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DePaul University

School of Education

**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION:  
A STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF FIVE WHITE FEMALE TEACHERS  
AT A LARGE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN CHICAGO**

A Thesis in

Curriculum Studies

by

Katharine J. Waight

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

November 2007

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Steve and my son, David Richard. Thank you for your love, support, and encouragement. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my students. They are the reason why this research is so important to me.

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**Abstract**

**by Katharine J. Waight  
DePaul University  
2007**

The population of the United States continues to become more and more culturally diverse. Yet, white middle-class women dominate the teaching force. Because there are such great numbers of white middle-class women teaching students of color, it is important to re-examine how they perceive and use multicultural education in their classrooms. There have been numerous studies that have examined how white pre-service teachers' perceptions impact their pre-service experiences, but it is important to look at how practicing teachers' perceptions of multicultural education affect their teaching. This study explores how teachers' perceptions of multicultural education influence the way they teach.

A focus group of five white middle-class female teachers was used to obtain information about how the teachers felt about issues of multiculturalism. The data consisted of five focus group interviews with the same group of teachers. In the analysis of the data, the following themes were identified: *Teaching as a Service-Oriented Career*, *Assumptions about Race and Class, Us Versus Them*, and

*Multicultural Education at Pine. Teaching as a Service-Oriented Career* examined the teachers' choice to teach poor children of color rather than children from privileged backgrounds. *Assumptions about Race and Class* focused on the how teachers' perceptions went back and forth between issues of race and class during their discussions of multicultural education. *Us Versus Them* included information about how the students were often forced to follow two sets of rules; the rules of the street and the rules of the school. *Multicultural Education at Pine* included the teachers' personal perceptions of multicultural education. It also conveyed examples of the realities of multicultural education at the school as well as hope for the future.

This study indicated that the focus group format provided a safe place for the teachers to discuss their feelings about sensitive topics related to race and class. In my findings, it was evident that discussing sensitive topics about multicultural education in a small group format was helpful and could be a helpful tool for making positive changes with multicultural education in the future. My study reiterated that more multicultural-based training is necessary for practicing teachers.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Currently, large urban school systems such as the Chicago Public Schools have a teaching force made up of predominantly white middle-class women (Chicago Sun Times, 2004). There is a large body of research that suggests many pre-service and in-service teachers are not getting enough training in multicultural education (Banks, 2001, Garmon, 2004, and McIntyre, 1997). This problem often results in teachers who lack the knowledge and background needed to make multicultural connections with students from diverse backgrounds. Research such as Alice McIntyre's (1997) study about white female pre-service teachers' perceptions of their own white privilege tells us that more should be done to prepare white teachers who will be working with children from different racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

The population in the United States is becoming more and more diverse, but the population of teachers continues to be mainly composed of white middle-class women (Kunjufu, 2002, p. vi). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Statistics (2007) in the 2003-04 school year, 82% of all elementary school teachers were white women. In the 2005-06 school year, the CPS teachers' demographics consisted of the following: 43.8% African American; 35.7% White; 17.4% Latino; 2.6% Asian or Pacific Islander; and 0.6% Native American. This is strong evidence that the population of teachers in the United States largely consists of white teachers.

Chicago Public Schools (2007) listed their enrollment in 623 elementary and high schools as 420,982 for the 2005 to 2006 school year. The students' backgrounds consisted of the following: 48.6% African American; 37.6% Latino; 8.1% White; 3.2% Asian or Pacific Islander; 2.4% multi-racial; and 0.1% Native American. Chicago Public Schools also listed 85.6% of the students as being from low-income families. In a school system where a large percentage of the teachers are from white middle-class backgrounds, it is crucial that teachers have a strong understanding of how their own values and perceptions influence their instruction and the treatment of their students. Furthermore, although there is more diversity in the teaching force in Chicago, nationally, over 80% teachers are white middle-class women.

In my research, I identify how five white teachers' perceptions of multicultural education affect their teaching. The participants in my study openly shared their own experiences with multicultural education. The teachers in my study also spent time on self-reflection in order to think about how their own experiences influence their teaching.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to answer the following question: What are five white female teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and how do those perceptions influence their curriculum at a large urban elementary school in Chicago?

In examining this question, the following sub-questions were also examined:

1. How do white teachers understand multicultural education?
2. What steps are these teachers taking to include multiple voices and perspectives in their curriculum?

3. How do the teachers' life experiences affect their teaching? For example, how has their white privilege affected their teaching and or their attitudes about teaching poor students of color?
4. What factors limit or increase the types of multicultural teaching practices that teachers use in their classrooms?

### **Significance of the Study**

The research questions and sub-questions help examine the perceptions and practices of five white teachers at an urban elementary school in Chicago. This research is important because there are such large numbers of white middle-class women who are teaching low-income children of color. In contrast to my work much of the research available about teacher perceptions of multicultural education relates to the perceptions that pre-service teachers have about multicultural education. For example, Garmon (2004), McIntyre (1997, 2002), Gay (2005), and Ladson-Billings (2005) have all explored ideological, political, and conceptual views that pre-service teachers and universities have about multicultural education. My study explores the importance of multiple voices and experiences in elementary curriculum and it allowed practicing teachers to reflect about how their background and or white privilege affects their teaching. I wanted to focus on how practicing teachers felt about multicultural education and I wanted to find out whether or not they were using multicultural education to help plan their curriculum. Although it is important to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of multicultural education, my research focused specifically on five practicing teachers' perceptions of multicultural education.

For the purpose of this study, it was important for me to include information about the history of multicultural education. Much of the literature discussed the history of multicultural education and addressed examples of how and why current perceptions and practices were formed. For example, Ogbu (2001) shared that much of the literature about multicultural education has focused on cultural diversity and he found this problematic because the research often refers solely to minority students (see Appendix B). He believes that both core curriculum and multicultural education attempt to “fix problems” associated with children who struggle academically. In this research, I refer to authors such as Ogbu to help illustrate gaps that have limited the use of multicultural education in schools.

In my research I focused on the following definition of multicultural education from the writing of Banks (2001):

Multicultural curriculum is at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process. Regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics all students should have equal opportunities to learn (p 3).

Banks’ definition emphasizes the importance of allowing all students to have a voice in school curriculum. Banks (2001) describes multicultural curriculum as a development that grew following the civil rights movement in the 1960’s. He indicated that the first traces of multicultural education were identified as holidays and *ethnic celebrations* started to be recognized (p. 5). This was a common approach in schools as a small step taken to recognize different cultures and ethnicities.

In the early stages of multicultural education, women's rights groups and a variety of ethnic and cultural groups began to have a voice in education and society. Banks emphasized that multicultural education is more than a program. It is necessary for educators to go beyond the single study methods of multicultural-based learning experiences.

### **Summary**

As stated, the population of the United States has become more diverse, but the population of the teaching force continues to be homogeneous. The purpose of my study is to examine how and why teachers' perceptions of multicultural education are formed and how those perceptions affect their curricula. The teachers in this study openly discussed their feelings about multicultural education and that information helped elaborate on how their white privilege has affected those perceptions.

Chapter II will address the theoretical framework of my study and I will elaborate how critical theory and critical pedagogy helped frame my analysis of the datum. Chapter III consists of The Review of Literature. This section covers various topics related to both past and present research about multicultural education. Chapter IV includes information about the methodology of the study. Chapter V includes descriptions and interpretations, and an analysis of the data collected in my research. The final section, VI is a summary of the conclusions and other reflections about the data. That section also includes recommendations for future studies related to multicultural education.

The next section will discuss the theoretical framework of this study. For the purpose of this study, it was relevant to go beyond focusing solely on the introductory

stages of multicultural education. In regard to this, it was important to examine the voices of the teachers because it helped determine how their perceptions of multicultural education limited or enhanced their teaching. The following section gives background information about critical pedagogy and helps clarify why I used it to frame and define my research.



## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Culturally Relevant Critical Pedagogy as a Lens for this Research**

Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2000) discussed critical pedagogy as viewed by McLaren and Giroux in that it exists when the teachers' voice is an important aspect of education and the teachers and students use stories and discussions to learn about each other (p. 263). I used this perspective as part of my research because I wanted to find out how the teachers in my study connected with their students in terms of sharing information about themselves as well as finding out about their students' lives and experiences. This framework was used to examine my research in connection with critical pedagogy and it helped identify issues of power, privilege, and various teaching practices of multicultural education.

McLaren (2003) discussed critical pedagogy in terms of how the problems he experienced related to how he was educated to be a school teacher. Through critical pedagogy he learned how his students viewed him and his "whiteness". He also learned about his students and their perceptions of his white privilege (p.183). Critical pedagogy allowed McLaren to learn about how educational practices are often damaging to poor minority children. He turned to critical pedagogy to help:

...illustrate the contradictions embodied in the teaching process itself and to chart out tension between perspectives held by the beginning teacher, who is trying to find a larger purpose in the day-to-day *practice* of teaching and the social theorists, who presumably had *better theoretical grasp* (p.p. 183-184).

McLaren spoke about how he used critical pedagogy to assist him in examining his own teaching and Giroux (2004) focused more on using critical pedagogy as a framework to help educators work towards creating positive social changes. He proposed that teachers re-examine education and utilize it to transform education. Giroux addressed the complexities involved using critical pedagogy to forge “a renewed sense of social and political agency and a critical subversion of dominant power itself” (p. 33). Giroux also focused on critical pedagogy and its relationship with various power structures such as education and politics (p. 34).

In his discussions of critical pedagogy, Giroux shared his frustrations that critical pedagogy is not always recognized by educators and social theorists (p. 34). He went on to share, “One of the central tasks of available critical pedagogy would be to make visible alternative models of radical democratic relations in a wide variety of sites” (p.34). Giroux felt that alternative models could help make positive and transformative changes in education. Critical pedagogy can be used to intervene and to help address issues of power as well as ethical and political constructions (p. 37). Giroux also stressed that it is crucial to consider power relations in schools (p. 43). He spoke of the negative stigma of teacher and student relationships based on deeply ingrained perceptions of authority (p. 43). Giroux suggested deconstructing and discussing negative images of power. He focused on using critical pedagogy to help students to become aware of their own knowledge and to use that knowledge to recognize oppressive ideologies (p. 44).

Giroux pointed out:

...educators must not only critically question and register their own subjective involvement in how they teach, they must also resist all calls to depoliticize pedagogy through appeals to their scientific objectivity or ideological dogmatism (p.38).

Giroux envisioned critical pedagogy as a power outlet for students and educators to use to challenge dominant power structures of society.

Young's (2005) work discussed shifts in critical theory that is closely related to critical pedagogy. Young's work explained how critical theorists such as McLaren and Giroux have struggled with the direction that critical research is going (p. 2). For example, Young's study helped with an analysis of "...whether the bordering of critical pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy produces transformative educators and (educators) who can teach culturally and linguistically diverse populations" (p. 2).

Young questioned whether or not white pre-service teachers could "think outside of the box" (p. 2). To answer that question, Young looked at the shifts in critical theory (p. 2). Such shifts have occurred in the 1980's and the 1990's and they are moving beyond examining issues of class and on to more concrete issues of how one's identity and one's political beliefs shape his or her teaching practices. Young referred to Biesta's (1998) analysis of such shifts in critical pedagogy (p.2). For example, according to Biesta's study, critical pedagogy has also shifted from issues of class to being more concerned about issues of racial and gender inequity (p. 2). This research also emphasized that critical pedagogy should work to look more closely at

cultural and political issues. For example, Young felt that it is not always clear whether or not the “effects of critical pedagogy on practices have been questioned” (p.3). Young believed that critical pedagogy, multiculturalism, and culturally responsive pedagogy must be aligned to help create platforms to discuss various discourses. She also recommended that teachers must be “culturally responsive and critically conscious” in their practices (p.3). This involves thinking about one’s privilege as well as being aware of issues of race and racism (p. 3).

Young and other critical theorists often refer to culturally relevant pedagogy in discussions about critical theory. This relates to critical pedagogy and refers to pedagogy that is reflective of a variety of customs and experiences of people from diverse backgrounds. In her discussions of culturally relevant pedagogy, Young cited the work of hooks (1994), Gay (2000), and Ladson-Billings (1996). She agreed with hooks’ view that culturally relevant pedagogy should be used as an outlet for teachers to reflect upon their practices. She also believed that it was an important way for teachers to be more critically aware of their teaching (p.2).

Critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy work as frameworks for my research on teacher perceptions of multicultural education because they help recognize the voices of the teachers. For example, Young (2005) emphasized that it is important to examine the connections of the teachers’ voice in pedagogy. She also stressed that it is imperative to make cultural connections with students through culturally relevant curriculum. In my study, five teachers discussed how their perceptions of multicultural curriculum influenced their teaching practices.

In what follows, I will focus on literature that emphasizes the importance of multicultural curriculum. The literature review includes a variety of examples of perceptions and implementations of multicultural education. The literature included was used to help analyze the changes that need to happen in order for multicultural education to be seen as an essential part of curriculum planning and development. The literature also describes why it is significant for the teachers to reflect about how their whiteness and white privilege has influenced both who they are as teachers and the amount of multicultural education they use in their classrooms (McIntyre 1997, 2002).

## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature in this review examines a variety of information about multicultural education including: 1) various approaches to multicultural education; 2) the politics involved with multicultural education including the *No Child Left Behind Act* passed in 2001; 3) research relating to teacher perceptions of multicultural education that includes issues of race and white privilege; 4) issues of class in relation to critical multiculturalism; and 5) practical approaches to teaching with multicultural perspectives.

#### **Approaches to Multicultural Education**

There are various approaches to multicultural education and to think of it as one concept is impractical. Banks' (2001) research helped clarify how instructional characteristics in schools have kept students from learning due to unequal resources and opportunities. Banks gave a clear definition of multicultural education as a concept, process, and educational reform. In regard to viewing multicultural education as a concept, it is something that developed in the 1960's following the civil rights movement (p.5). Banks described the early stages of multicultural education as "hurried" attempts to help recognize the accomplishments of different racial and ethnic groups (p. 4). Banks thought of multicultural education as a reform because it is "...trying to change the schools and other educational institutions so that students from all gender, racial, language, and cultural groups will have equal opportunities to learn"(p. 4). Banks emphasized that making such changes requires schools to do more than simply focus on curriculum. He also warned that individuals

involved in working towards educational equality should be aware that, “When prejudice and discrimination are reduced toward one group, they are usually directed toward another group or they take on new forms” (p. 4). This illustrates Banks’ belief that multicultural education is an on-going process and it can not be treated as a one time reform or program. Banks stressed that when multicultural education is viewed as a continuous process, a school’s achievement actually improves. The improvements in achievement results from teachers’ abandonment of curriculum that focuses on mainstream values and it turns the focus towards making multicultural connections with students from a variety of cultural, ethnic, gender-based, racial, and religious backgrounds. Banks found that the longer children from diverse backgrounds stay in school, the more they lag behind mainstream white students (2001). The lag is often the result of being forced to learn from curricula with no connections to their backgrounds or experiences. Banks illustrated the need for curricula that represents multiple voices.

