

Teaching in Isolation: An Examination of the Treatment of Multicultural Content in a Predominantly White and Affluent Suburban School

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Abstract

This study explores how a group of middle school social studies teachers at a school, whose student population is primarily affluent and white, include multicultural content in their curriculum. Interviews and observations along with an analysis of the textbooks, state standards, and the school's scope and sequence were the main sources of data collection. Three common themes arose in this study in relation to the incorporation of multicultural content into the social studies curriculum: (a) There is a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and practices; (b) the teachers' background in multicultural education is limited, and (c) though there is some inclusion of multicultural content, it is not put into practice in any substantial way because it is not seen as applicable to their school environment.

Introduction

Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) contend the way in which white teachers view multicultural education has changed since its early days. They assert that when multicultural education was beginning to gain momentum, many white teachers believed it was only relevant for students of color and hence did not apply to their classrooms. Derman-Sparks and Ramsey claim this assumption has changed and today white teachers are viewing multicultural education as important for all students. For them, the current issue is rather the difficulty and lack of knowledge that white teachers have teaching anti-bias/multicultural education within homogenous white environments. While this certainly is a vital issue of multicultural education and one that is lacking in the literature, it is questionable whether we are already to the point at which white teachers teaching in predominantly white environments have accepted the value of multicultural education for all students. It is therefore crucial to examine how teachers view multicultural education for white students to consider how it should be addressed in pre-service education classes. The goal of teaching anti-bias and social justice issues within multicultural education will not be realized if teachers first do not recognize the basic importance of multicultural education for all students.

This study explores how a group of middle school social studies teachers in a school whose student population is primarily affluent and white, include multicultural content in their curriculum. Following a pilot study, the hypothesis formed prior to the research was that because the student body was not diverse, the inclusion of multicultural content would be limited. This assumption was further supported by the literature, which indicates that multicultural education is often viewed as something that is primarily for students of color and therefore not important for white students. In conjunction with the initial hypothesis, three common themes arose in this study in relation to the incorporation of multicultural content into the social studies curriculum: (a) There is a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and practices; (b) the teachers' background in multicultural education is limited, and (c) though there is some inclusion of multicultural content, it was not put into practice in any substantial way because it was not seen as applicable to their school environment.

Review of the Literature

Before considering the application of multicultural education, I will first turn to the literature to discuss: (a) the value of multicultural education, (b) the relevance of multicultural education for all students, and (c) the lack of background knowledge.

The Value of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education has become an increasingly important component of education for schools at all levels. Despite the varying definitions of multicultural education (see Banks & Banks, 1995; Bennett, 2002; Nieto, 2004), there is general agreement that multicultural education covers the following: (a) learning about people of different ethnicities, races, cultures, social classes, religious affiliations, genders, and sexual orientations; (b) studying the similarities and differences in people's cultures and perspectives; (c) understanding how diverse students learn best; (d) learning to think critically about the nature of domination and oppression as it relates to humans, and (e) understanding the nature of social justice and equity.

For decades, despite criticism, scholars from many fields have upheld the value of multicultural education. First, proponents assert that multicultural education allows all students to function more successfully in a diverse world. According to Hursh (1997), multicultural education in social studies classrooms helps students to better understand and impact society by providing them with opportunities to examine diverse cultures, politics, economics, and history. Beyond this, Banks and Banks (1993) allege that an examination of others allows students to look at their own culture and understand it more fully by seeing how it relates to and is different from others. Ladson-Billings (1992) suggests multiculturalism is beneficial because it provides checks and balances by having people examine different points of view and discourages them from blindly accepting institutional policies and actions.

A second crucial argument for the inclusion of multicultural education is that if different groups are not equally represented in the curriculum, racism and ethnocentrism will be sustained and perpetuated. Sleeter and Grant (1999), for instance, testify that students need to have the opportunity to analyze the culture and history of diverse groups to go through a process of socially reconstructing knowledge. According to Ladson-Billings (1992), by having a curriculum that equally represents diverse groups, students will be better able to challenge inequity because of their knowledge of it.

Multicultural Education Relevant for All Students

One of the difficulties multicultural education has come up against is the notion that it is primarily relevant to students from historically underprivileged groups (Lipman, 1997). Howard (1999) confirms the pertinence of the idea of exclusive audience in his finding that the amount of multicultural content in the classroom was related to the ethnic makeup of the student body. Scholars such as Gay (1994, 1997), Banks (1993), and Ladson-Billings (1992), however, have argued for the value of multicultural education for all students. As the United States becomes more diverse and participates in a more global society, multicultural education is a means of helping all students to function more successfully in the variety of settings they may encounter. Kailin (1999) and Gay (2000) stress it is not enough for students merely to have contact with students different from themselves, but it is equally important for teachers to help students develop broad socio-civic skills, so they can effectively contribute to equitable positive social inter-relationships in a multicultural society. This is particularly important when students of different ethnicities and social classes are educated in segregated settings. Scholars such as Branch (2003), Howard (2003), Ladson-Billings (2003), and Tyson (2003) have also stressed the importance of incorporating current issues of racism within the social studies curriculum.

