

## FOR THE RECORD

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# Looking at Self as the Critical Element for Change in Multicultural Education: Pushing at the Seams of Theory, Research, and Practice—Part II

María Torres-Guzmán and Robert T. Carter, Guest Editors  
*Teachers College, Columbia University*

In this issue we continue to present the articles in our special theme collection on multicultural education. The articles in this issue focus on research and practice and highlight important themes for researchers and practitioners—culturally relevant teaching, positioning the relationship of self and other; motivating changes in the relationship of self to the world, social justice, and social change.

Paccione attempts to extrapolate from the experiences of individuals who are committed to multicultural education as a way to inform preservice teacher education programs about how they could increase the cultural competency of future teachers. She found in her study that the most salient life experiences associated with the development of a commitment to multiculturalism were: initiative from job situations, influence of family/childhood experiences, discrimination due to minority status, interactive/extended cultural immersion experiences, and training, educational courses, or books. In other words, there are many paths that lead to such commitment. The early childhood exposure to diversity (either due to discrimination or because of family embedded conviction) seems to lay a foundation for stronger disposition to developing a commitment to multicultural education among those in the study. But it is being in a job situation that requires cultural competency; the engagement in experiences beyond the racial-cultural comfort zone; and/or the participation in coursework, training, reading or a mentoring relationship that creates the impetus for critical analysis and social action. Paccione essentially addresses the need for teacher education programs to develop structures that help prospective teachers reposition themselves to undertake the study of self in relation to other and in relation to the world. The goal is commitment to multiculturalism.

Solomon's investigation goes beyond the focus on prospective teacher commitment. He illustrates how a teacher education program can structure a cultural immersion experience within its present set of activities. He

explores how the cross-race dyad partnerships within field-based practica can create opportunities for both dominant and nondominant students to develop self-awareness collaboratively. The study had anticipated and unanticipated findings that are of interest to those involved with teacher education programs. While the partnerships were effective in cooperative learning and intergroup collaboration, as expected, the unanticipated finding was that the institutions promoting these structures also limited some of their students in learning new ways of being. The pattern was that the institution interpreted racial differences as deficit and that this ethos, in turn, had differential effects on the partners. The partnerships heightened the student's awareness of diversity issues, helped the partners cross racial boundaries in school settings and in personal friendships, and promoted the exploration of divergent thinking. Among the dominant-group students, there was a heightened awareness of how racism operated within the institutional structures in which they worked and studied. Students reported witnessing how the institutions they worked with, both school and university, engaged in differential treatment based on race. Students of color, in turn, were restricted in their communication, in their ability to introduce curricular innovation, and in the level of control they were able to exercise in the classrooms of practice. The implementation of these structures of inequality and the associated teachers' and faculty members' beliefs and values created anxiety and silenced them. Solomon concludes that teacher education institutions need to attend to the field-based component of their programs so that the personnel associated with it are more sensitive and knowledgeable about equity issues. In addition, he proposes the creation of communities of learners among those that undertake the task of ensuring the implementation of the practica so as to create a nonthreatening environment in which antiracist curricula and structures can be discussed and racist structures can be transformed. The need for change goes beyond the individual; it must involve institutions.

Ball's article is reflective of the research on teaching that is ethnographically grounded and aims at discovering ways in which teachers engage their students by using culturally relevant forms. Furthermore, she frames the outcomes of such teaching within the context of critical pedagogy. In this article, she documents how three African American teachers use their own racial-cultural development to organize their instruction so that there are multiple social, cognitive, and affective objectives embodied in the act of teaching. First, they are legitimate authorities in the eyes of their students—not only were they embracing their culture and strongly identified as African Americans, one of the teachers was the first African American female to work as a licensed union machinist in her state, and the others were highly educated females with expertise in their areas of practice. Second, they continued to promote a sense of community through culturally rele-

vant teaching strategies, such as using familiar speech styles within the African American community, playing with language so that the language itself conveyed acceptance, praise, and encouragement, and using the communicative event itself in building solidarity. All the teachers tried connecting with students through a language they understand and could identify with both in form and in content. Finally, Ball proposes a continuum of ways teachers differentially speak to matters of human agency, from the individual within a restricted domain to the group within generalized domains, through which they communicated high expectations. Students were challenged to see different life possibilities for themselves—how can I see myself differently within this circumstance?—or for the social group with which they identify—how can circumstances be different for X group? By documenting what these three teachers do and framing what they do in critical pedagogy, Ball is illustrating the subtleties of teaching for empowerment that require that the individual be both respected and challenged to become more consciously aware of his or her life situation and to act upon it so as to challenge the structural inequalities that perpetuate the status quo.