Banks also examined multicultural education in terms of historical perspectives and discussed how African Americans wanted to make changes in society that promoted multiculturalism. In his analysis of the history of multicultural education, Banks discussed the impact of the civil rights movement and the changes in education that followed the movement. He referred to what Sleeter and Grant (2001) consider the single-group studies approach to multicultural education. Banks shared that schools often use that approach in month-to-month studies of cultural groups. For example, schools may study Latino History one month, Asian American History another month, and Black History the next month. Banks argued that the

single-group studies approach was a minimalist attempt at teaching multicultural education because it focused on studying one group at a time. Banks does promote the way it provides an alternative to teaching from the perspectives of “White wealthy men over everyone else(s)” historical perspectives. Although Banks saw the approach as a feeble attempt of making multicultural connections, Sleeter and Grant described single-group studies as being political and “aimed toward social change” (p. 67). They referred to the single-group approach as a way to get members of dominant groups to recognize issues of oppression and to help those from oppressed groups gain a sense of pride and empowerment based on successes of the past such as the civil rights movement (p. 67). Sleeter and Grant identified the single-group approach as an approach that demonstrates the need to negotiate much of the current curriculum and to stop excluding individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds.

In addition to the single-group study approach, Sleeter and Grant have four other approaches to multicultural education including: teaching the exceptional and culturally different, the human relations approach, the multicultural education approach, and education that is multicultural and social reconstructivist. The approach to teaching the exceptional and culturally different was described by Sleeter and Grant (1999) as a way to teach students who are different to fit in or assimilate to what mainstream students look like or act like. Teaching the exceptional child also has a focus on making non-mainstream children become more like white, middle-class children. Teaching the exceptional child examines multicultural education as a tool to help children work with their deficiencies and to help them conform to the values of mainstream society. They (2001) also stressed how many teachers of



students of color or students with disabilities compare the students' academic levels to what they viewed as the appropriate grade-level skills and tried to find ways to help them "catch up" with their mainstream peers (pp. 63-64). Sleeter and Grant related the assimilation tactics to the "human capital theory"; meaning school is viewed as a place for students to learn and gain knowledge to eventually get a job and to gain the skills they need to survive in society (p. 38). To do this, students are taught to conform to mainstream society's ideas of what is normal or appropriate. This approach is viewed as problematic because as Sleeter and Grant (1999) have explained, teachers often focus on "fixing" students' deficiencies and differences rather than embracing and learning from them. Teachers often try to teach students to assimilate and to fit into mainstream society. This approach often leaves non-mainstream children with feelings of inferiority and shame regarding their cultural, racial, or ethnic backgrounds.

Sleeter and Grant (1999) elaborated on the human relations approach to multicultural education. The human relations approach looks at multicultural education in connection with general psychology and social psychology. This approach focuses more on relationships and how and why people are prejudiced against certain groups of people. The authors described the approach as an attempt by teachers and administrators to "keep peace" by saying that they do have multicultural curriculum at their school. The Human Relations approach is also used to help reduce stereotypes and to create tolerance and respect towards those who are different than what is considered mainstream. This approach examines different aspects involved with group membership (p. 76). For example, Sleeter and Grant

found that it is important to consider how intergroup relations transpire. The authors believe that communication is a large factor in how individuals interact and how they deal with issues of prejudice and racial intolerance (p. 77). Sleeter and Grant found that when “accurate information” is shared with teachers and students, it can “help reduce prejudice” (p. 92).

The Human Relations approach is used to assist students by teaching them positive communication practices needed to help them deal with complex topics such as working towards the reduction of negative stereotypes. It is important for students and teachers to use the Human Relations approach when discussing how and why stereotypes and prejudices are formed. Finally, the Human Relations approach often uses cooperative learning activities, discussions based on personal experiences, and skills to teach positive social skills (p. 98-99).

Sleeter and Grant (2001) also identified the multicultural education approach and described it as “a popular term used by educators to describe education for pluralism” (p. 67). They also view the multicultural education approach as a way that educational theorists combine ideas from the single-study, teaching the exceptional and culturally different, and the human relations approaches (p. 65). This approach was established to help teach ways to reduce prejudice, oppression, and discrimination. It can be used to assist in ways to discuss redistribution of power, to create outlets for promoting equality, and to allow opportunities that encourage social justice (p. 68).

Sleeter and Grant (2001) believe that when teachers use the multicultural education approach, they should teach from a variety of perspectives. For example,

when teaching students about Native American culture, teachers should ask members of the particular tribes whom they would like to see celebrated and honored rather than only focusing on those leaders often showcased in textbooks such as Sacagawea, Squanto, and Pocahontas (p. 68).

Sleeter and Grant (1999) described this approach as including Gollnick's (1980) five goals (p. 150). The goals are as follows:

1. "Promoting the strength and value of cultural diversity"
2. "Promoting human rights and respect for those who are different from oneself"
3. "Promoting alternative life choices for people"
4. "Promoting social justice and equal opportunity for all people"
5. "Promoting equality in the distribution of power among groups"

Sleeter and Grant emphasized that the multicultural education approach should promote cultural pluralism.

The final approach discussed was education that is multicultural and social reconstructivist. This approach is a more transformative approach to multicultural education and focuses on racism, oppression, and inequalities of society. It was described as a visionary approach that allows students to reconstruct society and feel that their background and experiences are valuable.

Sleeter and Grant (1999) preferred the final approach and saw it as a means of redesigning curriculum to recognize diverse cultural groups. Multicultural and social reconstructivist approaches to education should be used to promote the following: structural equality and cultural pluralism. Those approaches are also significant in

promoting democracy in schools for all students and to help design curricula that fights inequalities and oppression. Sleeter and Grant (1999, 2001) identified the various approaches to multicultural education used by educators and gave valuable insight for implementing each approach as part of a school's multicultural curriculum development.

McAllister and Irvine's (2000) work further explored how, as Sleeter and Grant suggested, teachers should work to design curriculum so that it makes connections with students from different backgrounds. Their research focused on the process-oriented approaches to structural cross-structural learning. The authors looked at practices of teachers who work at multicultural schools. This research examined how process-oriented models affected teachers' understandings of multicultural professional development.

McAllister and Irvine looked at three frameworks including: Helms' Racial Identity Theory, Banks' Typology of Ethnicity, and Milton Bennett's Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. The framework was broken into stages that helped in understanding the characteristics of each. McAllister and Irvine found models that "provided some conceptual insight into how teachers could be more effective with culturally diverse students." The stages involved in a process-oriented approach go beyond cultural learning and into self-awareness. This research gave positive insights to help teachers learn more about multicultural curriculum training. McAllister and Irvine stressed the need for more research of models of effectiveness in multicultural education. Their review served as a framework for improving the cultural awareness of teachers.

Kocur's (1996) interview with Adelaide Sanford also focused on making multicultural connections with students from a variety of backgrounds. This research spoke specifically about how the arts help negotiate practical solutions for promoting multicultural education. The information related multicultural education to curricula with connections to various members of our society (Cahan & Kocur, 1996). Sanford shared experiences of her visits to troubled schools in New York City. She found it disturbing those students did not have opportunities to see value in themselves and their backgrounds. Sanford felt that art and multicultural education served as an outlet for sharing and making connections with the students' lives.

In the interview, Kocur found that many students learned much more outside of the classroom than they learned inside the classroom. Kocur and Sanford pointed out that curriculum often has little to do with the pressures students face in their lives. Multicultural social science and art-based curricula help teach about cultural diversity. Sanford emphasized that one culture should not be valued more than another culture. The authors felt that educators should teach all sides of history and children have the right to question history.

In contrast to Sleeter and Grant's work, Bennett (2001) did not view multicultural education as leveled approaches, but as a conceptual framework. The purpose of Bennett's research was to help educators look at multicultural education through a different lens and to rethink curriculum practices. Bennett examined changes in curriculum dating back to the civil rights movement. She emphasized how historical events such as Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education decision in 1954 helped promote social justice and equal opportunities in education.

Bennett's (1990) conceptual framework differed from Sleeter and Grant's leveled approaches because it was developed based on the following topics or clusters related to multicultural education: 1. Curriculum Reform, 2. Societal Equity, 3. Equity Pedagogy, and 4. Multicultural Competence (Bennett, 2000).

The reform component focused on "rethinking and transforming" curriculum that comes from a European white perspective. Bennett discussed the complexities of "rethinking" history and she examined various constructions of knowledge. Bennett referred to Banks' approach as a platform for embracing non-mainstream forms of knowledge (Banks, 1993). Bennett also gave insight about the importance of detecting biases in textbooks, trade books, and other materials used by schools. Bennett's research showed that there have been improvements in curriculum and that these improvements have helped clear up some of the negative stereotypes and biases about various cultures and races that existed in past curriculum.

Bennett went on to discuss the research that related to the *curriculum reform* and its relation to current practices in k-12 classrooms. As far as her concerns about elementary level curriculum, she felt that there was too much emphasis on textbooks. Because of the dependency on textbooks, Bennett emphasized the importance of selecting textbooks free of negative stereotypes and biases.

When describing multiculturalism in terms of *social equity*, Bennett referred to the work of Christine Sleeter (1991) and her view that students must learn how to be advocates and to speak out when they sense that they are being treated unfairly (p.194). As discussed earlier, Bennett shared that *social equity* is used as an opportunity for groups to work together to make changes. This genre of multicultural

education is used as a way to empower individuals and to help change unfair circumstances and to create equal opportunities for all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or class.

The idea of *equity pedagogy* focused on issues such as the use of hidden curriculum, students who are “economically disadvantaged”, and disproportionate numbers of suspensions, expulsions, and high dropout rates for students of color (p. 183). Bennett included the three genres of multicultural education in this cluster. Included in the three genres Bennett discussed the following areas of multicultural research: the significance of a school’s culture or climate, studies on student achievement, and studies related to cultural styles in teaching and learning. She reiterated that based on research in those areas, teachers often “lower their academic expectations for low-income and ethnic minority students if they are uninformed about cultural styles and differences such as communication patterns, social values, learning styles, time and space orientations, and discussion and participation modes” (p. 183).

Bennett’s fourth cluster is *multicultural competence* and Bennett incorporated examples from previous research such as how pre-service and veteran teachers’ beliefs and feelings about culture and diversity affect their teaching. While Bennett viewed this as an important aspect of multicultural research, her concerns focused on the high percentages of white middle-class teachers who are teaching low-income children of color. For example, she stated that 90% of teachers are from such backgrounds and research has indicated that teachers should have a “strong sense of ethnic identity to work effectively” in schools with students who are ethnically and culturally diverse (p. 199).

Bennett's frameworks were full of useful guidelines for future research on various types of multicultural education. Her evidence showed negative findings based on children who were taught from primarily mainstream perspectives. For example, those children did not develop much needed knowledge about different people from a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Bennett's explorations of genres and findings about the use of multicultural education were based on both quantitative and qualitative research, and it served as a useful tool because it looked at a vast variety of research approaches for studying multicultural education.

### **The Politics of Multicultural Education**

Gay (2005) discussed changes in teacher education programs and she described them as being "more conspicuous, contentious, and extensive." (p. 221). For instance, the increase in standardized testing and accountability based on the test scores has made teacher training more political. Gay spoke of how different tensions and opinions cause clashes in determining what should be taught in teacher preparation courses. She explained that there are individuals who want to continue to teach the "status quo" when it comes to teaching pre-service teachers about diversity. But there are those who argue that multicultural teacher training must be approached with new conceptions and from new directions (p. 221).

Gay stressed that politics in education should go beyond the self-interests of politicians; it can be used to create positive goals and changes. Gay shared examples of how Sergiovanni (2003) called this a means of creating "*collective action*"



(p. 222). To create positive changes, Gay suggested for pre-service teachers to learn about the achievement gaps among students from different cultural backgrounds

(p. 222). In this article, it was noted that teachers must be prepared to teach students with a variety of academic needs. It would be ideal for teachers to learn to focus more on teaching higher levels in content areas to better prepare students for the increase in standardized testing. However, multicultural education advocates suggest for teachers to “learn how to adapt their content knowledge and pedagogical skills to the contexts of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse student populations and school situations (p. 221).”

This article recommended for teacher preparation to go beyond teaching middle-class white teachers skills used in “mainstream schools” because the demographics of the United States are changing and the classrooms are changing. For example, currently there are more students from impoverished families, there are more students of color, and there are more students who are linguistically diverse who attend public schools in the United States.

Although Gay respected the work of multicultural advocates, she was concerned that their work stays mainly in higher education academic settings (p. 222). In other words, Gay felt that the public did not have strong connections or knowledge about ideas regarding multicultural education. Unfortunately, those with political power tend to focus on issues of student achievement and multicultural education is not viewed as a priority (p. 223). Gay felt that opponents of multicultural education use “scare tactics” when discussing standardized testing and it allows testing to be viewed as the priority in educational reforms which stifles the opportunities for

creating more outlets for multicultural curriculum. It is also problematic when blame is placed on the children with low achievement scores and politicians often ignore the problem of incompetent teaching practices (p. 223).

Gay believed that those in favor of multicultural education should become more politically active as a means of promoting multicultural education. Multicultural education should be viewed as more than a program of teaching practices; it should also teach future teachers that creating changes involves changing policies and shifts in power and pedagogies (p. 223).

Though she felt test scores should show improvement, Gay argued that political interests should also do more to stop repeating the “errors of the past”. When political interests are solely focused on improving test scores, it often excludes opportunities for making multicultural and moral connections with students. These test-driven political agendas are often geared towards “quick-fix” and short term solutions (p. 226). Gay’s research highlighted how students of color are often ignored in many educational reform plans and teacher education should help end this problem.

Nieto (2005) discussed multicultural education in relation to how individuals relate to it in terms of the overall purpose of education. For example, she referred to the ideals of Horace Mann and John Dewey and their visions of public education as an “apprenticeship to civic life” (p. 43). Nieto is concerned because this is not what is happening in education today. The pressures of standardized testing overshadow the need for multicultural education that helps promote positive social changes.

Nieto's concerns included the changes in school demographics and how they have affected what happens in classrooms. In terms of multicultural education, Nieto discussed movements and the history of how multicultural education was first used in schools. For instance, in the early twentieth century multicultural education was used to help improve education for African Americans with an effort to include more than white or western historical perspectives in school curricula.

Nieto also pointed out that advocates of multicultural education often have different agendas. She felt that although their agendas may differ, most advocates want to "provide all students with high-quality and equitable education" (p. 56). Nieto also felt that multicultural education should work to assist students who are often failed by public school systems. She recommended that teachers use culturally responsive pedagogy to help address sociopolitical issues. She stressed that it is imperative for educators to teach their students as Giroux suggests, to "Challenge institutional policies and practices, both in schools and society that perpetuate inequality" (p. 57). Nieto reviewed Sleeter and Grant's (1987) approaches to multicultural education and she shared that teachers often have different perspectives of multicultural education. Nieto was hopeful that teachers will begin to "embrace a more critical stance in which they begin to question institutional policies that discriminate against some students based on their social and cultural identities." Nieto suggested that more critical approaches to teaching multicultural education will help poor children of color receive a higher quality of education.