Lack of Background Knowledge

A major issue related to whether or not multicultural education is included in the classroom is whether teachers have the background knowledge to teach it. Based on my own experience as a student teacher supervisor, I often witnessed teachers who were very proud of their inclusion of multicultural material, while all they did was make piñatas or burritos. Buzzelli and Johnson (2002) write that immigrants or minorities of today are basically ignored in multicultural discussions. For example, this is often the case when the focus on Native Americans remains on their historical roles and not on their current culture. As Kailin (1999) explains, "I saw a contradiction where people, on the one hand, often idolized the dead heroes of the civil rights movement and, on the other, showed a relative detachment or alienation from their living survivors and their continuing strivings for equality" (p. 727). Banks (1997) more clearly defines this tendency, contending that the focus of diverse groups should not only be about slavery, internment camps, etc., but how diverse people build their own lives and cultures, which is the way European Americans are studied.

Rationale

I came to this topic through my own teaching experience at a predominantly white and affluent Catholic elementary and middle school. All the teachers at the school, including myself, were white and the only people of color were the custodial staff, whom the children referred to by their first names. During my teaching experience, I realized that the students I taught were living in a bubble and had no real understanding of people of different ethnicities or social classes. The school was, in effect, largely responsible for perpetuating their social isolation. I found that little attention was placed on issues of multiculturalism, and the topic of social class was particularly absent. My impression was that although several teachers did a project or two during Black History Month, it often remained a half-hearted effort that had little meaning for them or their students. I sensed that some teachers felt that due to the school itself being

homogenous, there was really no need to teach about different groups. I gathered that there was also pressure from the parents to stick to a more traditional Western European-centered curriculum, and issues of multiculturalism were not perceived as important.

This type of isolation has significant consequences as these students have little opportunity to gain any knowledge or have any meaningful interaction with those not of their same ethnic and social group. Gay (2000) discusses how most people still live in communities with people of similar ethnic and economic backgrounds despite the increase in diversity in the United States. Writing about affluent and predominately European American and Asian American schools, Fine (1992) points out that through publicly sanctioned isolation, schools themselves are responsible for teaching students that isolation is not only natural and justifiable but good for society. Bennett-deMarrais and LeCompte (1995) also stress how this isolation causes low visibility of both the upper and lower classes, and this, in turn, allows people to ignore issues of inequity.

Banks (1997) is another scholar who addresses the isolation that exists between whites and people of color and between the rich and poor. He maintains that this separation is hugely problematic because it perpetuates racial conflict and polarization. The isolation sought by the middle and upper class can result in a population that is out of touch with those not in their same social and ethnic group. Yet, these are the students that will most likely go on to become leaders in business and politics.

Purpose

A study conducted in a predominantly white suburb is important because an increasing number of white students receive their education in this type of setting (Lasch, 1995). Orfield (2001) provides evidence that since *Brown v Board of Education* (1954), schools have become more segregated rather than less. Though there is a wealth of literature on class inequities in schools, the majority of this literature concentrates on low-income urban schools. More specifically, much of the research examines the connection between the nature of working-class schools and how these characteristics intertwine with the formation of working class students' identities. What is missing from this discussion is a thorough look at affluent culture particularly that of children from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Proweller, 1998). In addition, as was the case with Proweller's study, the limited research that exists on affluent schools has been largely confined to private, elite schools. With the exception of Brantlinger's (1993) and Mathews' (1998) studies, public schools with predominantly affluent enrollments, typically located in suburban communities and consisting of primarily European American populations, have received scant attention even though this socially isolated education represents a prevalent form of schooling that exists widely throughout this country. There is even less discussion on the incorporation of multicultural curricula in these types of school settings with the exception of the studies of Dipardo & Fehn (2000) and Titus' (2002).

This study, therefore, has relevance for documenting the nature of the social studies curriculum and, particularly, the extent to which students have access to an appropriate multicultural curriculum in their schools. Including courses such as *Teaching in a Pluralistic Society* and *Multicultural Education* in teacher education programs will have little impact as long as students exiting from these courses continue to believe that multicultural content and its message is only relevant to teachers who teach in urban schools or schools with a certain amount of racial and ethnic diversity. How suburban teachers view their role in including multicultural

curriculum, whether they actually include it, and if so, how and from what perspectives and motives, should be of vital concern to teacher educators and policy-makers.

Methodology

Setting

The setting for this study is a middle school located in one of the wealthiest suburbs of a Midwestern metropolitan city. I refer to the suburb as New Canaan in order to call attention to the suburb's historically strong Christian background. Though there are several different Protestant churches and one Catholic Church in New Canaan, there are no other non-Christian houses of worship. The suburb is for the most part affluent. According to the 2000 Census, the population of New Canaan is 8775; the median family income is \$95,359, and the median home value is \$246,300. The 2005-2006 website of New Canaan Middle School (NCMS) lists 3% as receiving free lunch, 2% reduced lunch, and 95% paid lunch. The website also breaks down the student population as 0% multiracial, 1% Native American, 3% Asian, 3% Hispanic, 1% Black, and 91% White.

