

## Reflect on Your History

### An Early Childhood Education Teacher Examines Her Biases

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#### Introduction

Diversity does not simply mean differences of race or ethnicity but includes the cultural experiences that children bring to school, including language, beliefs, values, norms, family configuration, socioeconomic status, gender, special needs, home and community backgrounds, and learning styles. Yet while the population of children in our schools is becoming more diverse, the demographics of teachers continue to be less diverse, maintaining the prototypes of White, middle class, and female (Dilworth, 1992; Howard, 1999; Nieto, 2000) with sociocultural beliefs, expectations, and experiences differ markedly from the diversity of children in their classrooms.

Dean (1989) indicates "the further a child's culture is from the culture of the school, the less chance for success. Classroom environments that do not value the home culture of the students lead to decreased motivation and poor academic performance" (pp. 24-25). Considering that teachers teach children on the basis of the teachers' beliefs and interpretive frameworks, there is an urgent need for teachers to reflect on multicultural education and to confront their biases and prejudices (Dilworth, 1992; Sheets, 2009).

As Baptiste, Baptiste, and Gollnick point out (1989), teachers need to develop their analytical abilities to encounter diversity issues, including "participatory democracy, racism and sexism, and the parity of power" (p. 3), develop their abilities to clarify latent transmission of values and "examine the dynamics of diverse cultures and the implications for developing teaching strategies, and examine linguistic variations and diverse learning styles as a

basis for the development of appropriate teaching strategies" (p. 3).

Early childhood teachers, themselves, are members of diverse linguistic and cultural groups. Whatever teachers' social, cultural, linguistic, and historical groups are, they bring their own beliefs and values about the world to their children (Rodd, 1996). Multicultural education stresses the importance of perceiving sociocultural situations to bridge the narrow concept of "minorities" (Garcia & Pugh, 1992). Multicultural issues still exist even if there are no children from different ethnic or racial backgrounds in a classroom.

According to Irvine (2003) and Pugh, Garcia, and Margalef-Boada (1991), multiculturalism refers to a more complex and expanded view that emphasizes individual decisions about all issues of human welfare. Multiculturalism is "a layered concept that includes not only the experiences of particular individuals and groups but also their shared interests and relationships, which in turn are embedded in the interconnectedness of all peoples of the world. In its full complexity, then, multiculturalism implies the cultivation of a global view of human affairs." (Pugh, Garcia, & Margalef-Boada, 1991, p. 3).

Therefore, it is essential for teachers to recognize their own sociocultural and linguistic background as they work with students from diverse cultures. Teachers need to be open to critiquing their unique experiences, values, and beliefs regarding equality, equity, justice, freedom, and welfare in education, keeping in mind that all learners have to be provided with equal opportunities for learning regardless of their personal backgrounds and different thoughts. This is essential if teachers are to help diverse children learn more securely and meet their needs more equally in the school setting, and can best be done by providing a safe, challenging, and nurturing environment.

From this point of view, Sheets (2009)

and Tamura (1996) both assert that teachers have to reflect on what beliefs and values they have, what personal experiences have figured into their views about themselves, others, and the world, what kind of attitudes, biases, and prejudices they hold about diversity and culture, and the nature of their relationships with others.

#### Research Method

##### Research Question

Since teachers' personal and professional beliefs, values, and knowledge are closely connected to their practice regarding diversity and multicultural education, this study provided the opportunity for an early childhood teacher to critically analyze and reflect on her understanding about the beliefs and teaching on diversity and multicultural education. This study was geared to provide this early childhood teacher with a chance to confront her personal beliefs and biases on diversity issues by reflecting on her multicultural experiences throughout her life.

In order to better understand early childhood teachers' multicultural preparation, this study addresses the question: "How does an early childhood teacher's cultural beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes effect her teaching practice?"

##### Research Participant

Karla (a pseudonym), a Caucasian female in her sixties, has been teaching elementary students for sixteen years. She is currently teaching third grade at a private Christian school. She is enrolled in the graduate school of a Southeastern University.

She feels that teaching is her gift. She thinks emotional and motivational support for children's learning is more important than subject matter knowledge. Karla wants children to be prepared and challenged individually in their learning. She takes into account what the child's needs

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are and what's fair for the child. In teaching, she tries to spend time each day on little one-on-one conferences, working with individual children with diverse needs, abilities, and interests.