McLaren and Farahmandpur's research (2001) took a more radical stance about the future of multicultural education. For example, these authors referred to

what they call *revolutionary multiculturalism* (p. 2). This form of multicultural education “emphasizes the collective experiences of marginalized people in the context of their political activism and social mobilization” (p. 12). McLaren and Farahmandpur discussed the positive influences of Marxism and how it continues to influence multicultural education (p. 12). For example, they stressed that Marx “Believed that diversity increased our potential to enrich the quality of our lives.” (p. 12). Furthermore, the revolutionary focus on multiculturalism does not attempt to “Americanize” otherness; instead it teaches through the experiences and struggles of marginalized and oppressed individuals (p. 12). McLaren and Farahmandpur found that what is considered multicultural education by mainstream society often was an “airbrushed” attempt to examine complex issues and is often influenced by capitalist practices (p. 12). Revolutionary multiculturalism emphasizes how dominant social relations have reproduced oppressive social classes. This type of multicultural education creates an outlet for changing oppressive and marginalized social practices that would otherwise continue to be reproduced (p. 12).

This work was significant because at times more radical approaches should be taken to help create curricula that helps promote social justice through dialogue about difficult topics. It is my hope that teachers will think about taking their knowledge of multicultural education to the next level as McLaren and Farahmandpur have suggested. This does not necessarily mean that teachers will follow the revolutionary approach to multiculturalism, but it is important for them to think about how their teaching practices could help create an outlet for positive social changes.

In his book, *Schooling as Ritual Performance* (1999) McLaren discussed both liberal and conservative views of multiculturalism (p. 281). McLaren stated, “The conservative view of multiculturalism assumes that justice already exists and needs only to be evenly apportioned” (p. 281). McLaren also shared that teachers and students must not assume that because there are laws that promote justice and democracy; justice and democracy do not necessarily exist (p. 281). Furthermore, this analysis of multiculturalism stressed that teachers and students should have discussions to address social inequalities. McLaren’s vision of multiculturalism is teaching educators to go “beyond the status quo” (p. 282). In addition, teachers and students must take a closer look at how they view democracy. To do this, teachers must stop working towards “building a common culture” and they must begin teaching the value of multiple identities and multiple perspectives (p. 282).

This research was crucial because it examined the ways resistance was used by marginalized groups of students to protest their frustrations with the authorities who continued to treat them oppressively. McLaren viewed critical multiculturalism as a form of multiculturalism that creates “...space for rewriting dominant narratives...” (p. 284). For example, students and teachers must learn to challenge, question, and reevaluate undemocratic aspects of dominant cultures in society. It is also important to consider how politics often work to reproduce the inequalities and injustices of society (p. 286).

A final point McLaren made regarding moving beyond conservative multiculturalism was for teachers and students to consider how their identity has framed their ideologies. This too, is something that must be opened for discussion

and critical multicultural education works to create dialogue about how one's identity affects how one views diversity and multiculturalism. McLaren's work made a plea for educators to allow the "space" for discussions and analysis about diversity, forms of resistance against dominant society, and the examination of "otherness" (p. 290).

The information included thus far shares examples of how and why teachers and students must go beyond what McLaren (1999, p. 282) described as going "beyond the status quo". The work of these authors is significant because it is necessary to learn about how to question issues of oppression and inequalities that are often reproductions of dominant society. When people think of multicultural education, they often forget to think about how it can be used to question current inequalities and injustices and the authors in this section gave good suggestions for creating productive dialogue about these factors.

In 2006, McLaren and Farahmandpur wrote about the politics involved with the *No Child Left Behind Act* passed in 2001. The authors equated the act with the "back to basics" movements from the 1950s and 1970s (p1). They also referred to the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* which was written to expose the "weak economic performance of the United States compared to its Asian and European rivals." (p. 1). The authors felt that those responses were similar to what is currently happening to education based on the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Law*. For example, McLaren and Farahmandpur believe the NCLB puts, "an emphasis on testing, resulting in a teaching-to-the-test mania, strict accountability schemes, packaged and scripted teaching for students of color, and a frantic push towards standardized testing..." (p. 2).

The authors also referenced Jonathan Kozol's perceptions of NCLB and how he believes it has actually widened the achievement gap between black and white students (p. 2). McLaren and Farahmandpur felt that this has created a resurgence of segregation in schools. They also think the results of *Brown vs. The Board of Education* have regressed in many school systems because there are such relatively small numbers of white students attending public schools. For example in 2006, only eight percent of the students attending Chicago Public Schools were white. McLaren and Farahmandpur agreed with Kozol's (2005) opinion that researchers should find out more about how the obstacles of NCLB are often related to poverty and oppression (p. 3). This article emphasized how some argue that NCLB treats education like a business and McLaren and Farahmandpur included examples of how public schools are trying to follow "managerial" and efficiency-based concepts.

The authors believe staff development and teacher development time are often spent, "...shaming and discussing effective strategies and methods to prepare students for quarterly assessment tests and to review state and district standards" (p. 4). McLaren and Farahmandpur were distressed about how much time teachers spend on professional development centered on improving tests scores. They do not believe schools should run like large corporations which is happening more than ever based on the NCLB Act. McLaren and Farahmandpur described George W. Bush's social and economic policies as "...devastating for public schooling, forcing many school districts to reduce (their) school programs and services" (p.5). They also view NCLB as the neoliberals attempt to control public education. Though McLaren and Farahmandpur are discouraged about the state of education; they remain optimistic

that the efforts of those who believe in critical pedagogy will help change the situation.

In contrast to what McLaren and Farahmandpur said about the NCLB Act, The White House website (2006) believes the act has contributed many positive changes in education. According to the website, *The No Child Behind Act* is “Challenging students through high expectations” (p. 1). The site included several examples of what President Bush considers the positive affects brought by NCLB. There is also information about federal funding of schools and it discusses how it is now tied with “...measuring the results and holding schools accountable for teaching every student to read, write, add, and subtract” (p. 1). The administration also claimed to be working to help “...minorities and children who don’t speak English at home.” (p. 1). This law is said to have set standards that cannot be compromised. NCLB suggests that changes would only “hurt” the children who the Act was designed to help. Those children were described as “children in the inner-cities, in rural America, and in special education” (p. 2)

There continue to be conflicting views about NCLB and later in this study the teachers will share more information about how the Act affects their teaching. The next section examines research using multicultural education to promote equity in schools.

### **Democratic Multicultural Education: Visions of Equality Laced with the Realities of Public Education**

Democratic approaches to multicultural education involve teaching students to be empowered and proactive citizens. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2001) discussed why



critical multiculturalists are passionate about giving students opportunities to achieve such empowerment (p. 74). This section focuses on why advocates of critical multicultural education believe that it is important to help students who as Kincheloe and Steinberg shared, "...are ready, willing and able to take charge of their own worlds, as they seek to build communities of active citizens dedicated to universal education and social justice" (p. 74). The authors in this section focus on using democratic multicultural education to make positive and empowering connections with students. Democratic approaches to multicultural education are also based on teaching students to respect other races and cultures.

Gutmann's research emphasized that democratic teaching practices highlight teaching students to have mutual respect for others and to respect their rights and freedoms (p.308). Gutmann's information on democratic education helps determine whether or not teachers recognize the need to teach students from more than dominant points of view.

Gutmann (1999) wrote about the challenges of multiculturalism and discussed when it is not "appropriately recognized" in public schools (p. 303). For example, Gutmann referred to the problem of how history books are used in schools and she discussed how those who have suffered from some form of discrimination are often written about in a disrespectful manner. Gutmann included examples of how Native Americans have been written about as if they were savages (p. 303). She also found that there is often a push to teach students by "pressuring students to conform to Protestant religious practices" (p. 303). For example, this exists when schools

highlight Christmas traditions and choose to exclude other religious or cultural practices.

Gutmann believed that public institutions must promote respect and teach individuals to treat all people equally; one religion or race should not be highlighted as being better than others or worthy of more attention than others (p. 303). Gutmann stated: “a democratic education that is consistent with those conceptions calls for two different responses to multiculturalism, but the two responses are united by a single principle aim of treating individuals as civic equals” (p. 304). In other words, Gutmann stressed it is a teacher’s responsibility to stop excluding different perspectives of historical events. She also stressed that public schools must stop teaching students from the dominant group’s perspectives. Gutmann believes that public recognition and tolerance can both be used to teach democratic multicultural education (p. 304). She used the term multicultural education to describe “a society and world that contains many cultures (or subcultures) that affect one another by virtue of the interactions of individuals who identify with or (rely upon) these cultures” (p. 304). Gutmann believed that those cultures and subcultures often overlap and when teachers use open minded teaching focusing on deliberation it teaches students to recognize when things are taught from limited vantage points (p. 307). Also, it is their responsibility to talk to students when, for example, textbooks are blatantly or subtly discriminatory or if they silence certain racial, cultural, or socioeconomic, or religious groups.

Nieto’s (2005) work also discussed some realities and concerns with the inequalities of public education. Nieto talked about the visions of Dewey and Mann

for utilizing public education as an outlet for progressive learning and as “an apprenticeship to civic life” (p. 43). Nieto was concerned because she did not feel that this vision was a reality for poor children and children of color. Nieto also related her concern to the changes in demographics in public schools.

In terms of multicultural education, Nieto discussed movements and how the history of it has worked to help improve education for minorities such as African Americans. Nieto spoke of various agendas of advocates of multicultural education. She shared that although the agendas may differ most advocates of multicultural education agree that it should “provide all students with a high-quality and equitable education” (p. 56). As Sleeter (2001) shared, Nieto too believes that multicultural education should help students who are often failed by public school systems. Nieto recommends for teachers to use culturally responsive pedagogy to assist teachers with addressing sociopolitical issues with their students. She also believes it is crucial for educators to teach students to “challenge institutional policies and practices, both in schools and society that perpetuate inequality” (p. 57). Nieto reviewed the ideas of Sleeter and Grant (1987) as well as James Banks’ (1991) *dimensions* of multicultural education. These dimensions included teachers doing the following: integrating multicultural education into content areas, teaching students about various constructions of knowledge, and creating opportunities for teachers and students to understand how particular biases end up framing and shaping knowledge (p. 56). Nieto believed these are examples of how culturally relevant pedagogy should be used to examine the inequalities and sociopolitical issues involved with public education.

Nieto's work included examples of how poor students, bilingual students, and students of color are often given broken promises in terms of the quality of education they receive at public schools. As McIntyre (1997, 2001) suggested, Nieto (2005) also believes that teacher preparation must involve courses that address the inequalities in public education. These examples of the challenges and current problems with multicultural education indicate that there must be better pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. Such programs should work to extend teachers' basic knowledge or limited knowledge about multicultural education. The following section discusses how some teacher programs have worked or struggled to teach more critical approaches to multicultural education.

### **Research on Teacher Perceptions of Multicultural Education: Including Issues of Race and White Privilege**

In today's urban school systems a large number of teachers are white, middle-class women and there has been research indicating that pre-service teachers' should learn more about multicultural education and various aspects of diversity. The information that follows includes examples of why teachers need to learn more about all aspects of diversity. A large body of educational research has indicated that there is not enough support or coursework devoted to teaching future educators about issues of racism, white privilege, and social inequalities that impact the way students are taught.

This section includes information about the importance of examining how teacher perceptions of multicultural education affect how they relate to teacher training (Lawrence, 2005). There are other factors such as the amount of time

teachers spend learning about multicultural education and the amount of support teachers receive from their colleagues and school administrators. It is crucial for teachers to think about how their background and experiences affect the way they teach students from different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (Banks, 1999). The information that follows discusses some of the current research about teacher perceptions of multicultural education.

Ladson-Billings (1994) researched teachers who were successful with teaching African American children. In designing her research plan, she looked historically at the idea of having separate schools for African American children because so often public schools did not make academic and cultural connections with African American children. She discussed the ideas of African American leaders such as W.E.B. Dubois and his idea that separate schools would do more to help African American students achieve academically. Ladson-Billings wrote about how in the 1990s many African Americans were interested in going back to separate schools. She did say that she would ideally like for schools to be made up of students from all races and backgrounds. She reminded us that Thurgood Marshall's 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education* was set to end segregation in schools. However, she stressed there is now reason to consider schools that would look more closely at specific needs of African American students (p.2). Ladson-Billings discussed the tendency for whites and families of middle class backgrounds to send their children to private schools (p.3). She also talked about the "white flight" as the tendency for white families to move to suburban areas rather than staying in the cities with people from a variety of racial and class backgrounds.

Ladson-Billings found some success stories of how teachers made strong connections with their African American students. Some common themes in her work were that teachers who were part of the students' community or made efforts to become part of their community made positive connections with both students and their parents. She believed teachers' self perceptions and their perception of others was a dimension to their teaching (p. 34). She included examples of how teachers who taught with culturally relevant curriculum viewed themselves as professionals. Those teachers also considered themselves as having strong connections to their teaching (p.35). Ladson-Billings found "Teachers with culturally relevant practices have high self-esteem and high regard for others"(p. 33).

Ladson-Billings shared, "My own experiences with white teachers, both pre-service and veteran, indicate that many are uncomfortable acknowledging any student differences and particularly racial differences"(p. 31). This points to the notion of colorblind teaching; this happens when teachers act as if they do not see race or color as a factor in their classroom and it is not addressed in their teaching. The teachers who made strong cultural connections with their students in this study treated them with respect and taught them to have a sense of pride. They also believed that all students were capable of learning. The successful teachers of African American students were not afraid to modify curriculum, use cooperative learning, or teach with individualized instruction. These teachers chose to be at a school with African American students and made efforts to connect with their students' cultural backgrounds and their life experiences.

Emery (2001) reviewed the work of a college professor and her former student. Moyenda, an African American teacher, was frustrated because she felt that colleges were not giving pre-service teachers enough coursework focusing on multiculturalism. Emery shared that white Americans “often expect happy endings” and they often feel that those who work hard are the ones who are rewarded in life (p. 177). Emery pointed out how the work of Berlak and Moyenda showed teacher candidates ways to think about their misconceptions regarding teaching students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. The authors suggested “...that only when students and teachers both white and of color, begin to see themselves through the eyes of the racially conscious can they begin the process of excising racism from the classrooms.”

Moyenda led groups of education students in role play exercises and the students were taught about the realities of teaching low-income students of color. Emery wrote about how the activities often upset the participants and left them somewhat in denial because they did not believe such circumstances existed. She articulated the importance of making teachers aware of the unconscious racisms they might bring into the classroom. Moyenda gave examples of how her experiences with racism shaped her teaching practices and how she planned to empower her African American students. Moyenda also reiterated to the teacher candidates that their own naiveties about white privilege and racism could negatively impact their teaching practices.