Participants

At the time of my study, NCMS had five 7th and 8th grade social studies teachers. All five teachers were asked to participate and one declined. The participants, Catherine, Jacob, Sarah, and Nathan, varied in years of experience and educational background, but they are all of European ancestry and born and reared in the state where the study was conducted. Background information on the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

New Canaan Middle School Study Participants

Name	Catherine	Jacob	Sarah	Nathan
Age	50s	Early 30s	early 30s	50s
Education	-BA degree from a neighboring Midwestern state university -received degree in 1970 but stayed home with children for a number of years	-BA degree from the largest university in the state -MA degree from a Catholic university out of state -working on administrative license	-BA degree from the 2 nd largest university in the state -working on MA degree in administration	-BA degree from a small, religious college in the same state -MA degree from a local university
Teaching experience	-2 years with all experience at New Canaan Middle School	-6 years with all experience in New Canaan (middle & hs)	-8 years but taught in 4 different school districts	-33 years in New Canaan with the majority at the high school

Classes	-8 th grade <i>US History</i>	-7 th grade <i>People, Places, and Cultures in Africa, Asia, and the Southwest Pacific</i> -8 th grade <i>US History</i>	- 7 th grade <i>People, Places, and Cultures in Africa, Asia, and the Southwest Pacific</i>	-8 th grade <i>US History</i>
Home	-lives in a nearby suburb—not as affluent but predominantly white	-lives in the metropolitan area in a somewhat diverse neighborhood -mentioned that he was of Slovenian and Serbian descent	-lives on the other side of town in a more diverse neighborhood, particularly in terms of economics.	-lives in New Canaan and said it took his wife and him 20 years to afford to live in New Canaan
Spouses and children	-husband an electrician -2 children	-wife a social worker at an upscale nursing home -child on the way	-husband a lawyer -no children	-wife a school administrator -no children

Data Collection

The research paradigm that I worked under for this study was naturalistic inquiry. All the research was conducted within the school setting, and the majority of data collection was through open-ended interviews and classroom observations.

To get an authentic assessment of where multicultural education stood with the social studies teachers in the school selected for this research, it was necessary to not tell the participants the exact emphasis of the research. The reason for doing this was based on the outcome of a pilot study that I conducted on this topic. When I first discussed the nature of the study with participants in my pilot study, I was told that they did not study multicultural education because all of their students were white; therefore, it was not relevant to them. When I returned several weeks later to conduct the formal interviews, however, I got a very different story. Suddenly the participants pulled out any multicultural topic they could find and went into great detail about the importance of multicultural education. Because of this sudden shift in attitude, I felt it was necessary to de-emphasize the main topic of my study so that teachers would not deliberately concentrate on multicultural issues to impress me or because they wanted to stay “on topic.” Instead, participants were asked a variety of questions about social studies issues including multicultural, global, and civic education. Although direct questions were asked about multiculturalism, just how often and in what context multicultural issues were brought up in the interviews without being prompted or knowing it was what was being assessed, was telling

in itself.

The major source of data collection was in-depth, open-ended interviews with the four participants. Each participant was interviewed on three different occasions—twice in the spring of 2003 and once in the fall of 2003. Informal interviews also took place during the observation periods. Each formal interview took between 45 minutes to 1 hour, 30 minutes.

I also observed the participants' classes to gain a sense of how multicultural content is addressed in the classroom. Each participant was observed twice for one class period during the spring; while in the fall, the observation period was expanded to one week each. I chose to observe one class a day by each teacher rather than watch the same teacher throughout the day because, with the exception of Jacob, each participant only had one preparation a day. With Jacob, I watched two classes a day—a seventh and an eighth grade class. Although observation was not the central method in gaining information for this study, it provided me a sense of the classroom atmosphere and each participant's style of teaching. Observational field notes were also carefully recorded throughout the research process.

To further gain a sense of the role of multicultural content in the curriculum, I analyzed the eighth grade textbooks, the state standards, and the school's scope and sequence handbook for multicultural content, because these are three areas that are likely to have an impact on a teacher's curriculum planning. In analyzing the data, I used Banks' (1999) Four Approaches to Multicultural Education framework to assess at what level the social studies teachers were including multicultural content. To briefly describe it, the first approach is called the *Contributions Approach* or the *Heroes and Holidays Approach*. This is the most simplistic form of multicultural education to which its inclusion is limited to information about heroes, holidays, foods, and festivals. This approach is a start but is typically superficial in nature. The second approach, the *Additive Approach*, occurs when multicultural content goes beyond the *Contributions Approach* by adding more information about people of color and women, etc. It is often, however, presented in the form of a separate section and not fully integrated into the curriculum. For instance, many textbooks tack sections such as *African Americans in the American Revolution* and *Women in the Civil War* at the end of a chapter. By doing this, it lessens its importance. The third approach, the *Transformative Approach*, is one of the major goals of multicultural education, which is to fully integrate multicultural content throughout the curriculum. The final approach, the *Social Action Approach*, includes aspects of the first three approaches but seeks to encourage students to become active members in fighting for social justice. I utilize Banks' framework not only to help determine the level at which multicultural education is being practiced but also to determine the level at which it is being conceptualized.

Findings and Discussion

Three main themes emerged from the data collection in terms of the inclusion of multicultural content: (a) There is a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and practices; (b) the teachers' background in multicultural education is limited; and (c) though there is some inclusion of multicultural content, it was not put into practice in any substantial way because it was not seen as applicable to their school environment.

Before discussing the main themes, I will first provide an explanation to what degree the structure of the school affects course content and teacher decision-making. As McNeil (1986) discussed there are, of course, numerous other internal and external factors that control what is taught in the classroom. Nevertheless, what was surprising, given the emphasis on standards and

high-stakes testing in the state where the study was conducted, was the amount of freedom the teachers seem to think they have at NCMS. The fact that social studies is not included in state testing is presumably a contributing factor in this amount of freedom.