### Research Procedures

"No case study of a single individual can adequately or legitimately portray the complexity of an entire group of people. This is an especially important reminder because educational theories, no matter how helpful or insightful, are generalizations that do not explain every case" (Nieto, 1999, p. 190). Based on the implicit assumption that this study be limited to the research participant's reality about cultural experiences and beliefs, this research is a qualitative study.

"Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). This study involved three face-to-face in-depth interviews spaced over thirteen weeks in order to investigate the participant's experiences, beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes regarding diversity and multicultural education that stems from her personal and professional experiences in the school, university, community, and larger socio-cultural context. Each interview session lasted approximately one to one and one half hours. The interviews were audiotaped in order to accurately record the language of the interviewee. To control the quality of this study, thick description (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) was used.

In the role of researcher, my personal journal writing was collected throughout the study. This served as a source of brainstorming and inspiration for me as I recorded thoughts, ideas, and reflections for the study, including the participant's cultural experiences and beliefs. The journal helped me collect and analyze data focusing on the participant's comments and actions, keep notes on the questions that would require further investigation, and develop ideas on how best to present data during the "writing up" phase of the study.

### Data Analysis

I began the data analysis by reading and re-reading all of the transcripts and documents. In order to organize all information from the participant, data was analyzed by selective coding and sorted into themes and categories regarding her cultural beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practice about diversity and multicultural

education. As I analyzed additional data, new themes and categories emerged and were added to the list of codes. Themes that emerged from the participant's stories were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of her collective experience regarding diversity and multicultural education.

"There is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 31). Reflecting on this study, I wondered whether the portrait was the participant's reality or the researcher's witnessed understanding of her "given" reality. Since the researcher's view is socioculturally situated, participants in a study are "seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 31). Thus, there was a recognition that readers of this report might create yet more portraits about the participant's cultural beliefs and experiences regarding diversity and multicultural education.

Taking this possibility into consideration, I continuously attempted to keep my emotions, assumptions, and interpretations bracketed as much as possible, as a teacher and researcher. I discussed and shared the findings of data analysis and the interpretation with my participant in order to confirm and expand the depth of my understanding and interpretation about her understanding of diversity and multicultural education. When I needed to clarify the meaning of the participant's verbal and written responses, I checked my understandings and interpretations with her. I constantly thought about the role of interpretation and meaning-making within the larger research context.

### Research Findings:

#### Experiencing Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

##### *Interacting with Diverse Populations*

"I have had children who have been from most cultures you can name." In her classroom, Karla has children and parents from diverse racial and ethnic groups—Caucasian, African-American, Pakistani, Vietnamese, South African, Indian, Guatemalan, adopted children from China, and children whose parents are from Scotland or other cultures.

Karla recognizes diversity in terms of children's different races and ethnicities, and children from immigrated families or from visiting families staying in the United States for a short time.

#### Accepting Diverse Cultures

Karla recalls a diversity experience with a child from Japan. No English was spoken in the child's home and her only exposure to English was in the classroom. It was during a science lesson when Karla attempted to connect to the child's diverse life experiences.

We were talking in science about studying the ocean, seaweed, and all the food products we have on the grocery store shelf that have seaweed in them. The Japanese child said, "There's a snack I eat everyday that is mainly seaweed," and she said, "Could I bring it and give some to everyone?" I don't remember what it was, but when she brought it, it had a very strong smell that was pine farhes, but it was very offensive to the other children and their reactions offended the Japanese girl. They all expressed, "Oh, it smells horrible, it tastes horrible," and the Japanese girl's feelings were very hurt.

During a follow-up discussion with the children in the class regarding the unexpected aspects of the science lesson, Karla emphasized the importance of accepting different norms of appropriateness from diverse cultures, even when it goes against the mainstream norm. As Sapon-Shevin (1995) claims, children should be safe from humiliation, isolation, stigmatization, and alienation from the class members. "We had to talk about how what seems very appropriate in one culture may be very offensive and uncomfortable to people from another culture."

#### Developing Awareness of Uniqueness

Karla stresses that having a multiplicity of cultures is an enriching experience, not a problematic issue. She believes exposure to various cultures furthers positive and open-minded attitudes toward diverse cultures.