This review stressed that colleges must provide better courses to prepare teacher candidates for working with students of color and students from a variety of

backgrounds. Berlak and Moyenda's role playing activities were often emotionally difficult for the pre-service teachers, but they learned about the importance of taking time to reflect about how one's perceptions can be harmful or even racist in the classroom. The authors also found that teacher reflection was a crucial layer to removing layers of unconscious racism. The authors used the information to help come up with more outlets to teach pre-service teachers to deal with unconscious racial conditioning (p. 279).

Tyrone C. Howard (2003) also focused on teaching educators to use reflective approaches in teacher training. For example, he envisioned critical teacher reflection as being a key component to quality teaching and he felt that this helps address issues of equity and social justice (p. 195). Howard argued that this type of teacher reflection should be a part of teacher preparation programs because it would help with discussions about the races and cultures of the students and the teachers (p. 195). As mentioned by authors such as J. A. Banks, Sleeter, Grant, and McIntyre, Howard also discussed the need for changes in education based on the changes in demographics (p. 195).

Howard included statistical information from the 1996 United States Department of Commerce which projected that "by the year 2050 African American, Asian American, and Latino American students will constitute close to 57% of all U.S. students" (p. 195). Howard was also concerned that the teaching force continues to be homogeneous and as McIntyre (1997, 2001) recommended, white middle-class, female teachers must be prepared to have "...skills and knowledge that will be best suited for effectively educating today's diverse student population." For example,



Howard pointed out that teacher preparation programs must be responsible for helping white teachers think critically about issues of race and cultural diversity (p. 195). He cited examples of culturally relevant pedagogy based on the research of both Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1994).

Alice McIntyre (1997) is another researcher who looked at pre-service teacher perceptions of race and education in her participatory action research (PAR). McIntyre referred to similarities between herself and her participants (1997). She described the phenomena as “being seduced by similarity” (p.30). The research emphasized the need for self-examination and self-expression (p.30).

McIntyre interviewed and met with focus groups made up of thirteen white college students who were completing their education degrees. McIntyre had eight sessions with the young women and the conversations centered on the participants’ perceptions of “whiteness” and racism. McIntyre’s research unveiled the participants’ distorted stereotypes regarding issues such as teaching in the inner city, racism, and reproducing racist educational practices.

McIntyre discussed the similarities among her participants’ perceptions of their own “whiteness” and their perceptions of being future educators. She discussed biases in her “white on white” research and found that “what is taken-for-granted by many whites-both researchers and participants- as normal, self-evident, and typical is precisely what needs to be identified, challenged, and re-imagined.” (p.33). McIntyre worked hard not to dominate the focus groups and there were times she held back from trying to go in and educate the women about their obvious racism. McIntyre found that the women had limited experiences with people of color and

their perceptions were often based on their parents' views and what they had learned from the media. McIntyre felt that it was her responsibility to create a platform for positive social changes. Her research was used to help prepare her participants for working with inner city students of color. She wanted the participants to remove layers of racism and preconceptions about inner city students and people of color. McIntyre wanted her methodology to "provide opportunities for white researchers and educators to expose the dynamics of racism among white people..." (p. 134).

McIntyre also thought it was part of her responsibility as a white researcher at a predominantly white institution to address issues of racism and to create opportunities for her participants' to rethink their own perceptions of "whiteness". She found that most of the participants considered their own experiences as "normal" and often viewed people of color as deficient or lacking in opportunities.

McIntyre wanted her participants to move away from the "white knight" perspective of going into a school and saving the poor minority students. Instead, she wanted them to realize how harmful their perceptions could be if they were unwilling to look at things through multiple lenses. If these women wanted to make positive changes, they would have to stop putting blame on society, poverty, and the lack of resources (p.129). McIntyre wanted the participants to continue to have an open dialogue about how to change their perceptions and how to become more open to the process of self-reflection and self-critique.

In terms of multicultural education, the participants had a very limited view of what it actually meant. Most of the participants described multicultural education as teaching students about a variety of cultures, but they did not clearly understand the

importance of discussing issues of racism and how it contributes to inequalities in society. McIntyre found she made progress with her participants in terms of expanding their perceptions of racism and white privilege, but she felt that the discussions were still in the beginning stages of working towards creating social changes. McIntyre analyzed the participants' past experiences and found that they were much more comfortable discussing personal experiences rather than common themes of racism throughout society. She also found that the participants needed to have more experiences with people of color and this was a limitation in her research.

The study of teachers' perceptions of whiteness helped to deconstruct issues of racism and created opportunities for awareness of the role of white privilege in education and in society in general. Alice McIntyre opened the door for a small group of white teachers to reevaluate their perceptions of "whiteness" and for them to take on more transformative teaching practices.

McIntyre expanded her study of "whiteness as a discourse in multicultural education" in a study of white students in her teacher education classes (2001). Her research, as well as the research of Sleeter, hooks, and Tatum shared information that encouraged white teachers to reflect on how their white privilege and social class influenced their educational practices and policies (McIntyre, 2001, p. 31). McIntyre's research allowed pre-service teachers to participate in classroom-based and observation-based activities that gave them opportunities to reflect on how race affects their teaching practices and views of students of color. McIntyre used classroom activities and student teaching related work to help white middle-class teachers gain a stronger understanding of their white privilege and how it affects their

teaching practices and perceptions of students. Open dialogue and written activities also gave students the opportunity to learn more about effective ways to teach from multicultural perspectives.

McLaren (2003) wrote about how his teaching experiences at a school in a Canadian “rural ghetto” changed how he thought about his own whiteness. He did an ethnographic study about his experience teaching fourth and sixth grade for a few years at a challenging school in a low-income rural area in Canada. For example, McLaren shared journal entries about his struggles with his poor minority students. He discussed their perceptions of him as a white male as well as their perceptions about race, gender, and socioeconomic status. He discussed how he had to set aside his own ideological beliefs about teaching and learning in order to make connections with his students. He learned from his students and made great efforts to connect with them and with their parents.

After these experiences and many years of studying education, McLaren suggested that educators “unthink whiteness” and “rethink democracy” (p. 263). He discussed moving away from blaming current social conditions and finding new ways to promote social justice. McLaren addressed the idea of looking at whiteness from another angle. For example, he stated, “We must create a new public sphere where the practice of whiteness is not only identified and analyzed, but also contested and destroyed.”

(p. 264). McLaren suggests that when educators choose to look beyond whiteness, it may lead to building hope for others.

McLaren discussed the changes in demographics in the United States as well as the problematic socioeconomic conditions of many poor Americans (p. 265). McLaren's work examined many levels of oppression and social injustices. For example, he discussed how the government often contributes to racial stratification and oppressive practices (p. 271). He included his own framework for building transformative and democratic teaching practices. McLaren views students as individuals, and as an educator, that takes many steps to help his students feel important. Although his journal entries included multiple struggles and failures of his early years as a teacher, McLaren also included stories of transformative teaching and ways to promote social change.

Gary Howard (1999) also wrote about his whiteness and how it framed his thinking about multicultural education. He too, discussed the changes in the population of Americans in terms of the population becoming more racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. Howard discussed how his work has evolved since it began in the 1960s. He shared that he was previously unaware of his own white privilege and he did not realize that he lived in a world without connections to any people from multicultural backgrounds. As Howard learned about multicultural education, he was strongly influenced by the work of James A. Banks (p. 10).

Howard went through a process where he recognized his white privilege and he began to think about his whiteness. He discussed the importance of whites gaining a better understanding of multicultural education. He gave examples of his own process of examining layers of "racial consciousness" (p. 11). Howard traced his

own experiences and discussed how the previously “untouched” perceptions of race helped him learn more about people from different cultures and backgrounds. He described that process as “the beginning of a long journey toward multicultural awareness” (p. 14).

Howard used his knowledge when working with teachers to help them learn about multicultural education. He described different attitudes that white teachers have towards multicultural education. Howard’s example connected with the previously mentioned examples given by both Ladson-Billings (1994) and McIntyre (1997) such as when authors referred to teachers as having a colorblind perspective when teaching students from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds. As described earlier, this is when teachers claim that they see all students as being the same regardless of race, gender, or ethnic backgrounds. Howard described “colorblindness” as one of the “innocent confusions” white teachers often have about multicultural education. Howard stressed for teachers to consider the personal and cultural histories each student brings to the classroom (p. 25).

In his work, Howard looked at the issues connected with white dominance and white privilege (p. 33). As McIntyre (1997) discussed, Howard too agreed that whites are often unaware of their own privilege. This illustrates why it is crucial for both current and future educators to continue to have dialogue about white privilege.

Sleeter’s (2005) study about current teacher preparation programs and their attempts to educate white teachers about culturally diverse students indicated that more needs to be done to help end the “overwhelming presence of whiteness” (p. 96). For her research, Sleeter looked at the results of 80 studies about the effects of pre-

service teaching strategies related to multicultural educational practices (p. 100). Sleeter's research was significant because it addressed the limited knowledge many white teachers have about teaching students of color from multicultural perspectives. She saw the limited amount of multicultural related teacher preparation as a "crisis" for schools with students of color and low-income students (p. 94). Sleeter framed this research around her years of experience with multicultural education and analyzed the results of the 80 studies about this subject.

Sleeter found it disturbing that most predominantly white colleges often offered very few courses in multicultural education. She was also discouraged that many of the courses offered were often fragmented and highlighted only areas of the each professor's interest. It was also clear that in most cases, pre-service teachers of color were more devoted to learning about multicultural education. Sleeter also found that non-white pre-service teachers were often "more committed to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing children of color with academically challenging curriculum" (p. 97).

Sleeter's research demonstrated that the majority of studies on multicultural education examined the lack of preparation white teachers are given. However, she felt that schools could do more to help with this problem. Sleeter suggested that teachers who "culturally match" their students should be placed at those students' schools. Based on the high number of white teachers entering the teaching field, this would not always work. In this case, Sleeter suggested that pre-service teachers to become more involved in their students' communities. She found that some pre-service teachers are now required to live in a community different from their own

backgrounds prior to teaching at a school in that setting. These approaches help teachers make better connections with their students and the school communities (p. 97).

This information indicated that based on previous studies about the impact of multicultural courses and trainings; there must be more focus on follow-up sessions and time for teachers to reflect on what they have learned. In most cases, teachers admitted to learning from the courses and they admitted to changing their attitudes about multicultural education. However, the studies concluded that most teachers did not continue to use strategies in multicultural education even one month after the courses or workshops ended. Sleeter recommended that multicultural teacher trainings should not be done as deficiency models, but with motivating strategies for using teaching approaches. Finally, Sleeter stressed that to end the “overwhelming presence of whiteness” in teacher training programs then students of color should not be “silenced”. Also it is also crucial that the skills being taught in the courses must go beyond training and they must continue to be in the new teachers’ classrooms. The research suggested that university-school partnerships are helpful for continuing and strengthening teachers’ knowledge about multicultural curriculum.

Gay (2005) also offered suggestions for teacher training programs. She felt that multicultural curriculum should be integrated throughout all teacher preparation coursework rather than being taught in a few isolated courses (p. 224). In her 1997 research, Gay cautioned that multicultural education should also be offered as a “viable area of specialization” (p. 224). For example, the research indicated that there must be spaces for multicultural education for both pre-service and veteran teacher



trainings as well as on-going staff development trainings. Gay suggested that this will help teachers continue to learn more about the various areas of multicultural education. This research discussed the problem of having few teachers of color teaching in inner-city schools and the overwhelming focus on standardized testing. These two factors often limit the amounts of multicultural curriculum used in the classrooms of white middle-class teachers (p. 225).

Gay found that multicultural education in teacher training programs is often “conflicted” due to a variety of agendas about its actual purpose (p. 227). She feels that multicultural education is both a problem and a solution that requires more attention at political levels and in teacher training programs. It is necessary for white teachers to gain clearer understandings of how to work with students from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Her research illustrated that teachers must learn to make multicultural connections to help underachieving students succeed in school. And finally, Gay’s research demonstrated that politicians, teachers, and pre-service teachers have to understand the importance of making multicultural connections with students. These connections will inevitably help all students with their overall school achievement and they will help students feel valued by their teachers.

Ladson-Billings’ research also examined some of the factors that influence teacher preparation programs (2005). For example, she shared information about how economic issues have changed the focus of many programs. More specifically, Ladson-Billings discussed how those changes affected the teacher training programs. Economic cutbacks have brought questions and criticisms about the amount of

academic rigor in alternative certification problems and politicians continue to influence teacher-training programs (p. 229). Ladson-Billings was also concerned about the changes in the country's demographics and how more should be done to help make connections with students who are ethnically and culturally diverse.

Ladson-Billings included statistics from a study done in 2000 and she pointed out that "88% of the teachers are white and in some areas that figure soars as high as 99%." (p. 230). She suggested that the number of teachers of color is decreasing because, in many cases, they are moving on to "more lucrative professions" such as doctors and lawyers. This is another example of why more must be done to encourage individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds to become teachers. Ladson-Billings shared that those who are planning to be teachers are often white, middleclass, females which greatly influences how the college courses are taught. Unfortunately, the coursework in pre-service teaching programs often caters to white middleclass perspectives of the world. Ladson-Billings placed some of the blame on college professors. She felt that although professors are often verbally committed to teaching students about diversity, they have difficulty acting on their commitments. For instance, Ladson-Billings shared that professors "... are rarely in situations that make such a demand on them" (p. 230).

Pre-service teachers must have opportunities to learn about multicultural and demographic values (p. 231). Ladson-Billings believed politicians and many teacher-training programs were too focused on the deficit models of the 1960s and 1970s and she stressed that programs should stop viewing poor students of color as "at-risk" or "lacking" (p. 231). This will not happen unless there are more opportunities for

learning about diversity for both pre-service and veteran teachers. Ladson-Billings believes that the responsibility lies within the college professors, politicians, pre-service teachers, and the veteran teachers. Finally, she stresses that faculty of color must have support and must be heard as individuals regarding issues of diversity.

The research given by these authors will help support the idea that teachers' backgrounds and teacher training programs have an influence on how they perceive and teach multicultural education. Robert W. Smith (2000) also wrote about this subject in his case study about how two white teachers' backgrounds affected the amount of multicultural education in their classrooms. He also examined how teacher preparation programs prepared white middleclass teachers to work with students from different cultures and backgrounds.

Smith's research examined how teachers' personal background "influence(s) what is taught, interpretations of classroom situations and students' behavior, and pedagogical decisions." (p. 155). Smith's research contained information about how white teachers may have "distorted views of multicultural education" (p. 156). Smith's study indicated that the white pre-service teachers who had more experiences with individuals from diverse backgrounds were more likely to have a better understanding of the benefits of using multicultural curriculum in their classrooms. Smith also found that it was important for teachers to have opportunities to reflect about how their prior socialization has influenced their teaching and the amount of multicultural instruction they used when teaching.