State Standards

The participants were all asked about what influences their curriculum planning, and although they all spoke about the influence of the state standards and the school's scope and sequence (which is developed by the social studies faculty based on the standards) in curriculum planning, none of the participants accentuated they felt restricted in what they taught. In fact, Sarah said, "In middle school we are not credit driven, so there is flexibility. There is another teacher who does seventh grade social studies, who is time-line oriented; whereas I am theme-oriented, and I don't follow the textbook in sequential order." Sarah went on to explain:

Some teachers I know do post them and say, "These are the standards we are going over today." I personally feel if I have covered the information, I shouldn't have to tell a kid this is standard 23.417. I am not an expert, but I have gone to school, and I know enough to be able to say we have covered this.

Sarah also mentioned that the school had not yet gotten to the point where they expect teachers to put them on the board. She said, "I know it is done this way in other districts, but sometimes we can't get through the entire curriculum. This term, we had a war break out." Nathan voiced:

I have never felt restricted even when the standards came out. We sat down and said, "We do that, and we do that." . . . I think younger teachers who come in the first time are overwhelmed by it for the first couple of years. . . . There is a teacher down below us. Last year was her first time back in teaching and she was going through the standards and checking them off one at a time while she taught them. [Chuckling] That is nice if that is what works for you. But the standards are pretty much what every social studies teacher does anyway.

Jacob was the biggest defender of the standards and he said:

I don't think the standards are perfect, but they are good. What are listed in them are things that need to be taught, and I am not going to scoff at it . . . We need some leadership that tells what needs to be taught. Of course you need that or you have people that do whatever they want to do and some of it is good and a lot of it is bad.

Catherine claimed be fairly satisfied with the standards; however, she talked about supplementing a couple of research projects that were not part of the standards. "I like Native Americans, but I don't think we get to spend enough time on them. We do The Trail of Tears and we do a web quest on the computer, that kind of thing. So I am happy." It is significant that Catherine felt she had to go outside the state standards to include lessons on a multicultural topic.

Textbooks

Fortunately, it was an opportune time to discuss the textbooks with the teachers because the time of my interviews and observations coincided with the textbook adoption year for social studies, forcing them to think about the pros and cons of different textbooks currently on the market. All the participants were directly asked how and why the new textbooks were selected and to compare the new textbook with the old. The new textbooks were selected by a committee made up of the social studies faculty and parents. However, I got the impression the decision was really up to the faculty. An important aspect to come out of the discussion of the textbooks is that none of the participants spoke of the need for any additional multicultural content other than what was contained in their texts. In fact, multicultural issues did not come up at all in the discussion unless they were specifically asked about it. This point is further confirmed by the response to the question of whether they were looking for a change in content to which the basic answer from all the participants was “not really.” Overall, the primary concern of all the participants was finding a textbook that was more demanding of the students than the one currently used.

Participants were also asked how much they rely on the textbook. Jacob and Nathan gave the impression they used it very little, albeit for different reasons. Nathan asserted that it made little difference what textbook he used because he has “been teaching U.S. History for close to thirty years, and really, on the days I lecture, I am beyond the textbook usually.” Jacob claimed to use the textbook occasionally and said he read it fundamentally for background information. During my observations, Jacob never referred to the textbook; instead, students were given handouts to read. As Jacob said, “I have the kids read the textbook, but it doesn’t always come through. . . It takes a lot of supplementing. Our clientele, our students, are above average for the state so we need something a little more challenging.” Sarah tended to work on the same principle about the textbook as Jacob. Sarah stressed, “I am not a ‘we start the book-we finish the book.’ I use the book as a tool and not as a be all and end all.” Of all the participants, I assumed Catherine would stay closest to the textbook because she is a relatively new social studies teacher. She did acknowledge that she relied heavily on the auxiliary material.

Curriculum Planning

For the most part, teachers seem to be on their own in terms of curriculum planning. Catherine said they did work somewhat together as a department but did not have regular meetings. Instead, they typically meet during in-services to go over goals. Only Sarah and Catherine talked about working with other teachers. Catherine commented she would like to plan more with other teachers but said she was unable to do so because there was no team planning time, which the other participants mentioned as well. Sarah was the only one to give a specific example of working with another teacher and spoke about the African Tribe Project they developed over the summer. Nathan and Jacob did not even have a good idea when the language arts teachers were having students read a novel that would complement the historical period they were studying.

In connection with curriculum planning, none of the participants indicated that the administration was involved in making curriculum decisions in their subject area. Jacob confirmed that what is taught is set by the state standards and the social studies faculty not the administration. In fact, Jacob remarked, “I have only had it once where a principal came to my

classroom and said, ‘You will teach this.’” Even though asked, Jacob did not elaborate on what it was his former principal wanted taught, but he did mention that the current principal “sent us an e-mail on teaching about the war. He asked us not to turn on our televisions. He told us to discuss it, but keep in mind, some kids know people in the U.S. military over there. But that is all. He didn’t want to cause us any trouble.” Catherine felt similarly and talked about how she felt the administration was very good about giving teachers’ academic freedom. When asked about various workshops of which the teachers have participated, with the exception of Sarah, who participated in a workshop on Islamic Culture, no one volunteered they had done anything related to multicultural education.

Parent involvement, overall in the curriculum, in fact, was less than expected based on earlier studies and the literature review, particularly from Lareau (1989) and Anyon (1980) on affluent school communities. From the interviews, I learned the influence of parents is mostly felt concerning decisions about who is to be in academically talented classes. As mentioned above, some parents sit on committees, such as textbook adoption committees, but there is not really an indication they override teacher decisions. Only Sarah talked about parents being a powerful body and said she was always aware that they may object to her discussion of various religions in her *People, Places, and Cultures in Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific* class. Therefore, she said she tries to be careful how she presents the material. Nathan, on the other hand, talked about them exerting their influence in athletics but not in the classroom. Overall, based on my interviews and observations, I sensed that parents placed no pressure on teachers to teach a specific curriculum.