How narrow is it to always live in middle-class America with nothing but Caucasians? How limiting is that? I think we're enriched. The more that I'm exposed to, the more that I get to learn about other people and their cultures and values.

Karla's school has a program called Excel where children organize a multicultural program for the entire elementary school. Children in Excel are assigned a specific cultural area of the world, conduct their research, and make presentations.

I'm trying to think Japanese writing. They have to make a book mark with their name from those characters. They have to taste various kinds of food. We

had children from our school and the high school that have grown up in India and they came in their native dress and did dances for the children. They did the sand paintings that some of the cultures do, sort of the tattoo-looking henna hand painting for the children. We experience little things about all different cultures.

On this point, however, Pattnaik (2003) suggests that it is a myth that other cultures have to be learned as discrete entities, merely focusing on differences from the mainstream culture. Pattnaik says teachers should avoid a polarized "we versus they" focus on other cultures' exotic differences. Rather, it is important for children to recognize the uniqueness of their own culture.

Karla also discusses their school culture and values with the "Mission Trip" that is available in her school district. At the high school, the English department takes any students that want to participate on international trips.

The high school students go on a trip to Europe explore a different culture and during spring break they can also sign up for one of five different mission trips, visiting different cultures. One group goes to Mexico, one group goes to Honduras, and one group goes to Russia. We're going on a medical mission trip and we need band-aids. The whole elementary school will be working together to gather materials for those high school students to take on their mission trip.

The high school students tell the elementary children about their trips to raise their curiosity and interest. They show a slide show, showing whom they took care of and how they live.

#### **Equal Treatment**

On the day following September 11<sup>th</sup>, some of Karla's Muslim children's parents came to school and expressed the concern, "How are my children going to be treated here? Are they going to be ostracized?" Karla remembers that one thing she could assure the Muslim parents was, "The children are going to be loved and treated just the same. This is a safe haven for all children." Emphasizing the equal treatment of all children regardless of their personal backgrounds, Karla takes into account the nature of the school learning environment.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, we were in chapel. Our principal called all the teachers out of chapel and the chapel director was singing with the children. The president of our school came over and told us what

had happened and discussed that this was a Christian school and every child was going to be treated equally regardless of their background, regardless of their beliefs. The exact words he used were "any unkindness from other students toward a student of Muslim background will not be tolerated."

In her school, Karla explains, "A teacher here would not mistreat a child and the children don't treat each other that way." She feels they are "blessed" and "fortunate." In her school, no matter what children are or where they come from, they are safe, loved, and protected.

#### **Curriculum Change Regarding Diverse Ethnic and Cultural Groups**

In spite of the fundamental beliefs of her school based on the principles of Christianity, Karla discusses two contrasting teaching approaches regarding the September 11<sup>th</sup> issue. One classroom teacher provided children the opportunities to voice and share their Muslim beliefs and discuss feelings about the event, whereas another classroom teacher ignored opportunities to discuss Muslim values. Karla describes the approach of the former teacher.

There was a boy in one of the senior classes that was Muslim. The teacher allowed him to talk to the students and explain that his belief as a Muslim did not in any way go along with these people's beliefs and what had resulted from their beliefs. The teachers were very open to let him share how embarrassed he was. It made him voice that people of his background where at this school, but in the news media, they were lumped together.

In contrast, Karla does not feel the need to discuss Muslim issues because, to her knowledge, nothing unkind or inappropriate has ever been said or done in her classes.

We didn't talk about the Muslim issue. We just said, there are evil people in this world, we need to pray for them, just like we need to pray for all the people that have been hurt by what's happened.

Karla's view is that it would be easier and more relevant to discuss Muslim beliefs and culture in the former example, as the teacher can connect to the Muslim child's thoughts and feelings about the September 11<sup>th</sup> event. According to the concept of "curriculum inclusion" (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997), however, any ethnic and cultural diversity, including Muslim beliefs and culture, should not be omitted from the curriculum. Grant and

Ladson-Billings (1997) explain the goals of curriculum inclusion in the dictionary of multicultural education:

1. to present information about groups who traditionally have been oppressed and marginalized in U.S. society and have been excluded from the instructional agendas of schools; and 2. to replace incomplete, distorted, or stereotypical portrayals of marginalized groups with accurate information. (p. 79)

Focusing on the point that curriculum inclusion typically emphasizes "selective, restricted, and fragmentary" dimensions of culture using exotic artifacts, celebrations, information, or experiences, teachers should put more effort into broadly connecting their curriculum to the social, political, economic, cultural, and institutional level of ethnic and cultural diversity. Within this movement of curriculum improvement, change should also be carefully considered, involving major transformation of existing biased values, assumptions, and beliefs about diverse groups of people and their cultures.