Garmon, (2004) an African American college professor, examined how a 22 year old white female teacher who grew up in a predominantly white middle-class

part of the country was able to increase her awareness of multicultural education. This young woman was able to grow intellectually because she was open to further exploring and reflecting about her own biases about race and inequalities (p. 202). Garmon also thought it was significant that this participant's "willingness and ability to look at herself critically certainly facilitated her growth (with multiculturalism)" (p. 205).

Garmon's study illustrated the importance of teacher reflection in conjunction to learning about multicultural education. For example, the young woman in Garmon's study displayed a strong sense of critical consciousness and she took time to learn about issues of racial bias. The most difficult aspect of that process was for the participant to think about how her biases about race could be a problematic aspect of her own teaching practices. Garmon's study reiterated the need for teachers to have opportunities to discuss their biases and to allow them to work through them. Pre-service teachers may have such opportunities in their multicultural coursework, but in-service teachers need those same opportunities. Garmon's research illustrated the importance of giving teachers a stronger sense of critical consciousness (p. 206). It also proved that once that consciousness exists among teachers it can work to promote social justice in schools.

Lastly, Lawrence's research (2005) not only focused on the importance of providing teachers with quality multicultural professional development; it discussed the value of connecting the training to a positive school climate (p. 350). For example, Lawrence stated that it is beneficial to look at "...the implementation of antiracist multicultural practices learned through professional development" (p. 350).

Lawrence's study examined how seven teachers implemented what they learned through their multicultural professional development training. The trainings were designed to transform their current teaching practices by extending their knowledge of multicultural and antiracist curricula (p.350). This was a qualitative study and Lawrence's findings indicated that school climate such as the support of school administrators strongly influenced the amounts of multicultural and antiracist-teaching practices used by the teachers in the study (p. 350). The research of Emery (2001), Gay (2005), Howard (1999), Kunjufu (2002), and Lawrence (2005) reflected the need for antiracist multicultural professional development. Lawrence reiterated, "The growing disparity between the racial background of students who attend our nation's public schools and the teachers who educate these students often means that teachers have limited knowledge of their students' families or communities." (2005, p. 351)." The next section looks specifically at why it is important to address issues of class as part of critical multicultural education.

### **Issues of Class: An Often Overlooked Aspect of Multicultural Education**

It is important to consider the complexities and issues related to class and hooks' research examined the relationship between feminism and one's class (2000). For example, hooks discussed how "...reformist white women with class privilege were well aware that the power and freedom they wanted was the freedom they perceived men of their class enjoying" (p. 101). Her work also focused on how women of white privilege gain more power than women from lower socioeconomic classes. She pointed out that it was not until the 1990s that, "...white women had managed to incorporate race comfortably into existing gender studies without linking

this academic work to any organized feminist movement challenging white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 105). hooks felt that women of privilege often gained power through the workforce and they were less open to talking about the inequalities that exist for women of color and for women of lower socioeconomic classes (P. 105).

hooks’ writing about feminism and issues of class examined the divide between women of privilege and women from poorer backgrounds. In her examination of classism, hooks described the work of radical and revolutionary feminist and ways to help end oppressive and sexist practices (p. 108). However, hooks was discouraged because she felt that such progressive work rarely gets a platform to be heard (p. 108). hooks’ research highlighted the importance of recognizing issues of class and she viewed the feminist movement as an outlet for creating social consciousness about those issues. Clearly there should be more dialogue about issues of class as she shared in this statement, “Most American citizens do not acknowledge the reality of class difference, of class exploitation, and they continue to believe that this is a classless society.” Over eighty percent of teachers in this country are white middle to upper-middle class women and this is a topic that should be examined by both pre-service and practicing teachers.

Kincheloe and Steinberg discussed how class is often ignored in multiculturalism (p. 107). In their writing about class, the authors stated, “The concept of class is extremely ambiguous and complex, and must be used very carefully in any multicultural analysis” (p. 106). For example, Kincheloe and Steinberg emphasized that there will always be power hierarchies that often, but not

always related to one's work and or their socioeconomic status (p. 106). They also found it significant that class inequalities are often more problematic and this adds to the need for the problems to be addressed through multicultural education.

Kincheloe and Steinberg's view of critical multiculturalism stressed that it was crucial to examine "...the specific forces involved with a group's disempowerment" (p. 109). The authors made this argument because they felt that it was important to look closely at the social constructions of various groups and how those constructions are related to their status in terms of class (p. 109). Ultimately, the examination of one group's disparities or lack of opportunity allows others to see how the group has been marginalized due to a lack of power and resources (p. 109).

Their work also discussed how the dominant ideology or what the authors referred to as the "power bloc" often creates inequalities in society (p. 11). For example, society often views inequalities or unequal distribution of wealth as "normal" because society has been one way for a long period of time. In this analysis, Kincheloe and Steinberg looked at ideology in terms of one's political beliefs and they also considered how it works as, "...a belief system (that) presents as with a view of the concept as a static phenomenon removed from the cultural context in which it always operates" (p. 112).

The authors reiterated how complex it is to examine such social inequalities and they stressed for critical multiculturalists to stay away from viewing ideology with ambiguity. Instead, critical multiculturalists should examine "...ways that power works to oppress and regulate the lives of the poor and non-white" (p. 113). Kincheloe and Steinberg also discussed how technology, the media, and the corporate

world have added to this problem (p. 121). For example, many large companies do not offer employment opportunities in the United States because they move their factories to Third World countries and hire workers for much lower wages (p. 114). This practice creates oppression on multiple levels and it continues to cause more problems for already marginalized groups. There are more layers involved in this complex dialogue about issues of class, but their research gave many relevant examples supporting the need for multiculturalists to teach others to be class conscious. Finally, the authors stressed to not only be aware of oppressive issues, but to confront the causes of oppression.

#### **(i) Practical Multicultural Teaching Strategies**

Simmons & Bearden (1998) offered an excellent example of how students' lives can be connected to social science curriculum. Their example illustrated how teachers could connect to students' lives by asking questions and finding out about students' families. Students were given the opportunity to interview a relative and find out things about their family history. Following the interviews, students learned to research, work cooperatively and make connections with other subjects. For example, students learned statistical information about historical events, and learned to use their writing skills for this project (p. 152). This example demonstrated how students could be an active part in how a lesson or unit is taught. Simmons and Bearden indicated that "Teaching for the Tests" and leaving out multiple perspectives in social studies and history lessons is not the answer to teaching the standards.

Butler's research (1998) investigated the story telling patterns of her second graders. Her research was relevant because it focused on issues that inner city second



grade students' deal with on a day-to-day basis. The students in Butler's research were African American males and females. They lived at the Robert Taylor Homes Housing Projects in Chicago and attended a Chicago Public School.

Butler's research was of a qualitative nature, and Butler used a reflection process to analyze ways that students told stories that related to their lives. Her goal was to reflect on how knowledge was formed (both her knowledge and that of her students). She focused on common themes in casual conversations and whether or not students viewed the topics as reality or non-realities.

Butler stated that, "...the stories of experience became the foundation for our (meaning hers and her students' experiences) investigations into ideas of power, justice, unity, respect, resistance, oppression, and change." Multicultural-based curriculum relies on the production of knowledge based on students' experiences and Butler used these experiences to transfer them into other pedagogical sites. Butler did a qualitative case study of her students based on conversations in what was called "talk time". She varied whether or not the repeated themes in the stories were real or fictional based on follow-up conversations with a child, a parent, or an older sibling.

The findings were that knowledge came from "imagination of empowerment" as seen in the stories. This knowledge was tied to the need for survival (Butler, 1998). Butler found, "students' knowledges need to be better understood within the frameworks of their realities." Her research pointed out the need for multiple perspectives in elementary curriculum. As far as limitations, Butler's work was an informal study and the research could have been more fine-tuned with a stronger analysis of the study content.

Goodman (1996) examined the connections between social and cultural relationships. He explained that considerations must be given when viewing how media can be used with education. Goodman also suggested that educators should consider knowledge as mass media. He pointed out that when children come to school, they are filled with images seen on television, in movies, and on videos. The things children are exposed to go beyond the dominant mainstream culture.

Goodman (1996) expressed the need for students to have outlets to show accurate representations of their communities. Critical analysis is essential when examining students' life experiences. Students must be involved in projects and learning that closely examine their cultures and backgrounds, not just the dominant society. A student's world as Goodman stated, "can become the primary text." Goodman's research helped demonstrate the importance of having strong relationships between the school and community. Interdisciplinary learning through the arts and multicultural perspectives can be used as a means for strengthening and enriching students' lives. Goodman's research suggested looking at the world critically through multiple perspectives. He also indicated that students should be treated as though they are part of the mass media in our society. The examples that follow focus on how teachers used strategies to make their students more aware of social inequalities and social injustices.

Marri's (2005) research focused on how three secondary social studies teacher's respect for students' experiences helped build a sense of community and helped embrace learning about different cultures, ethnic groups, and racial groups through democratic multicultural education. The teachers in this study often used

cooperative grouping of students to help students learn from their differences (p. 1039). The themes reflected on disciplinary content and Marri noted that the “established canon” often focused on Eurocentric perspectives, but the teachers expanded the canon by incorporating nontraditional interpretations of history.

Marri also looked at the work of Delpit (1995) and her suggestions to help students understand different codes of power (p. 1044). The teachers talked to their students about the meaning of democracy in the United States and discussed inequalities of the past and present. One teacher who had what she described as a homogeneous group of students was disappointed and thought that if there were more students of color, then her class would be “more multicultural” (p. 1050). Marri thought it was important for the teachers to connect with all groups of students through multicultural education. Marri also explained that if teachers had limited perceptions of democracy, then it affected how their students came to view the meaning of democracy (p. 1050). For instance, limited perspectives of democracy “marginalizes others forms of diversity in socioeconomic class, gender diversity, linguistic diversity, diversity in sexual orientation, and religious diversity” (p. 1050).

Marri believed that it was important for the teachers to go beyond using textbooks to teach social studies. The teachers who were successful using multicultural education in their classrooms allowed students to use a variety of resources for their social studies assignments. For example, students used newspapers, magazines, and other forms of media to learn about various topics. Students were encouraged to find a variety of sources to “support their claims” and they were encouraged to question history (p. 1044). The students were actively

involved in their learning and they learned that there are multiple historical perspectives. To create a sense of democracy, students learned to have productive discussions and to listen to other opinions.

Marri's study indicated that teachers focused mainly on racial and ethnic diversity more than other forms of diversity. Marri concluded that teachers should do more to teach students about different forms of social action and to create more opportunities to increase their critical thinking skills. For example, Marri articulated that students should have appropriate time to process their activities and projects. Students must learn that they are capable of creating positive social changes that go beyond the classroom. Multicultural education goes beyond the classroom and Marri concluded that engaging discussions about diversity allowed students to experience what it meant to create positive social changes.

Lawrence's (2005) research highlighted specific factors that allowed seven teachers to be successful in teaching antiracist multicultural curricula (p.352). The courses focused on anti-racist multiculturalism and they were taught by teams of instructors from different racial backgrounds (p. 352). Lawrence stated, "the primary goal was to help teachers create multicultural anti-racist classrooms in which children of all backgrounds felt affirmed and were able to achieve academic success" (p. 352). The teachers who received support from other teachers and school administrators showed high success rates in teaching from the anti-racist multicultural perspective.

Lawrence's study was useful because many studies do not focus on how a school's climate influences whether or not teachers continue to use the information learned in multicultural staff development or in multicultural-based courses (p.351).

Lawrence's work highlighted that some of the participants in her study complained that they did not get the support needed and it caused feelings of frustration. However, the teachers who worked in supportive environments went on to use the antiracist multicultural teaching skills learned through coursework and long-term professional development. Many of the teachers admitted that they previously viewed children of color and children from low-income homes as being "different", but learning more about antiracist teaching practices taught them to transform their teaching and their thinking (p. 352). Lawrence's study reiterated that teachers need to have more opportunities to learn about the students they are teaching. As one teacher in her study shared, teachers need to "dismantle the myths" they have about students from different backgrounds (p. 353). Teachers must allow time for their students to "explore issues of race" (p. 352). Lawrence's work highlighted the importance of principal and district support of antiracist multicultural curricula. Lawrence's work showed that there are often "roadblocks" that affect the way multicultural education is used by teachers and it is my hope to find out more about those obstacles. The next section will discuss the details and methodological background of my study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of my research was to determine how teacher perceptions of multicultural education influence teachers' curricula and their teaching practices. Because there is such a high percentage of white, middle-class, female teachers teaching in schools with low-income minority students, I wanted to find out more about these teachers' feelings about multicultural education. Irvine's (2003) research supports the need for teachers to learn more about multicultural education. She wrote about how approximately 44% of the elementary and high schools in the United States do not have any teachers of color (p.52). This along with the studies used in my review of literature demonstrated the need for more research of current teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. It was especially important for me to look at how white teachers' perceptions are framed because there are so few teachers of color in the teaching force.

In 2003, I conducted a pilot study on the same subject. This study helped me work through methodological problems and helped me think about how I would conduct this study. For example, I conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers from a variety of backgrounds. I was not satisfied with my findings, and for this study, I thought it would be best to conduct interviews within a small focus group. Using a focus group helped me better answer my research question and sub-questions.

## **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was used to find out how and why white teachers used or failed to use certain approaches for teaching multicultural education. Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000) described a qualitative approach to research as “a means for describing and attempting to understand the observed regularities in what people do, or what they report as their experience” (p. 96). Therefore, this relates to my work because I interviewed five teachers and used the data to determine how and why their personal backgrounds and experiences have influenced their perceptions of multicultural education. This approach also allowed me to interview the group of teachers and to explore information about their knowledge of multicultural education. It also helped to find out how the teachers used that knowledge in their teaching. The interviews permitted me to understand the participants’ perceptions of multicultural education.

In my research, I used Smith’s (2000) definition of one’s background as something that focused on issues of race, gender, and social class. Smith believed that it was important to look at an individual’s prior experiences with diversity and he feels there should be support for individualism (p. 156). I looked at similar influences and elements of teacher backgrounds when I interviewed five practicing teachers about their perceptions of multicultural education. Because the teachers who participated in my study were from relatively privileged backgrounds; it was important to discuss how their white privilege has influenced the ways they perceive multicultural curriculum. The next section will examine the data collection and methods that I used in this study.

Prior to conducting my own data collection I felt that it was essential to look at the work of past researchers to help guide me through qualitative research practices and the relationships those practices have with multicultural education. I included information about qualitative research methodologies. I found it was important to examine Banks' historical information about researchers of multicultural issues. Banks (1998) shared some insight about the history of multicultural research. He discussed the approaches to multicultural-based topics. He gave an analysis of the work of social scientists that pioneered this type of research. Banks highlighted the work of social scientists such as Kenneth B. Clark, Franz Boas, and Ruth Benedict. His historical analysis of the study of culture, race, and ethnicity helped me to understand how multicultural research came into existence.