Discrepancy between Teachers’ Perceptions and Practices

Although the participants in this study acknowledged the importance of incorporating multicultural issues into their social studies curricula, their classroom practices and their answers to interview questions revealed that it was, for the most part, not put into practice. The findings show that all participants fell along the lines of Sleeter’s (2001) observation that though many teachers include some multicultural issues into their lessons, such inclusion falls short of a transformative level. Teachers, particularly those who have been in the field for a number of years, do not know how to select material that adequately reflects various perspectives.

The interviews conducted for this study, however, show that, with the exception of Catherine, all the participants saw themselves as including multicultural content at both the additive and the transformative level; Catherine felt she remained at the additive level. Therefore, they all thought that they included substantial multicultural content. Yet, there was no substantial evidence indicating that this was the case. Catherine, for example, specified how her lessons on multicultural content were generally done to correlate with a holiday, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and Sarah talked about how she sought to connect the study of Africa to Black History Month. The school itself resembled a discussion by Lareau (1992) where she related how one parent complained that teachers had no problem finding time to put up Halloween decorations in the classrooms and hallways but ignored the celebration of African American heroes. With the exception of Catherine and Sarah’s meager connection of Black History Month by having her students conduct an “African Tribes” project, the other teachers did not do anything for Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Black History Month. Yet, Halloween was certainly observed in the school with many teachers participating in a door-decorating contest.

Both Jacob and Nathan, however, were more negative about Black History Month. Jacob contended:

I don't like Black History Month. The blacks only get one month, and we will ignore them the other eleven. There are a lot of people who aren't white, and you talk about them. There is plenty of news out there. I think it is getting easier now. Look at the President's Cabinet. Things are changing.

Nathan held a similar stance. "My basic argument is Black History is part of American History. I don't have a Jewish History week or a Women's History week.

With the exception of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day project in Catherine's class, issues of multicultural content did not surface on their own in the participants' responses. This gives some indication of its place in the social studies curriculum at New Canaan. Nathan's response provides a good example of this. For instance, although Nathan gave good responses to the question of how important it is to include multicultural content, it did not emerge in discussion as to what he actually did in the classroom. For example, Nathan replied, "We are a multicultural society, how can we not include multicultural content. We may not be that multicultural in this environment, but you are going to move to another environment." Yet, when asked if he had taught a unit that focused on multicultural issues, he replied, "Not a whole unit, no, and not even a chapter. Again, when you deal with the treatment of Native Americans, it is in the curriculum, and we do a lot with that." Nathan's attitude suggested that theoretically, he fully supported multicultural education, but in practice, it was not clear if he taught it to a great extent.

There were a few examples, however, of a participant going beyond the contributions level. For instance, Jacob had students read an article on daily life in Egypt. This article was an excellent addition to a social studies unit, particularly in addressing how women and people of lower social classes lived during the New Kingdom in Ancient Egypt. Jacob, however, did not talk about having students make comparisons to either modern Egyptian society or to life in the United States. Despite this example, conversations during the interviews with Jacob revealed that his multicultural efforts remained at an additive level and clearly were not sufficiently woven throughout the curriculum to consider it at the transformative level. Throughout the interviews, Jacob made it clear that he believed there was only so much you can do to include multicultural content and how it was a mistake that the seventh grade class does not connect more with Western civilization. In addition, Jacob was the one behind the selection of the "academically talented" textbook. He chose Boorstin and Kelley's (2002) *A History of the United States*, which he said he "loved." This textbook, however, could be considered a throwback to an older style textbook with limited multicultural content.

Overall, the participants' inclusion of multicultural content at the contributions or additive level appeared to follow the type of additions described by Banks (1997). As mentioned earlier, Banks discusses how often the focus on diverse groups tends to remain on issues such as slavery and internment camps. When asked about the inclusion of multicultural content, Jacob confirmed this as he explained how the whole focus of his class for several weeks had been on slavery. Sarah and Nathan also spoke about showing the movie *Roots* to the class. With some exceptions, such as the supplementary novels in Sarah's academically talented class, multicultural content in New Canaan social studies classes tended to follow the narrow range of topics referred to by Banks. The further problem connected to concentration on these topics is that the information is typically presented in a way that is unconnected to students' lives.

The decorations and lectures I observed in the participants' classrooms were also indicative that multicultural content has not made it to the transformative level. Only Jacob has pictures in his room that include women and people of color to any degree. Nathan, by concentrating his lectures on battles, excluded the female half of the classroom because, with the exception of a few individuals who made flags or bandages, women were not represented. The feeling of exclusion presumably felt by girls is probably similar to how students from different ethnic backgrounds experience traditional U.S. History classes. People of color and different social classes or religious beliefs are shoved aside as fringe events that have little importance in the greater scheme of things. Instead, one might think, for instance, of the role of Native Americans in the American Revolution, and their sentiments toward it.