Obidah focuses on the practice of teaching multicultural issues by placing herself inside the student-teacher power relationship as a person of color undertaking the teaching of all students and in the process having students reconsider the relationship of self and “other.” She documents her experience in implementing course work on multicultural education at the university level. She does so in the traditions of reflective teaching and teacher research where she is both object and subject of inquiry and her teaching is made problematic. Obidah argues for the “symbolic disruption” of the concepts of “culture, self, identity, and difference.” She tries to deal with the multiple layering the act of teaching embodies. She poses interesting instructionally based questions such as, How would it be possible to teach culture as a dynamic interaction between people in the midst of integrating texts from specific cultures? She, like Ball, uses critical pedagogy as a framework and looks at herself as a potentially “embodied metaphor” in the teacher-student relationship. To do so, Obidah introduces us to her focal students and recounts their semester in class together struggling, letting us in on her journey, and that of her students, across cultural lines in understandings and assumptions. She lets us see how she went beyond the silence to which PC adherents hold, she shares her own discomfort and that of the students, and she finishes with a reflection on what she learned about teaching a multicultural education class. Her insight was that there is still a way to go in understanding the practice of multicultural education and that stopping to reflect on practices would help teacher educators gain insights about the discipline. She also shows that the nature of the subject matter taught in multicultural classes is dissimilar to other subjects in that, by the nature of the material and learning, it engenders

discomfort in students and teachers. This is often not well understood in colleges and universities.

Goodman conceptually connects multicultural education with social justice by focusing on what motivates members of the dominant groups to engage in supporting the rights of oppressed groups. In doing so, she unravels some of the issues associated with the concepts of empathy, moral/spiritual values, and self-interest. She concludes that while each has intrinsic value, it is when they operate in conjunction that individuals tend to move to action on multiculturalism and social justice. She calls for change agents and teacher educators to change the center of their presentation, going from those that appeal to the presenter as personally compelling to that which appeals to people's motivation and thinking so that our collective ability to enhance diversity and equity is improved. Implicit in Goodman, and the other authors' texts, is the assumption that we are *all* implicated in the process of change.

Wallace in the final article concludes with a call for change. She proposes that the ethos of schools of education that perpetuate inequality be challenged from an institutional standpoint. To this end, she develops a series of questions that can guide faculty members and administrators as individuals to become multiculturally competent and as members of their home institutions to also undertake the task of changing and strengthening their institution's capacity to embrace the goals of multiculturalism.

The articles in this and the preceding issue of *TCR* provide the field of multiculturalism and multicultural education with a coherent direction that echoes the past scholarship and nudges on its seams in various ways. The goals of multicultural education are not solely to create tolerance of diversity but to change existing structures that perpetuate intolerance, oppression, and inequity. While the assembled articles are almost exclusively around racial issues within the United States and outside, the underlying premises and messages go beyond race as Wallace proposes. The broader message is that our society needs to change drastically, but that the paths toward those changes are multiple and must be undertaken in a concerted, interactive way. By looking at self, one sees the other. We should each take on the task of understanding self. But we come to see self through the eyes of others, thus, we must implicate ourselves in the development of the other if we ourselves hope to develop. This is meant for all and is a call for dominant group members, as Rosaldo states, to break the "myth of detachment [that] conceals their dominant class position" (p. 204). Whether we are teachers or students, a member of a conglomerate of people organized in an institution or individuals, multiculturalism is an issue that concerns us all.

### *Reference*

Rosaldo, R. (1989). *Culture of truth: The remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.