Banks also discussed the issue of whether or not "an individual outside of the culture or color" of a group of people could accurately describe a group's culture. This was an important issue for me as a researcher because I wanted to find out about how white middle-class female teachers perceived and taught multicultural education to students of color. I interviewed five white teachers to find out how they used multicultural curricula to teach African American and Latino students.

Banks looked at both insider and outsider conceptualizations of a researcher. Although I have currently taken a leave of absence, I still volunteer at the school and I substitute teach at Pine a few times a month. I have thought about how insider status has affected my research. However, I was able to gain authentic knowledge about the teachers in my study because they were comfortable sharing personal information about their teaching practices with me. In some regards, I do not think I would have



gotten the same responses from teachers who did not know me. My insider status included the fact that I have taught at the school where the participants teach, I am a white middle-class teacher, and I have taught the same population of students. I have participated in academic and school-based committees with some of the teachers who will participate in my study. However, I have not worked on an administrative level; I have worked on the same professional level as the teachers who participated in the study. I do not think that it was a problem that I had some insider status and I gathered authentic research about five white teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. I have been studying multicultural education for over a decade, and I have read about it and taken several classes that dealt with multicultural studies. However, I did my best to remain unbiased and allowed the participants to share their own information. For example, I worked as guide in the discussions if the participants asked for my assistance, but the main information came from the participants' experiences with multicultural education.

Banks (1998) discussed insider status to some degree, but I wanted to identify some examples of teacher research through an insider's lens. To find out more, I looked at the work of Metz and Page (2002). Metz and Page wrote an article in response to some of the issues Anderson had with practitioner research and whether or not this should be considered valid research. The author's responded to Anderson's view of insider research as often becoming a "murky swamp" (Anderson, 2002). Although the article focused on levels of authenticity of practice-based research, it connected with my insider status of research.

Metz and Page (2002) described on-site research as becoming more and more common due to issues of time and money. They rationalized that doctoral students with full time teaching jobs have limited time to conduct research projects at other schools. Metz and Page also believed that on site research was important because it was often used to solve problems of immediate practice. They went on to discuss differences between the research of social scientists and educational researchers.

Although my research did not focus on an analysis of my own teaching practices, I needed to be cognizant of the biases that could result from conducting research on my former coworkers. Throughout my research, I thought about the debate regarding what should be considered “real research”. I began to understand that although research at my former school site would be more convenient, I had to be prepared to give evidence to illustrate that it is “real research” and not simply research of convenience. The teachers who agreed to participate in my study preferred to meet at my home because they shared that they would be more comfortable if the interviews were not done at the school.

There are various reasons why I used focus group interviews as the main source of data in my research. Madriz (2000) discussed how focus groups are used to highlight issues and how the use of a feminist and postmodern framework helped to share multiple voices in a research study (p. 835). Her work addressed issues such as why it was crucial for the participants to be comfortable and at ease when they were interviewed. For example, Madriz shared that in some cases; participants of focus groups actually “find the experience more gratifying and stimulating than individual interviews.” (p. 836). According to Madriz, a “safe environment” allowed a

participant to interact with other members of the focus group and ultimately he or she felt more comfortable sharing personal experiences and opinions. For these reasons, I conducted the interviews away from the work environment. Because the interviews took place away from the school, the teachers were more open to discussing sometimes difficult topics related to race and how it affected their views of multicultural education.

Madriz also stressed that a focus group is “a collectivistic rather than individualistic research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants’ attitudes, experiences, and beliefs” (p. 836). This point reiterated how focus groups helped me gain knowledge about a variety of different perceptions of multicultural education. Although the participants were all white, female elementary school teachers, they had different ideas, experiences, and overall knowledge of multicultural education. Madriz indicated that one-on-one interviews had been more commonly used in both qualitative and quantitative research (p. 836). However, focus groups could work to create more of what Madriz called “collective testimonials” (p. 836). Her research shared how focus groups gave women more opportunities to discuss their experiences and to be honest about how they truly deal with those experiences (p. 836). This was especially important for my research because I wanted to find out what has shaped the teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education. I have done pilot studies using one-on-one interviews and I found that teachers often gave generic responses and tried to answer the questions based on what they thought I wanted to hear about multicultural education. The opportunity to use a focus group for this study gave me more layered and authentic

information about multicultural education. Madriz's work also allowed me to see that interviewing women in a comfortable environment and letting them share ideas about multicultural education could possibly create ways for them to eventually act as change agents in their school (p. 848). However, there are some negative aspects of using a focus group. For example, Madriz indicated that at times, the presence of the researcher could interfere with the discussion. She also shared that some researchers believe interviews done off-site are not as authentic because the participants are away from where their work takes place. As I discussed earlier, the participants indicated that they were more open to sharing information off-site.

Madriz's (2000) work was very specific about how and why focus groups are beneficial for research studies and the work of Edmunds' (1999) also gave analysis of the benefits of doing research with focus groups. Madriz discussed the importance of being well-organized. For example, she stated that the interviewer should be cognizant of the time commitments involved when participants attend the focus group meetings. She stated that the researcher should spend adequate time planning and preparing for the interviews. Things as trivial as materials used for the interviews were very important. I used the 56 pages of field notes and the transcriptions to form the main themes in my research.

### **Methods**

Five white, middle-class women participated in a focus group-based research study about their perceptions of multicultural education. The data in my study consisted of five group interviews. All of the teachers were present at each interview which lasted approximately two hours. At the completion of my interviews, there

were 56 pages of transcriptions taken from the taped interviews. Once I reviewed the tapes, I contacted each teacher by phone or by e-mail to go over any questions I had about their responses. I also reviewed the teachers' responses about their personal perceptions of multicultural education and gave each teacher the opportunity to add or change any of the information.

The information in my study was gathered in the form of interviews. Prior to completing this research, I consulted the work of Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) about various methods used for coding interview data. Bogdan and Biklen described data as including any of the following: interview transcripts, field notes, newspaper articles, "official data", and written memoranda (p. 172). As mentioned in the previous section, I included taped interviews, field notes (written after the interviews), and notes taken during the interviews.

I coded my research without the use of a computer program. This is my first large research project and rather than struggling with a new computer program; I decided to focus on the details of the research. Bogdan and Biklen suggested that new researchers often make that choice and once they are more familiar with the transcription process, they may choose to use a computer program to help with the coding (p. 172).

The interviews were conducted in a focus group format and the teachers were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The name of the school and any individual associated with the school were also given fictitious names to protect their identities. I used well-planned questions, I took detailed field notes, and I used audiotapes to record the interviews. The audiotapes allowed me to review and

transcribe the interviews. As for the transcriptions, I listened to the tapes and took handwritten notes and copied what the participants said, and finally, I typed 56 pages of notes. Once I transcribed the interviews, I met with the focus group to make sure I fully understood the themes of the discussions. The participants had the opportunity to ask me questions about the research and I was available to answer any questions they had about the about the interviews. If I needed clarity about a discussion or if I needed to make sure that I had a full understanding of the participants' interview answers, I contacted the participants by phone or e-mail.

At this point, the teachers have not contacted me with any further questions, and at the final focus group meeting the teachers stated that they had no further questions. Once I completed the transcriptions I e-mailed the participants their individual explanations of multicultural education. At that time, Janet was the only participant who wanted to add more information to her previous response.

I looked for themes in the research and I put the themes into folders. Bogdan and Biklen discussed the importance of keeping the themes organized and they suggested that researchers should stick to between 30 to 50 codes. Once my themes were established, I searched for information in the interviews that fit into the themes. Bogdan and Biklen strongly recommended that researchers to pay close attention to notes and memos as well as field notes when they are reviewing research for coding purposes (p. 173). I did all of the transcriptions myself and reviewed the tapes and recorded the information by typing my own transcriptions.

Coding the research helped me determine what information was valuable from the taped interviews. Bogdan and Biklen shared that when researchers transcribe

their own research, they should go over the data multiple times because it may be necessary to modify coding categories that later seem insignificant (p. 173). Reviewing the research also helped create an outline for my paper (p.173). Bogdan and Biklen shared that themes often overlap which was another reason to constantly review the research (p.173).

Bogdan and Biklen recommended keeping several clean copies of the notes because they are used over and over again for coding purposes (p. 175). I kept folders with extra copies of my handwritten notes and I had access to obtaining additional copies of the transcriptions and field notes saved on my computer. I referred to the literature used in my study to help in my analysis about the teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. For example, I examined how white privilege has influenced their multicultural teaching practices. I also looked at studies about teacher training related multiculturalism and I determined how the teachers in my study were or were not influenced by courses or professional development. As discussed, I used critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy as the theoretical frameworks for my study.

### **Background Regarding Pine School**

Pine School is over one hundred years old and is considered a neighborhood school, meaning the children who attend the school are not bused there. The school is located on the west side of Chicago. There are grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade at Pine School. According to the CPS Department of Data Management Office of Research, Evaluation, and Accountability (2006) 99% of the students who attend Pine are considered low-income. Approximately 52% of the student

population is Hispanic (majority are from Mexican American or Puerto Rican backgrounds) and 47.9% of the students are African American, and 0.1% of the students are Native American. Many of the students at Pine struggle academically. The school has been on academic probation in the past and often borders on re-entering academic watch due to not enough students meeting levels of achievement on standardized tests. There are over 50 teachers at Pine and there is a high turnover rate for new teachers. The staff at Pine consists of teachers from a variety of cultures and backgrounds, but a large percentage of teachers are white middle-class women. The *Illinois School Report Card* (2006) listed 77.2% of the teachers in Chicago Public Schools as women and 48.3% of those teachers were white (p. 2). The average stay for new teachers who come to Pine is between three and eight years. There are approximately 1200 students attending Pine Elementary School. At the time of this study, the school principal had been at Pine for over twenty years. However, the principal retired shortly after my interviews were completed.

### **Participants in the Study**

Five elementary teachers at Pine School in Chicago were asked a series of twenty in-depth, open-ended questions (See Appendix B). My pilot study done in 2004 helped me find teachers who were willing to participate in my study. In 2005 school year, I announced that I would be conducting a study and I handed out a flyer inviting teachers to participate in my study on teacher perceptions about multicultural education. The five teachers who agreed to participate in my study were white, female teachers between the ages of 24 and 39 years old. Their levels of teaching experience ranged from three years to sixteen years.



Each teacher was provided with a copy of Alice McIntyre's book, *Making Meaning of Whiteness* (1997) because I thought it would be helpful for the teachers to read about some of the issues brought up in McIntyre's research on pre-service white teachers. In my interviews, the focus group discussed issues of white privilege and topics that were difficult to address. At the time of the interviews, the teachers brought up a few examples from the book, but they did not spend much time discussing the book. They shared that they would read the book in their spare time and many believed because they had taught for a number of years the examples in the book were more relevant for beginning teachers. With that said, the book did not play a large part in the research design. The following is information about the five participants. I began my descriptions of the teachers who had the most teaching experience and ended with the teacher who was the newest to the teaching field.

The following section describes information about the participants, the school where the participants work, and the information about the participants' perceptions towards multicultural education.

### **Pam**

Pam teaches first grade at Pine. She has been teaching for over sixteen years. Her first three years were spent teaching at a Catholic school in Chicago. Pam attended Catholic school from kindergarten through high school and she wanted to experience teaching in the parochial school system. However, after three years, Pam chose to teach for the Chicago Public Schools because she could not live on the salary given at the Catholic school. Pam has been teaching at Pine since leaving the Catholic school.

Pam attended a mid-sized state college in the Midwest where she received her teaching degree. Pam went on to get a master's degree in education from a small private college in Chicago. Pam also attended trainings through CPS to be a school literacy trainer. She served as a literacy trainer for the primary levels at Pine for two years. In that position, she worked as a reading coach and assisted teachers with their language arts programs. For budgetary reasons, Pam's position as a literacy trainer was cut and she went back to the first grade classroom in 2003. Pam is very passionate about teaching and describes her teaching style as one that makes connections with students through literacy-based activities. For example, Pam uses books to generate conversations with the students about their lives and experiences. Pam is well respected by the staff at Pine, the students, and by many of the parents. Pam is single and she is in her late thirties. At the end of this study, Pam informed me that after teaching at Pine for 14 years, she was going to teach at a charter school in Chicago. Pam felt that it was time to try teaching in a new environment and she had heard good things about the charter school. Pam has recently completed her National Board Certification.

### **Maggie**

Unlike Pam, Maggie did not receive a bachelor's degree in teaching. Maggie is from a city in the Midwest and she attended a small private university for her undergraduate degree. Maggie received a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in modern dance. Maggie then moved to Chicago and worked in the technology department at a bank and after two years, she was ready to move on to a more rewarding career. Maggie attended a large private university in the Chicago

area and received a master's in education. Maggie worked at a CPS school on the south side of Chicago for one year before coming to Pine to teach second grade. Maggie has taught at Pine for six years.

When asked about why she chose to be a teacher, Maggie responded by saying, "I didn't think I wanted to be a teacher because everyone in my family...all the women in my family were teachers, so I worked hard against it. But...I loved working with kids." Maggie had been a camp counselor and it was a reminder that she wanted to get back into working with children. Her graduate work gave her a strong background in literacy-based teaching. She is well organized and is considered a leader on her grade level team of four other second grade teachers. Maggie is not afraid to voice her opinions to school administration and other teachers respect her for that trait. Maggie is in her early thirties and is the only participant who is married. At the end of the study, she announced that she was expecting a child. Maggie moved out of state and she plans on taking some time off from teaching so that she can be with her baby.

### **Shelly**

Shelly has been teaching at Pine for three years. She did not receive an undergraduate degree in teaching. Shelly attended a large university in the Midwest and received a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology and art history. Shelly moved to Chicago and worked in the corporate world for a short time before she decided to earn a master's degree in education. She attended a mid-sized private university in the Chicago area. Shelly also received training from a local university's center for school improvement. In their first years of teaching, Shelly, Brenda, and

Janet were also part of a CPS organization called The New Teacher's Network. Shelly has taught both third and fourth grade. She is the recipient of several grants and she uses the funds to enhance her curriculum. Her art background has influenced her teaching. Shelly enjoys learning and she is always looking for new opportunities to learn the latest in educational strategies. Because Shelly has taught third grade she shares information about the stresses of teaching a grade and having those test scores count toward the school's total testing goal. Shelly attended a university that focused on teaching urban education and says she could not see herself teaching in the suburbs.

Shelly is also from the Midwest, is single and in her late twenties. Shelly is Jewish and is the only non-Christian participant in the study. Like Pam, Shelly wanted to try teaching at another school because she grew tired of the push for constant test preparation at Pine. Shelly was offered a job at the charter school she spent time at for professional development. Shelly and Pam are not teaching at the same charter school.