The participants' answers to interview questions further demonstrate that transforming the curriculum was neither considered a primary importance nor something that really needed to be done. Overall, the issue of multicultural education never really came up in conversations unless the participants were directly asked. It might additionally be noted that Sarah and Jacob tended to lean more towards Ravitch (1990) and W. Bennett's (1988) stance that multicultural education has "gone too far." Sarah spoke at one point about there being more information on Harriet Tubman than on George Washington. Her attitude tended to resonate with that of D'Souze (1991), who indicates that the "great works" of the West were being pushed out of the curriculum to make room for non-Western and feminist work. Jacob stressed several times the need to study the seventh grade *People, Places, and Cultures in Africa, Asia, and the Southwest Pacific* class in connection to Western civilization.

Catherine spoke of "fitting in" multicultural content when she could, but there was no sense it was a priority. Catherine also did not particularly like the new textbook, Garcia, Ogle, Risinger, Stevos, & Jordan (2002) *Creating America: A History of the United States* that had been adopted that year and appeared to have problems switching from a more traditional book to one that included much more multicultural information. She described the new book as not having enough "facts." The ultimate impression is that none of the participants gave any indication they were striving to change the curriculum. Instead, the perception gained was that they were satisfied with the limited multicultural content and saw no need to change their curriculum. In addition, I neither saw nor heard any discussion of social justice or action. The topic of racism was safely confined to the issue of slavery before the Civil War.

Teachers' Backgrounds in Multicultural Education Was Limited

The participants were asked whether they felt they had the background to include multicultural content in their teaching. The results varied. Sarah acknowledged she was somewhat deficient, whereas Nathan felt more confident. One question that surfaced was, "How are teachers going to implement multicultural content and issues of diversity if they do not have a background in multicultural issues?" Several of the teachers had difficulty conceptualizing and used multicultural and global education interchangeably. For example, Sarah proved to be unaware of quality movies or documentaries she could show her students to wrap up a unit on Africa; instead, she showed *The Lion King*. For her Egyptian unit, she chose *The Mummy* and *The Prince of Egypt*. In addition, Nathan did not appear to include any literature with his United States history class—an area of study that can easily incorporate the perspective of someone who is not European American or male. It was unclear whether he chose not to bring in outside literature because he was unaware what was available, or if he simply left literature up to the

language arts teacher. At any rate, attention to interdisciplinary content was not apparent in his narratives or his teaching.

Given the recent scholarly attention to the growing diversity in American society and the importance of exposure to multicultural content, what may be more surprising than the participants' difficulty with the terminology is the complete lack of in-service or workshop training devoted to multicultural education provided by the administration at NCMS. Considering how long many teachers have been out of university, it seems prudent for administrators to actively address multicultural issues. The opposite, however, is the case at New Canaan. None of the participants recalled multicultural issues ever being brought up by an administrator. This further underlines the isolation of the school community and connects to Banks' (1993) assertion that many schools, particularly those that are predominately white, do not have multicultural programs to guide them. If one of the goals is to have schools move from a contributions or additive approach to a transformation or social action approach, it is not enough to incorporate multicultural education in teacher education programs. It is imperative that teachers and administrators who have been in the field for many years be educated about multicultural education and be inspired to include it in their curriculum. To transform the curriculum is certainly more difficult and involves more school personnel attention than adding a few non-traditional heroes here and there. Moreover, many teachers have been out of school for a long time. Hence, the question arises as to how they might get a sense of the importance of including multicultural content and how to integrate it into their curriculum, especially if they have never been exposed to it and no immediate pressure from the students and the school dynamics address such issues.

Jacob, the one participant who took a course on multicultural education, provided a vivid description of the course he took as an undergraduate and the problems he had with it. Jacob, rather passionately, claimed:

The multicultural education course I took as an undergraduate was just about the worst thing. I didn't understand what they were trying to do. It was this touchy-feely thing that I just hated. It was one of my first education courses that I took when I was a junior and was thinking about majoring in education. I took that course, and it was that course where I said, "This is the stupidest thing that I ever heard." I don't know what they were trying to prove. I mean, "Be nice to black people or Chinese people or whatever." I thought it was a waste of time, and I decided not to go into education. My thought was, "These people have nothing better to do with their time than preach to me and this is not Sunday." I was kind of offended, and I didn't get a degree in education for years.

When asked who taught the course, Jacob's response was, "She was a professor, and she was a black lady. I don't remember her name, but I didn't like it though." Jacob continued to explain:

I didn't feel like I was learning anything. Like I said, it was preaching—"You have to treat black people this way," and I was like, "What?" I didn't understand that. I try to be fair to everybody and talk to everybody. It was like, "You white people don't have any black friends; you don't know what it is like to be black." I just found it to be "What does this have to do with teaching?" I kept trying to figure that out. I wanted to find out about famous people who are black and how I can incorporate it into the curriculum. It was kind of like, "We are going to teach you white people how to teach black people." I

thought how insulting. I don't know.

It is clear Jacob has trouble with the idea that not every cultural, socio-economic group should be taught in the same manner. It may suggest Jacob does not quite grasp or rejects the idea of white privilege and leans towards the notion of a colorblind society. His most revealing remark, "What does this have to do with teaching?" really speaks to the need of having courses such as these. Jacob also seems to be embracing the contributions approach when he said, "I wanted to find out about famous people who are black and how I can incorporate it into the curriculum." Unfortunately, what the professor was trying to teach had the reverse effect and caused Jacob to reject the whole idea of multiculturalism.

