both the theory and the critique may be found in multicultural educations emphasis on empowering individuals to resist the oppressive forces in their lives and thus alter the dominant power structures acting on them and on society.

Thus, the emphasis placed on cooperation and consensus, and the subsequent downplaying of conflict as a basic social force in society, represents yet another way in which schools maintain the status quo.

Not surprisingly, transformative knowledge (as an important component of multicultural education) ultimately seeks to challenge and to conflict, rather than to conform or consent. Because it is inherently tied to, and achieved through, a process of intentional questioning (especially the questioning of the dominant forms of knowledge, basic assumptions, and common norms and values in society), it is by default conflictual. Nonetheless, as Apple (1990) noted, "Internal dissension and conflict in society are viewed [in schools] as inherently antithetical to the smooth functioning of the social order" (p. 93). Yet, those who pursue transformative academic knowledge desire to expand, alter, and revise the established canons, theories, and explanations accepted in mainstream academic knowledge (Banks, 1993). Disrupting the "smooth functioning of the social order" is their agenda.

Perhaps, then, the close relation between multicultural education and social studies (as many multicultural initiatives are carried out via social studies content and curriculum) may give us a partial explanation as to why transformative knowledge fails to make its presences felt in this context. This is not to say that social studies should not maintain its close alliance with multicultural education. However, there is a cautionary tale here—one that warns us that if the majority of multicultural initiatives remain confined to the social studies classroom, and the classroom is one that supports "a proconsensus and anti-dissension belief structure" (Apple, 1990, p. 76), then we must understand that both the hidden and formal curriculum will continue to neutralize the transformational possibilities associated with multicultural education, whatever form it takes.

Accordingly, a goal for educational researchers in either field would be to uncover the ways in which the hidden curriculum functions in the daily routines, curricular content, and social relations in schools to prevent challenges, particularly those posed by multicultural education, to the dominant group and the groups values, ideas, objectives, and agenda. If multicultural education hopes to move from its position on the margin of contemporary education towards the center, and thus displace mainstream curricula with transformative knowledge and practice, it may need to refocus its energies on the enemy it cannot see.

New Directions, New Projects

In the spirit of searching for new research directions for multicultural education in particular, and social studies education more generally, I argue again that any re-

search agenda would benefit from turning a critical eye towards the hidden curriculum, the "education" it provides students, and its unintended outcomes for their learning.[4] Moreover, when we begin to investigate the relation between the hidden curriculum and multicultural education, we are likely to see how quickly additional problems for multicultural education arise. For instance, although they take steps towards challenging and altering the mainstream curriculum, multicultural efforts that take the form of curricular add-ons about the "Cultural Other" (Montecinos, 1995) have their own embedded hidden curriculum. A major outcome of that hidden curriculum is the re-inscription of essentialized notions of culture and essentialized representations of the members of cultural groups. Therefore, critical interrogation of the hidden curriculum should not only be an initiative for educational researchers, but should be common practice for practitioners wishing to employ effective multicultural initiatives in their classroom, lest both groups find themselves perpetually tied up in safe harbors.

Because of its extreme usefulness as a framework for analyses that illuminate the primacy of race in multicultural education, a second step in advancing the field is the deliberate appropriation of a critical race theory perspective. As Parker et al. (1998) argued, critical race theory

> highlights discrimination … and offers alternative visions, perspectives and policies that are based on placing race and its partial intersections with other areas of difference, e.g., ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, social class at the center of the remedies for changes in the current power relations in U.S. society. (p. 5)

Consequently, linking critical race theory to multicultural education challenges us to see the primacy of race within the field of multicultural education and its dual nature as a problematic of the field and *as* problematic in the efforts to advance the field. Ultimately, this link may provide us with the insights needed to illuminate potential opportunities for shifting multicultural education into a place where it can exercise more control over the roles it plays in maintaining the hegemonic structures operating in American schools and in American society.

Moreover, the deliberate adoption of a critical race theory perspective requires that we not only identify and analyze those aspects of education that maintain a marginal position for students of color, but that we transform them. Thus, we are exhorted to shift from a passive stance (reflection, identification, analysis) to an active

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[4]For a thoughtful analysis of the literature on the hidden curriculum and its most common meanings, see Portelli, 1993. For its original conceptualization, see Jackson, 1985.

one (transformation) if we are to affect the kind of change necessary to provide all students with the education they need to function in our ethnically and racially diverse nation. Such a shift seems more than appropriate when we hearken back to multicultural education's origins in the social movements of the 1960s. Indeed, whatever its manifestation, multicultural education has always been, and will continue to be, social justice work. We need to be reminded that working for social change requires commitment, perseverance, and a vision for a better society. But most important, it requires action. The time to act is now.

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