#### **Attitudes towards Segregation**

"I grew up in the South, in Alabama and Tennessee. I saw as a child how differently people could be treated." Karla emphasizes the importance of nondiscriminatory and non-prejudicial attitudes toward other cultural groups of people, recalling racial segregation during her childhood.

We weren't wealthy, but we could afford for my mom to have a maid that came in once a week to clean and do laundry. We always had just the sweetest Black women that came to our house. I just loved them.

One day, as a kindergarten child, Karla heard about how the African-American people could not go to the same restaurants as the Caucasian people. "To me, it was so sad because I had these lovely sweet older Black women coming to my house that were so wonderful. I never understood why it was that way." Karla's memory represents a significant aspect of segregation in American history. In the 1896 Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Court considered the 'separate but equal' doctrine (Raffel, 1998). The case held that "White Only and Colored Only" public facilities did not violate the equal protection of the Colored. This case allowed racially separate facilities as long as they were equal, and was an example of supporting segregation (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Karla feels she was fortunate because her family was open-minded toward other races. She mentions that discrimination and inequality have never been an issue for her in spite of a predominantly "White" school background. She attributes this to her parents' non-biased child-rearing attitudes and her Christian religious beliefs.

### **History of School Segregation and Desegregation**

Karla mentions her experiences regarding the movement towards desegregation and integration of public schools in Southern states. During her early years of teaching, the government put efforts into integrating children from diverse racial and ethnic groups within the public schools. Karla describes the resistance of Caucasians in her particular community against the integration of schools.

When I started out teaching in Alabama, the government was forcing integration in the schools. The particular area where I was teaching was a fairly wealthy area and so all these little small communities that could afford to do it were breaking off from the city school system and they were forming their own school systems. They did not have to abide by integration.

Raffel (1998) and Grant and Ladson-Billings (1997) explain that the government's attempt to integrate schools was driven by the 1954 Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. The decision in this case sanctioned the idea of school desegregation, arguing that the idea of dual school systems organized on the basis of "separate but equal" was inherently unequal, because it conveyed the sense that African-Americans were unworthy and inferior.

If you take government money for anything, you have to integrate. They were taking money to help their school lunch programs or whatever so they had to go miles away to another community to bring a bus load of African-American children in to satisfy the government's demand.

Karla's description of busing African-American children "miles away to another community" demonstrates the situations that existed regarding desegregation. According to Grant and Ladson-Billings (1997), this was accounted for in terms of the concept of "de jure" segregation, a type of formal segregation of school systems, and "de facto" segregation without formally designating separate dual school systems. Karla describes her feelings regarding the small number of poor African-American children integrated into Caucasian privi-

leged schools with teachers unprepared to teach them.

I felt like that was very, very sad because those children were brought from a level of tremendous poverty and illiteracy into a school of wealth where most of the parents had college degrees. To me that was very, very unfair for those children. They were, I felt, being punished. There was not the least thing for them. They were in a school of privilege, but they were so different and a lot of the teachers were so unprepared to help them. That was, to me, a very negative thing for those children.

### **Recognizing the Generational Differences**

Karla notices the generational differences between herself and the children in her school. "It is time that we're really open and aware that the America of my childhood is not the America of today."

She considers that contemporary diversity is so common and natural. "Today's children are accepting, and this little Caucasian boy's best friend is the little Vietnamese boy that's sitting beside him. It's natural to them."

### **Realizing the School Environment**

#### **School Goals Emphasizing Diversity**

Karla feels that her school's goals reinforce teachers' work and attitudes regarding diversity. In the faculty meeting or any other professional meetings, the teachers at Karla's school are attuned to diversity matters.

We have children from every culture and a large population of diverse nationalities. We've already had our meeting about how we can bring the culture that some of these children have in their backgrounds into the classroom, how we can integrate some of their cultures, their foods, the things that they do at home into the classroom. That's something that we really think about and talk about.