Although my first inclination was to write Jacob off as someone who just did not get it and has problems dealing with issues of race, I realized that I could not just dismiss him as someone who is unsympathetic to racial issues. There were several instances where Jacob showed awareness that Americans and the nation's government lack an understanding of foreign cultures and in this sense, he demonstrated important insights about cultural diversity, though it was at a global level. Also, his classroom decorations and his occasional inclusion of women's issues show that—despite his somewhat negative comment towards multicultural education—Jacob did include multicultural issues, although he tended to focus on women's issues rather than on ethnicity, social class, or religious beliefs. At one point, Jacob said, "We do talk a lot about women's rights, or the lack of it, because half the class wants to know that." It is obvious that "half the class" specifically refers to girls, suggesting that women's rights would be much less important a topic were Jacob to teach an all-boy class. Jacob seemed to confirm the findings of Stodolsky and Grossman (2000) and Kailin (1999) that some teachers, though open-minded, fail to recognize deep-rooted problems such as white privilege. Jacob appeared to appreciate the difference of cultures outside the United States but appeared to be less interested in differences between cultures within the United States, which was surprising, given his explicit identification with his own Slovenian and Serbian heritage. In fact, Jacob also complemented Lareau's (1992) observation that affluent white parents were not disturbed by race relations and did not see it as an issue to be given attention. Teacher beliefs and parent beliefs seem to go hand-in-hand here and are likely to reinforce each other, creating an environment where race is not an issue. As Jacob mentioned several times in the interviews, he believed his students were free of racism because he had not heard any racist comments or jokes. Though Jacob personally did not hear racial comments, it does not mean racism is not a part of the school culture (in fact, I overheard a number of racist comments amongst the students during my classroom observations).

Implied in Jacob's comments is the need to look into what is being taught in multicultural education courses. One of the premises of this study is that teachers often, perhaps unintentionally, receive the impression that multicultural education is for students of color. If one examines textbooks, it is not surprising this impression is conveyed. For example, in a chapter on multicultural education in one social studies textbook, a comment was written, "Matt Marcella's second-grade class reflected the diversity of his community. Twelve children were Hispanic, five were Vietnamese American, four were African American, and nine were European American. Eight children were immigrants to the United States" (Zarillo, 2000, p.28). Although this commentary about classroom diversity illustrates an extremely important trend in American society, many teachers do not teach in schools with such a diverse population. By concentrating so heavily on the necessity of teachers of diverse classroom to be informed about multiculturalism, the equal importance of teaching multicultural education in non-diverse

classrooms is marginalized or ignored.

Inclusion of Multicultural Content Not Perceived as Applicable to School Environment

The idea that multicultural education is primarily for students of color also emerged in the interviews. The teachers acknowledged that they would probably include more multicultural content into their curriculum if they had a more diverse student population. Catherine reluctantly admitted:

I might do more, to tell you truthfully, if I were in a community that was predominantly African American. We chuckle about getting Martin Luther King Jr. Day off. I mean for the fact that we have one African American student where I know of other places where there is a large racial mix and they are in school. We always have it off.

Sarah seems to believe Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a holiday specifically for African Americans and that it makes as little sense to celebrate it in a school where there are hardly any African American students as celebrating Ramadan would be at an all-Christian school. This attitude shows, at least in Sarah's classes, a transformative approach is yet very far away. The milestones of African American history do not really belong to *our* history not even when they directly touch upon it.

At other times, however, Catherine and Sarah acknowledged how students in the community were isolated and had problems relating to people different from themselves. They both explained how some of their students had difficulty communicating with students of different ethnicities and social classes when they were in contact with them. In addition, Sarah talked about how her students preferred not to visit a mall frequented by people of ethnicities different from their own. The teachers were aware that by thus seeking to extend the type of environment they are familiar with at home and in school, students were further isolating themselves from diversity as it naturally occurs in their extended communities. McLaren (1998) writes how many white people perceive minorities based on what they see on television since they are isolated from them in their daily lives. McLaren explains that television presents images of which few people work blue-collar jobs, women are mothers or lovers and the victims of violence, and African Americans are either gang members or a white hero's sidekick. Both Catherine and Sarah talked about how out of touch their students are and how they emulate gangster-type clothing and talking without having any understanding of what is going on. The same is true for social class differences. Though the community was, for the most part, affluent, only 5% of students at New Canaan receive free or reduced lunch; Sarah commented on how they are treated differently by their classmates:

I did an economic unit, and I asked what they carried around for cash. They had \$50-100 for lunches and basketball games. Many have Visa Bucks Cards where their parents put \$500 a month on it, and they can use it just like a credit-card, or they are secondary or subsidiary holders for their parents' credit-card. That breeds itself. It is still a minority, but if you don't have a cell phone it is an issue.

The above quote correlates with Brantlinger's (1993) study that indicates the lack of empathy students have towards people not in their same social class. The notion of White Flight also came

up in the interviews and was viewed by teachers as a driving factor due to the addition of some new students in their community. Sarah and Catherine's responses were quite a contrast to Jacob who said, "A challenge when kids want to learn a lot—I don't know. Concerns? As a group, not really. . . I don't worry about these kids too much."

The administration also seemed to have a laissez-faire attitude in terms of multicultural content. A newspaper article in the *Metropolitan Tribune*, February 17, 2003 explained the superintendent's acknowledgement that there was a lack of diversity in New Canaan schools with his assertion that "He has tried to do what it can to improve the situation." The superintendent further commented, "When the district sees a need to recognize issues of diversity, teachers try to use the opportunity to prepare students to accept others" (*Metropolitan Tribune*, February 17, 2003). This rather vague statement is representative of a non-issue stance the administration has taken towards multicultural education. Under the guise of commending teachers for their own initiatives, teachers are, in fact, left on their own. The statement by the superintendent clearly places all responsibility in the hands of teachers, and my interviews confirm this situation. As the participants explain, there are neither curriculum development planning/programs nor workshops to help teachers or any real initiatives by the administration to address diversity issues. It is as though the subject has never been brought up.