### **Brenda**

As with all of the teachers in this study, Brenda is also from the Midwest. Brenda attended a large state college in the Midwest and received her bachelor's degree in social work. Brenda has been teaching sixth grade at Pine for three years. When asked about her choice to become a teacher she shared, "I'm not actually really sure why I became a teacher. I'm still questioning that decision." Like Maggie, Brenda's mother and grandmother were teachers and in some ways that influenced her decision. Brenda originally came to Chicago because she wanted to get a

master's degree in social work. However, she says she made the decision to "try teaching" and she received a master's degree in teaching from a mid-size private college in the Chicago area.

Brenda added an interesting perspective to the study because she teaches middle school level students. Brenda struggles with more serious behavioral problems in her classroom and she shared that it is difficult because she does not experience the warmth the primary teachers get from their young students. Brenda is in her early thirties and is in the process of earning her National Board Certification. Brenda's grade level is departmentalized and she teaches sixth grade language arts. Brenda is optimistic about the new administrative staff at Pine and hopes there will be more support for behavioral problems.

### **Janet**

Janet is the youngest participant in the study. Janet is in her early twenties and like Pam, she grew up in Chicago and attended Catholic schools from grade school through high school. Janet received her bachelor's degree in education with an emphasis on special education from a small private college in the south. Janet described the school as one where nearly all of the students were from similar backgrounds. Janet stated that most of the students were from white middle-class or upper-middle-class families. Janet is the only teacher in the study who does not have a master's degree, but plans to earn a master's degree in education.

Janet is the newest to the teaching field. She gave an open and honest perspective of what it is like to teach at a large urban school like Pine. Like Pam, Janet looked into teaching at a parochial school, but she knew she could not live on

what they were willing to pay her. Janet knew she wanted to teach in the city, so she came to CPS. Janet said she always knew that she wanted to be a teacher and she said, “I sometimes take the job too hard. Like I bring it all home and it drains so much out of me, but I feel like this is my time when I don’t have a family and I can stay until six o’clock at night.” Janet is very devoted to teaching and gives teaching a lot of attention. Janet is honest and admits that if she were married with children, she might not have the time or energy to give her job the same commitment.

Janet will begin a masters program this fall and she will take evening classes. Janet has decided to teach first grade rather than special education. She feels that she can reach more students by teaching in a “regular” classroom. Janet became annoyed with some of the bureaucracies involved with teaching special education and she wanted to have more time for her students. Janet hopes to learn more about multicultural education in her graduate program.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DESCRIPTION, INTERPRETATION, AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

This chapter focuses on the information gathered from the interviews with five white female teachers from middle to upper-middle-class backgrounds. The chapter describes and analyzes the data from the focus group meetings; this information will help answer the questions about teachers' perceptions of multicultural education

#### **Description of the Findings**

##### **Similarities in the Participants' Backgrounds and Experiences**

As shared in the descriptions of the participants, all of the teachers are white middle-class to upper-middle-class women. Janet and Pam received bachelor's degrees in education and knew early in life that they wanted to be teachers. Brenda, Maggie, and Shelly decided to teach after working in other fields for a few years after graduating from college. Brenda and Maggie were somewhat influenced to enter the teaching field because some of their family members were teachers. All of the teachers shared that teaching was a rewarding career and they all had rather strong opinions about not wanting to teach in the suburbs.

The women in my study are all from the Midwest, and all but Janet attended universities in the Midwest. All of the teachers in the study except for Janet earned master's degrees in education from private colleges in the Chicago area. However, none of the teachers attended the same universities for their undergraduate or graduate work. All of the women are from two parent families and all admit to living

rather privileged childhoods. There will be more discussion on this topic later in the research.

### **Theme I: Teaching as a Service-Oriented Career**

#### **Teaching in the Inner-city: Teaching as a Mission**

At the first focus group meeting, the five participants were asked a series of questions about why they chose to be teachers and why they chose to teach for Chicago Public Schools.(see Appendix A). As a whole the teachers in my study stated that they chose to teach for public schools because the pay was higher than the private schools paid and they could afford to live on the salary. However, when asked why they preferred teaching in the city, the five teachers had strong opinions about why they chose to teach in the city versus teaching in the suburbs. The following section will examine some the reasons the teachers gave for wanting to teach in a low-income urban school in Chicago.

Maggie described her first teaching experience as being one in which she was at a “hardcore” Chicago Public School. She taught at the school for one year because her teaching mentor taught at the school and suggested that Maggie give it a try. Pam, Janet, Shelly, and Brenda asked Maggie whether or not the school was more hardcore than Pine School and Maggie gave this response:

Yes, we [Maggie and her mentor] were the only two white people in the entire building which I didn’t think would be a big deal, but it was a really big deal. Not [a big deal] to us, but I quickly learned what it felt like to be a minority. Like what they would say, how they would treat you. It was pretty hardcore and they [the administration] mismanaged their money and spent it all on



office supplies. Uh, everything that was in the classroom, the teacher bought or it was donated. I thought I was going to teach in the suburbs if I was going into this career because that's what I knew. That's how I grew up. When I went to school I went to a very small girl's private school. I thought it was the greatest thing ever until I worked with this group of kids and it was the most rewarding thing ever.

Maggie struggled with her first teaching experience, but she felt that it was very valuable. She ignored the administrative problems and focused on helping the students. Maggie summed up the experience by stating, "To have two weeks of horrible experiences and to have ten minutes with one kid who got it or felt better about himself; it totally changed everything and it was worth it." Maggie also shared that she could not deal with the entitlement wealthy suburban parents felt and she thought education should not be based on money: "I did not want be part of that because I don't believe you should get ahead because of your background or money."

Janet joined the conversation by talking about the notion of not "going to the other side". She shared that her parents and others might not always understand why she chose to teach at a school like Pine, but she shared, "I think deep down they all don't think they could do what I do, but in the suburbs they think they could and would do a better job." Janet is a new teacher and that statement indicated that she gets frustrated and she doesn't think that many of the people in her life truly understand what her job entails. She went on to say, that she believes "deep down" the parents of the students at Pine do understand and respect her.

The conversation went back to a discussion about issues of entitlement and the teachers agreed that working to build a relationship with a parent at an urban school is more rewarding than building one with a privileged parent. Pam simply shared that she continues to teach for CPS and specifically at Pine because it is more challenging. I ask her to explain and she shared that it is somewhat like a mission to teach children from such an underprivileged environment. Brenda's background in social work is what drove her to teach for CPS. Brenda views teaching at Pine as sort of a service. She wanted to work with children at an inner-city school.

Throughout the research, the teachers talked about wanting to do more by teaching at an urban school, but they tend to go back and forth about their frustrations and those frustrations will be shared throughout the themes. McIntyre (1997, 2001) and Howard (1999) discussed the phenomenon of white teachers acting as "white knights" and believed that in some ways they were saving poor children of color. The teachers in this study adhered to this phenomenon because they often talked about how they preferred working with students in a low-income and urban setting rather than teaching at a school in an affluent suburb. The teachers shared that they wanted to do something that made a difference and that helped society. Because the teachers felt that children from privileged backgrounds did not need "to be saved" by them, they felt that it was their duty to help poor children of color. In some ways, these teachers were doing what McIntyre and Howard described in their interpretations of white knights because they made a choice to teach underprivileged children.

## **Theme II: Assumptions about Race and Class**

### **The Teachers' Perceptions of their Whiteness**

The teachers often debated whether or not they were making perceptions based on race or class and this section discusses specific examples of each perception. Brenda, the sixth grade teacher, seemed to have more problems with her students and how they treated her. She attributed those problems to her whiteness. For example, when asked about white privilege she said, "What do we do and how do we react when a kid says, "*White people are ugly*"? Brenda shared that that was just an example of how some of her students act when they are confronted with discussions about stereotypes. She and the other teachers also talked about how many of the students view the teachers' whiteness. For example, Brenda is not comfortable sharing much information about her background and her students often have a "debate" about whether or not she is white. When describing her students' perceptions of "whiteness" she explained,

Sometimes they [the African American students] think we [the white teachers] are Mexican or Puerto Rican, that's white to them. So you get out a map and I would just try to prove that maybe there are some white people who are ugly and there are some who are not. It just comes from I don't know. A lot comes from... I mean they must hear it from somewhere because I had a girl in my room and her mom came and talked to me accusing me. She said she was going to the office because I only help the white kids; meaning the Hispanic kids.

Brenda is quite aware of her whiteness and white privilege, but she is frustrated by her students' misconceptions of it. She continued to talk about the African American girl who told her mother that she only called on the "white kids" and she tried to prove that it was not the case, but the girl refused to believe her. Brenda confided in some other teachers about the accusations and they told her not to worry about it, but it bothered Brenda and she felt helpless. Clearly, both Brenda and her student had some race related frustrations.

Brenda sees her whiteness when she considers the students' background knowledge of the world. This comes out when she is teaching literature to the students and she tries to get them to relate to certain books. She felt that by saying "I see it in their background"[meaning the students' lack of background knowledge about a subject] that her answer was "so teacher", but she felt that it is very telling when the students are not familiar with certain topics. Brenda believed her students should be familiar with more topics relating to life beyond their neighborhood, and she tried to make connections through literature. Brenda found it frustrating and she shared, "But, having most of our kids having such limited experiences um it really makes a huge difference." Brenda, Shelly, Maggie, and Janet shared that they felt their privilege because when they were young, their parents took them places and they had a lot more exposure to the world than their students do.

Pam was not from such a privileged background and she did not travel much as a child, but she learned about the world through books that her mother read. In addition, Pam's mother talked to her about different subjects and she visited the library regularly. Unfortunately, there is not a library within walking distance to Pine,

but Pam continues to use books as a way of exposing the students to new things. Perhaps Pam was not as frustrated because she has been teaching for sixteen years and has learned not to make assumptions about what the students should and should not know. Brenda argued that it was not as easy for the older students to visualize things through books. Pam responded,

You have to try and give that to them. If I was teaching somewhere else, in a more privileged school, I really think it wouldn't be much different. I feel like I'm giving them a lot, but I guess they are not bringing a lot to the classroom and...

Pam paused, and Janet said that she wondered what it would be like to teach the students at schools in affluent neighborhoods. Janet seemed awestruck when she was reading a book about airplanes with her students and only one of them had actually traveled on an airplane. The teachers continued to share stories comparing their issues of privilege to what most of the students have not been exposed to. The conversation about white privilege focused on comparisons of an "us versus them" theme relating to the consequences of not growing with the benefits of being privileged. Brenda often struggles with her whiteness and explained in another example:

I think that one of the big barriers would be my own life being so different and I don't know if it's being white. Um I can't, I mean after almost three years like I still can't understand some of their line of thinking. Then I always think like as I'm screaming to them about their behavior, am I imposing my way of thinking? But if you want to be a civilized person that people will want to

interact with, you have to be able to use some sort of manners. [Gives examples of inappropriate behavior] Like who says that? Because I am continuing to be shocked everyday, just like how disrespectful and like little things they just don't know like: how to act in public, how to talk to someone in a normal conversational tone, how to interact socially without hitting. I still don't understand and I don't know if I ever will.

The teachers came to the conclusion that many of their feelings about the students were based on issues of class. Although they questioned whether or not their assumptions were based on race or class, they often gave examples that related to issues of poverty. For example, Pam talked about how African American students from middle-class or working-class backgrounds have more exposure to literacy based on parental involvement, educational background of the students' parents, and experiences such as travel and going to museums. The teachers tried to understand the circumstances of the students and their parents, but they continued to share examples of how they felt class created barriers at Pine.

### **Survival**

The participants discussed assumptions they tend to make about the students at Pine and many of those assumptions are based on their own experiences. Janet discussed how it was hard to believe that only one of her students had been on an airplane. She admitted to having a difficult time realizing how different life is for the children at Pine. Once the teachers began discussing this topic, they were able to think beyond their own experiences and they began thinking about what the students must do simply to survive. Violence was part of the way in which students survive at

Pine. The teachers discussed their feelings about the amount of violence that occurred at Pine and they were also vocal about their assumptions regarding how they believed the students should act at school. The following conversation discusses some of those assumptions about how they think the students should act:

Janet: Well we know that [how to act] because we were taught that [social skills and manners]. If they've never been taught that...

Brenda: Why is it that you can't just talk to your friend? Why do you have to hit him? It just overwhelms me. I'm not only saying manners, but social interaction. I will say to them, "In all my years in school I never would see a child curse at a teacher." And I know they're like, "That's you coming from your little white world in suburbia." But that's not OK. I don't know, is it OK?

Maggie: I think it's really tricky, I don't know. Like everyday when they go outside I see the parents interaction with their kids and I watch and I'm so curious about their experiences and what they're coming to school with and what they expect from us as their primary care givers for those five and a half hours- why they react to some forms of communication and why they don't react to other forms of communication. And for me I feel like they have to hold these two sets of rules from outside on the street and the Pine rules. I think that's so hard for them to have two drastically different ways to interact and to behave and these expectations, so we have an unbelievable job to teach them the rules of school and get them to follow them.

Field Note: Maggie's point is very important and white teachers need to have a clear understanding that students who live in poor urban areas have to have the survival skills to deal with their daily encounters in their neighborhoods. Some students are better at switching from one set of rules to another and others may see more value in the rules of the street.

Janet: Because if I'm going to have to pick between, if I have two sets of rules and I'm going to have to pick one; I'm probably going to pick the one that I need to survive on the street. I mean it sounds so parental, but I'm going to pick the rules that help me survive better on the street. That's what I'm going to pick regardless of whether my teacher thinks I'm respectful because that has more value to them.

Maggie: Right. That's our fundamental issue and I don't think we talk about it or address it and there's no accountability for parent involvement or showing interest in your child's school life or you know what's our credibility for these kids; not much. We have to prove ourselves everyday to them whereas, anyone else in their other life they are automatically credible. You know someone else's parent is more credible than I am.

Janet: A neighbor who doesn't even know them.

Maggie: Right. There we are between a rock and a hard place. In a way it's great to do the educational piece of exposing kids to a bigger world through new read alouds [books read aloud to the children] and all of that, but they need to know about it, they can't just live in their box. I don't think they are getting at the real issues.



Shelly: It's sad that that's how they have to survive. I mean why do they have to be so angry?

This was very telling information from Brenda. It was clear that she really needs support and tools to help her students and to assist her in dealing with the negative behavior that has become status quo. She attributed it to her not understanding the students and she said that she continues to be shocked. It could be because she is white and privileged, but it should be addressed. She is correct in saying that the students do need to know how to interact appropriately and they do need to know how to act in public.

Shelly did not agree that it completely has to do with privilege. She told the teachers about her professional development experience at a charter school in Chicago. She visited the school for several days and described the student population as being 100% African American and she said that most of the students were receiving free lunches; meaning they were from the same economic background as the students at Pine. Shelly could tell something was different and she stated that there was a stronger sense of accountability. It appeared the students and their parents were more involved in education. The teachers debated about what could be the answer and they shared that attendance problems at Pine was an issue and perhaps the charter school did not have those problems. They also believed that strong parental involvement is helpful and Pine struggles in that area. Finally, they agreed that the parents of students at a charter school have to apply for their children to attend the school and that is one more step in their foundation for strong parental involvement.