### **Influence of Religious Education on Attitudes towards Diversity**

Karla indicates that the chapel programs in her school contribute to teachers' and students' knowledge and attitudes about diversity. Strongly believing that all children should understand and be exposed to diverse cultures, the chapel programs try to help children experience diversity in multiple ways.

At our chapel programs we even focused on children of different countries. Last spring we did a program about America. Our music teacher puts it all together

and the children learned and sang a song about how America is a salad bowl of all these countries.

The chapel programs emphasize the acceptance and celebration of uniqueness and difference in a person as well as in diverse cultures. The programs teach children that they should be curious about this world. They stress the point, "...that different is good. We can come together and be strong because we can help each other, work together, and learn from each other. We're all different and we judge people more by what's on the inside than what we see on the outside."

### **Influence of Christian Beliefs towards Celebrating Uniqueness**

When Karla has problems regarding diversity issues with children in her classroom, because she is at a Christian school she stresses that "God created everyone, God loves everyone, God accepts everyone, and we have to do the same thing." From a biblical standpoint, Karla teaches children that all people are unique and different and God sees everybody as precious. Her school employs a full-time staff member just to help teachers be more aware of and deal with diversity in classrooms.

Last Friday in chapel, the man who's been hired to help us know ways we can celebrate diversity, he did chapel for the elementary school. We sang a song that talked about God creating people of all color. That was our whole chapel program Friday. I'd be very hard to come up with any negatives here because we like the diversity and the differentness. Jesus expects us to treat each other this way.

### **Administrative Support and Attitudes towards Diversity**

Karla stresses the school principal's influence and ways of handling dilemmas involving diversity matters. "If I don't do something about a child teasing, my principal would not tolerate me not dealing with that appropriately in my classroom." If the problems continue even after she has talked with students about people's feelings and appropriate behavior, Karla sets up a conference with the school principal and the parents of the particular child.

I would let my principal know for sure and we would probably call the parents and have a conference. I would think most of the parents here would be horrified to think their child was mistreating someone in that way. The parents know it won't be tolerated, and so they're going

to make sure their children do what needs to be done.

## Staff Development Programs in School

### Teachers Sharing Experience and Knowledge

Karla describes her school's staff development programs and the relationship to multicultural education. For example, the teachers in her school have faculty meetings where they share their different teaching experiences, focusing on how to work with diverse children in classrooms.

At our faculty meeting—we discussed ways we brought diversity into the classroom. Different teachers brought books they had found that addressed the issue really well. The Spanish teacher related what she does at Christmas. Everybody shares their experiences and resources. Anytime we can get a new idea, it's wonderful.

## Discussion

### Gaining a Picture of Diversity through Reflection on One's Own History

As an experienced teacher in early childhood, and utilizing her life experiences, Karla chronicles personal perceptions of diversity issues historically by analyzing her personal and professional experience with school segregation and desegregation. Reflecting on the history of the education of African Americans in the United States, Raffel (1998) explains the "stages of school desegregation" as follows:

1. *Prohibition* of the education of Blacks before the Civil War. South Carolina adopted the first compulsory illiteracy law in 1740 making it a crime to teach slaves to write; other southern states followed;
2. *Development* of education for Blacks after the Civil War with the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, which helped to found schools for Blacks throughout the South, and many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs);
3. *Segregation* following the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision of 1896, which established the principle of separate but equal as constitutional and kept Blacks in inferior schools for decades;
4. *Desegregation* following the 1954 *Brown* Supreme Court decision, which overturned the *Plessy* decision and the separate but equal principle, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which provided the federal government with the enforcement tool to effect school desegregation. (p. xiii)

Having lived through the historical period of the transition of school segregation and desegregation, Karla feels sad about what she perceives as teachers' failure to develop knowledge and positive attitudes about African-American children, their family, community, and culture.

Unlike the situations of the Southern schools during her early teaching years, Karla feels the learning environment where she is currently teaching is highly "blessed" with people who are both socioeconomically affluent and culturally tolerant. Working at a Christian private school, Karla's strategies for dealing with diversity issues are based primarily on religious principles. Being influenced by her school environment, Karla believes teachers should be aware of and sensitive to individual children's differences irrespective of their personal backgrounds. "If you're aware of something, you're going to think twice about what you say or about what you do that could be labeling, or hurtful to a child."