As mentioned earlier, parents have little influence on teachers' decision-making, and this was especially true in terms of including more multicultural content in the curriculum. This was made clear when Nathan admitted that no parent ever questioned his hanging a Confederate flag in his classroom. Although Nathan did not display the flag as a political statement but rather as a part of his classroom decoration during the study of the Civil War, it can reasonably be assumed that it would not go unquestioned in a more diverse setting. It can better be speculated that hanging a flag with a swastika in the room while teaching WWII might have received more attention. There was also no strong sense that teachers should stick to a traditional curriculum, but this may be because most of the curriculum remains along traditional lines with only a few additions of multicultural content.

Implications

Considering the nature of our world today and how we are becoming a more multicultural and global society, it is vital that educators take courses on multicultural education. It is imperative that these courses emphasize that multicultural education is for all students not just for students of color. In this study, the problem with the inclusion of multicultural education remaining at a contributions or additive level speaks to the need for more education on multicultural issues and preferably at a transformative and social action level.

The comments raised by Jacob about his taking a course on multicultural education also need to be considered. Although he is just one example, more research needs to be done to assess how students react to courses on multicultural education. Considering the majority of teachers in the United States continue to be predominantly white, it is important to consider how multicultural issues are taught in order to avoid situations such as the one with Jacob, who rejected the whole concept of multicultural education. Ukpokodu (2002), for example, discusses how European American pre-service teachers are often defensive and antagonistic towards multicultural education and provides excellent suggestions for how to teach such a course. Works by Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) and Landsman and Lewis (2006) can also be helpful. As Bennett-deMarrais and LeCompte (1995) explained, colleges and universities need

to emphasize issues of social justice in their education programs in order for students to be prepared to teach in situations far more different from that with which they are familiar.

Findings from this study demonstrate how important it is for pre-service teachers to be involved in course work concerning multicultural education and for in-service workshops to be offered to long-term teachers not exposed to such courses in their teacher preparation. Many university programs today (my university included) still do not require their elementary education students to take a course involving multicultural education or student diversity. By requiring that education majors today take a course on multicultural education, we can be assured that those students will have at least some background knowledge. Yet, what do we do about those teachers who are already in the field and have never returned to the university to receive course work in multicultural education and probably never will? In other words, many teachers lack the necessary background information on multicultural education. It is crucial, therefore, that administrators are informed about the importance of multicultural education for all schools not just those with diverse populations. By including background knowledge in multicultural education as part of administrators' graduate course work, it is hoped that they will provide workshops and in-services for their teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

As indicated earlier, there is a void in education research on the topic of the inclusion of multicultural content in suburban schools with predominantly high-income and white students and faculty. There have been only a limited number of studies that examine classroom practices and multicultural content, and even fewer studies focus on schools in suburban settings. First, this study needs to be replicated in other demographically similar school districts. It would also be informative to make an inventory of a large number of similar school districts and develop a quantitative study to correlate with the qualitative study. Looking at students in affluent and predominantly white schools and contemplating what they are learning about multicultural content will also be an important consideration. Because multicultural education is a now common requirement in teacher education programs, it would be informative to compare whether teachers who have taken such course work do a better job infusing it into their curriculum. As I have suggested, it is vital for administrators to take course work focused on multicultural education; it would also be helpful to know their stances on multicultural issues as well in a similar type of setting. Finally, it would be informative to replicate this study in upper-income, predominantly white private schools in non-homogeneous neighborhoods like inner-city private schools and draw comparisons. Questions arising may be whether or not those students are more isolated and would the pressure from parents be higher since they invest more money in their children's education?

Limitations

Although the teachers were at different stages in their career, Nathan had been teaching for close to 30 years; Catherine finished her degree in the 1970s, and Jacob and Sarah had been out of their university program for a number of years, there were no recent graduates in this study. Studying recent graduates who have had presumably more multicultural education would be an important addition to this study. No such persons were teaching at New Canaan though.

Keeping the true focus of this study de-emphasized was a vital component of it. By doing

this, I believe I was able to attain a more accurate assessment of what role multicultural education played in the social studies classes at New Canaan. It was, however, also a hindrance because there were times I would have liked to have pressed a topic more with the participants.

Conclusion

Transforming the social studies curriculum to equally represent different groups of people is a challenge and one that cannot be accomplished without the backing of the standards and support from the administration. Furthermore, Banks (1992), Bennett (2002), and Sleeter and Grant (1999) assert that reform of the curriculum will not happen unless teachers are fully behind it; therefore, it is absolutely critical that pre-service teachers take courses such as *Teaching in a Pluralistic Society* or *Multicultural Education*. Suburban schools are often in the position of establishing the foundation for students who will later become leaders in business and government. Therefore, they are obligated to provide their students with the tools to be involved with people of different backgrounds. The suburbs are not going away, and the sad reality is that our schools are becoming more segregated rather than less. Therefore, schools such as the one described in this study, need to reconsider the role of multicultural education in the curriculum and not just view it as something that is specifically for schools with a diverse student population.

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