In order to be sensitive to each child's personal background, Karla places a high value on talking to the children in her class. Being close to children in the class, teachers can create more culturally responsive and successful learning environments for children in terms of cultural integrity and educational success (Phuntso, 1999; Sheets, 2009; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

It's making me become more aware of the opportunity to go over at lunch and just ask them "Was your mom and dad born in the United States? Were they born in Pakistan and then they moved here? Is your Christmas more like the American traditional Christmas or do you bring other customs? Back in Pakistan do you have a lot of relatives? Do you get to go and visit?" and just find out children's personal backgrounds and individual differences. If we didn't talk about it all the time, I might never have thought about just starting up a conversation and finding out these things.

Recalling the September 11<sup>th</sup> event, Karla recognizes that teachers' approaches to multicultural education are different, even in a school environment where all of them consider diversity as the primary important issue. Speaking to this point, Grant and Ladson-Billings (1997) stress the need to overcome a "curriculum inclusion" approach to multicultural education. Curriculum inclusion, as a form of curriculum improvement, is meaningful in the respect that it includes issues of diverse eth-

nic and cultural groups of people such that they are not excluded and marginalized in school curriculum. However, "curriculum inclusion" as an "add-on" approach is more likely to be selective and fragmentary, focusing on exotic cultural customs or people, and isolated from broader daily-base experiences with history, politics, economics, and institutions.

According to Grant and Ladson-Billings (1997), the "curriculum change" approach is considered best for multicultural education, where the focus is more on transforming the curricular components including basic values, beliefs, and sociocultural assumptions. Using this "curriculum change" approach, teachers should examine their practice to consider whether their curriculum takes into account diversity by comprehending and valuing cultural pluralism and challenging or changing biases and prejudices toward other cultures.

Through her staff development programs and opportunities to think about diversity and multicultural education, Karla finds herself deconstructing her belief that culture is only something equated with exotic differences among various countries. She feels that she is developing a broader picture of multicultural issues that goes beyond simple racial or ethnic classifications. "I have always equated cultural diversity in terms of meshing customs, habits, and foods of people of different cultures, substituting the word "countries" for "cultures." Karla now feels that there can be great cultural differences even in one country. Realizing there can exist cultural diversity between people of one country, Karla mentions, "Helping my children understand cultural differences throughout our own nation can be vitally important."

Karla emphasizes the need to focus more on looking at every child individually, rather than seeing them as a "whole" class. She sees a connection between each child's strengths, weaknesses, personalities, and problems to cultural experiences and family backgrounds. She reflects on some of the children that she has encountered in her teaching.

I need to be more aware of their cultural differences and think about how culture is impacting their performance or their behavior or any aspects of my classroom. That may be why this is a struggle for that child. That may be why I never get notes back from that mother, she may not have the English skills to deal with it.

Karla tries to keep journals and more

## Research

closely observe the children in her class to find out how their struggles can be understood in juxtaposition with their cultural backgrounds.

Discussing teaching, Karla emphasizes that the appropriateness of activities and teaching strategies depend on the cultural context. She suggests that children should be fully understood in connection to their own culture, history, and background. At the same time, teachers as cultural beings have to understand that their teaching actions can never be separated from their cultural context. Teachers need to modify their instructional goals and strategies considering individual children's cultural knowledge and experiences.

### No Voice Is Allowed to Dominate

No voice is allowed to dominate in this mostly White classroom, nor are words permitted to hurt or offend. Yet how does one know which words or stories or poems shock and anger another person?... This too becomes a goal in courses: to find the words that honor individual sensitivities even as we push further into the groups' discoveries and conflicts. (Dilg, 2003, xiii)

How can teachers be multiculturally well-prepared for themselves and their students? How difficult it can be to engage in crucial and powerful discussions of multicultural issues. This study of one teacher suggests the need to create spaces where teachers or teacher candidates can openly discuss and pose questions related to pressing multicultural issues.

It is also interesting to observe that this particular teacher entered the profession prior to the current emphasis on multicultural education as part of teacher preparation, but that based on her own teaching and life experiences she embodies many self-taught understandings of multicultural education. Here again, what would be valuable would be professional

development opportunities for discussion of such issues with and among her teaching colleagues.

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