The teachers also discussed frustrations about their expectations for students and they talked about their frustrations with students not coming to school with basic necessities such as clean clothes and school supplies.

As stated, the teachers shared that they chose to teach in the city and they find it rewarding, but they still get frustrated when students, parents, or school administration do not support them. This information resulted from a question about white privilege, and perhaps because I asked the question early in the interviews, the teachers dodged the question (See Appendix A, question # 4) and made it more about their students.

In my examination of this theme, I found that the teachers were aware of their white privilege, but they had difficulty moving away from making assumptions about their students. For example, the teachers often compared their experiences as students with those of the students at Pine. That type of comparison can be harmful because the students come from an environment where over 99% of them are living at or below poverty level; life for students at Pine is not a privileged life.

The next section focuses on the teachers' feelings and attitudes about their experiences versus their students' experiences. It also includes feelings they have about the students' parents and how those feelings relate to their roles as teachers.

### **Theme III: Us versus Them**

#### **Competing with Two sets of Rules**

The teachers had many discussions about having to compete with two sets of rules; the rules of the street and the rules of school. This section addresses the “us versus them” phenomena including issues related to academics, class, race, and

cultural issues. The teachers talked about what Zeleman, Harvey, and Hyde (1998) considered the standards movement's *best practice* approaches to teaching. According to Zeleman, Harvey, and Hyde, an educator who is using best practice approaches in his or her teaching "is aware of current research and consistently offers clients the full benefits of the latest technology, and procedures (viii)." Those authors also believe that best practice works because it does not put all of its emphasis for school reform on new rules, but it works to make improvements in school curriculum (xii).

The teachers in my study discussed their views of best practice and explained the complexities of incorporating those beliefs into and working with the students and parents at Pine. Maggie felt strongly about using best practice as her model for teaching. She explains,

...I'm kind of where I've gotten over a feeling like I'm pushing something that parents aren't interested in or kids aren't interested in, but the research says that you have to read with your kid 20 minutes a night at least. Nothing is going to get better if we don't speak up and say it loud and push it on them. And I've had that conversation you know with a parent who's working three jobs and there is no...there's no second parent that you know (and) the neighbors are watching the kid and the parent's trying. You know we want the best for this kid. There's someone besides me who is helping the kid. So let's find someone in the community. Maybe it's a neighbor, maybe the kid can come in early to school. I work with parents to think outside of the box and get what this kid needs without compromising you know my relationship with

this parent or pushing my agenda too hard. I didn't used to push it at all. I used to think whatever they do it's all up to me. I only have them for five and a half hours and this is all I'm going to do. I'll do the best I can. But that's not good enough because we are in the business of education.

Maggie's explanation of not pushing too hard, but pushing hard enough to make connections with the parents for the benefit of the students' education is very telling because it illustrates how teachers of students who come from backgrounds different than their students need to be willing to "think out side of the box". Also, research such as McLaren's (2001) work in Toronto indicated that it is important to work with the community and to form relationships with the adults that the students interact with at home. As discussed by Maggie, this is not always an easy task, but is important for the teacher to find a caring adult to connect with and to help each child. Maggie's former outlook was to try to tackle everything in a school day, but she realized that she needed the support of the parents to be successful. Realistically, students at Pine do not always have supportive and involved parents, but Maggie has learned to seek out other resources. For example, she connected with reliable neighbors, grandparents, and older siblings. It is true that she could not always find a reliable adult for every student in her class, but she was willing to try.

Brenda was more frustrated with the lack of parental involvement and she believed that perhaps because her students are older; their parents are not as involved in their child's education. The teachers talked about their frustrations with students who do not come to school prepared to learn. They gave examples such as students who come to school sleep deprived, students who come without supplies, students

who do not do their homework, and more seriously, students who do not have necessities such as clean clothes to wear to school. Each year, teachers also deal with students who need glasses, but do not have access to them due to parents' unwillingness to take them to a clinic or to an eye doctor or when parents do not go through the proper channels to get a free pair of glasses for their child. Brenda shared,

“Not sending your child to get glasses. I don't think that is whiteness. I think that's just maybe that's neglect. But just like behavior just like last week when I had a mom where we were talking. She was threatening the whooping thing. You're threatening to beat your child!”

Brenda continued and gave examples of the explicit language used when that parent talked about the corporal punishment she planned to use if her child did not straighten up. Brenda was not comfortable sharing her statement and she asked that I not share part of her statement. However, she wanted me to share that when she spoke to the mother, her behavior startled Brenda. Brenda shared, “She said this in front of me you know and I'm just like, that's not okay. I don't care who you are, but...”

The other teachers agree that the way students at Pine are disciplined at home often involves corporal punishment such as parents hitting their child with a belt. They believe that it is a huge issue, but they question whether or not they have such a problem with it due to cultural differences. When talking about discipline, the teachers were reluctant to say that they were being racist because they disagreed with those approaches to disciplining a child. Pam, Maggie, Shelly, Janet, and Brenda

were not disciplined with corporal punishment and they thought it was borderline abusive.

Shelly shared, “The parents say, ‘I told you when someone hits you, you hit them back.’” She tried to defend herself when this type of confrontation happens and explained, “In my classroom that’s not my rule.” This situation was difficult because the students are told to do something that is not allowed in school, but their parents will not take that for an answer. Brenda asked, “I’m just saying is this me being white or is it me being like not necessarily white, but just how family...” She continued and explained that because she was bothered by students being hit by their parents, in some instances, at school that her judgment did not have to do with being white.

The teachers were clearly bothered about the ways some of the parents dealt with disciplining their children. However, what can the teachers do? Brenda suggested that it was not about race and that it was about “what is simply not right.” All of the teachers viewed corporal punishment as a means of violating a child’s rights. When they referred to going beyond spanking a child, they discussed inappropriate punishments including the following: parents who beat their child with a belt or object, hit them repeatedly, pushed them, or slapped their child as a form of punishment often referred to as a whooping. More than one of the participants shared examples of parents who came to the school and physically hit or grabbed their child in front of school staff. They also shared examples of how parents pulled children out of the classroom to confront them about their behavior. The confrontations sometimes resulted in the parent taking the child into a school bathroom to hit them

because of a call from the school about bad behavior. In most cases, the teachers felt uncomfortable with such behavior and often had school security step in to stop the parents from physically confronting their child at school.

Shelly included, “Wouldn’t there be a lot of black teachers or black people who would think that is wrong?” Brenda responded, “Then you have a lot of people who just say, ‘Look the other way.’” They discussed discipline methods that some of the veteran African American teachers use in their classrooms that would not be acceptable for white teachers to use. For example, some of the veteran African American teachers are very strict with students and they keep order through a sense of intimidation. The teachers have shared that the parents are often supportive of teachers using corporal punishment, and although it is not out in the open, there have been rumors of teachers who use some forms of corporal punishment at Pine. Janet, Shelly, and Pam shared that some parents have told them that they have permission to hit their child. Shelly shared that she responds “No thank you.” The teachers do not talk to the parents about their feelings regarding such harsh discipline because they are not comfortable questioning the parents.

Janet shared that when parents give her permission to hit their child, she explains that she is not allowed to and she does her best not to make the parent feel like she is passing judgment. Maggie responded to Janet,

I think what you are getting at is that you don’t want to alienate yourself further from that parent. I feel like we have talked a lot about the parents questioning that we are different. Are they black and white issues or are they just moments of difference between what we know and what’s unknown?

Maggie's question highlighted how she is unclear on how to determine the differences between students' parents and the teachers. This question referred back to the differences in privilege and Maggie realizes that the students' and parents' experiences are contrary to her own experiences in her world of white privilege. She and the other teachers do not agree with corporal punishment, but Maggie admitted that this was a world that she was not familiar with and she was reluctant to pinpoint it as something she attributed to race.

The teachers spoke a lot about their feelings regarding how the parents dealt with their children when there was a problem at school. Janet was the only teacher who had spent time in another state teaching, so I asked her to talk about her student teaching and her pre-service teaching experiences at a low-income public school in a large city in the south. Janet responded,

We are supposed to talk about culture and not just race and I guess I don't know if it's poor families and I am thinking of when I was student teaching.

My classroom was 65% white. I think about the very, very poor white families and there were very poor black families. It's hard because it's just what we know at Pine. The families were so different in [she names the city].

I continued the discussion and asked Janet, "But were the very poor families working-class or on welfare?" Janet told me that the families were on welfare and I asked her to elaborate on the differences between those families and the families at Pine:

Janet: I think part of it was because of where I was. Because of where I was and Tennessee is a totally different place than Chicago. Things were done behind closed doors. I did not hear a lot of screaming [from parents]. Even the



very poor; I mean one of my best parents was really upset because we were having a Halloween party and she couldn't buy candy because she had her lights turned off. But I never saw that in the classroom. I mean it was private. The girl [the woman's daughter] had two shirts, but they were washed and she came to school every day. Maybe because its [poverty] more out there here?

Shelly later spoke about student perceptions of class and it related to what Janet said about the poverty at Pine being "out there" and it differed from when she taught at a school in a southern city. Shelly elaborated by sharing,

I don't think they see themselves either being at the bottom of the social class. We were talking about the 2004 tsunami and my kids were like we want to help those kids. I had kids who brought money and they don't have money. I almost started crying. Some of them don't see themselves being in that position.

The conversation continued and the teachers deliberated about how the students cope with being poor. The following is an extension of the conversation Janet and Shelly had about the students and their struggles:

Janet: I think when you say that these kids don't see themselves at the bottom of the totem pole it's all an act. They know they are at the bottom and that's why they act so tough. They try to pretend that they don't care. I think that I forget that when my students curse at me and call me bitch and all this stuff and I'm like, "Who does he think he is?" And I have all of these expectations I forget that some of them are seven years old. I forget that they are babies.

Shelly: You [meaning teachers in general] do it all of the time.

Janet [to Brenda]: You told me some of these sixth graders are so rough and tough they are what, 11 years old?

Brenda: That goes back to they are seven and they are calling you a bitch. Where is that coming from or whatever?

Janet: But I wasn't like, I mean my students have changed because I came in saying this is what's wrong, but at seven, I wasn't trying to survive. I'm not trying to dramatize, but I went home and my mom asked me how school was and she would give me a snack. My kids don't need my sticker on their chart because they're going home and you know eat a bag of whatever they want and play whatever they want. Even the ones who itch on my last nerves- it's all for a reason. I don't know how to deal with it.

Shelly: One Friday I saw Jack Williams and it was freezing cold out. Like we're leaving the hood (the teachers) to go bowling and there's Jack Williams and this other kid and they had nowhere to go. Nowhere to go and it's Friday.

Shelly continued her story about Jack Williams, an older student who all of the teachers knew because of his bad behavior. Shelly explained how it saddened her that Jack was still on school grounds long after all of the other students had left to go home. Shelly's point was that even though Jack was always in trouble at school, he still felt more comfortable staying at school than returning to his life at home. The teachers admitted that they never experienced anything like what Jack has to do just to survive. They also empathized slightly about why young children use foul language towards teachers. Janet, Pam, Brenda, Maggie, and Shelly do not believe that this is alright, but they do begin to recognize that there are different methods of

survival and the students are forced to constantly code switch. The code switching is complex, and at times, it is difficult for the students at Pine.

The teachers spoke about the frustrations that they had with the school system and with the school administrators. The final portion of this section includes examples of the teachers' disappointment in terms of those factors. For example, the *Chicago Sun Times* (2007) reported on a study done by the University of Chicago's Consortium on School Research. The study found that over 1,700 new teachers in Chicago Public Schools did not get help and support from a mandatory training program. The study was conducted during the 2004-2005 school year and it pointed out, "...only 8 percent to 13 percent of novice CPS teachers reported getting the kind of intensive help from mentors and their school..." (p. 12). The article stated that new teachers in CPS were more likely to be white. The study suggested that because less than 8 percent of the students who attend CPS are white, the novice teachers could negatively impact the children's' cultural, linguistic, and other differences based on their privileged background (p. 12). This information further illustrated the need to provide new white teachers in CPS more training and support for teaching children of color.

The teachers in my study often complained about not getting enough support or training in multicultural education at Pine. For instance, Maggie described the leadership at Pine as being "ill-equipped" and "out of touch from reality." Regarding the administration, she went on to say, "I think they operate from a philosophical or theoretical point of view where they are using guidelines from the federal government, but they are not actually looking at the kids." She is discouraged that

Pine does not teach students about respect and tolerance. As a group, the teachers shared that they felt like they were alone in their teaching and the only thing that was really pushed at Pine were strategies to improve the standardized test scores. The teachers also pointed out that multicultural education should be taught throughout Pine. Maggie summed up her thoughts by stating, “One voice in 50 classrooms is not enough.”

According to the teachers in my study, the administrators at Pine put so much focus on standardized testing, that they severely limit the creativity that once coincided with the school’s curricula. Although Maggie teaches second grade which is not a benchmark year for measuring test scores, she admitted that the pressures of NCLB has changed her teaching styles. She believes that she is always rushed and that she has no room for the once creative lessons she used when she first began teaching. Maggie described the current climate at Pine as “Test prep hell [and] on the day of the test what have they internalized is the most horrible experience.” Shelly also agreed that she rarely gets to teach fun and creative lessons because she is forced to turn in the test preparation materials that the administrators require her students to complete. Shelly referred to those materials as “a traumatic event” for the students and she estimated that eight out of twenty-eight of her students are at the appropriate grade level to successfully complete the practice exams.

Throughout the interviews, the teachers shared that they would be more open to using multicultural-based lessons in their classrooms if they received more professional development and support from the school leaders. Currently, the teachers feel isolated and pushed to spend too much of their teaching time on test

preparation. However, they admit that the students respond best to creative and fun lessons. The teachers also talked about the difficulty of being a white teacher for students of color and they gave examples of teachers who were well-respected by both students and their parents. The next section addressed the teachers' perception of black teachers at Pine.

### **The Participants' Perceptions of African American Teachers**

After the discussion about corporal punishment and how teachers often operate with two sets of rules; the participants gave examples of teachers that were respected by their students. Four of the teachers mentioned were African American women, one was a white woman, and one was an African American male.

The participants shared that in some ways they were jealous of the respect those teachers received from the students and they tried to dissect how that respect was earned. Brenda in particular wanted to be appreciated and accepted by her sixth grade students. The other teachers felt that most of their students respected them, but they often had difficulty gaining active support from the students' parents. As stated, the participants were often bothered by inappropriate behavior from the students. Brenda believed that because her students were adolescents; they did not feel the same way about their teachers as the younger students did. In other words, Brenda did not feel loved or appreciated by her sixth grade students.

The respected teachers mentioned in our discussion did not have behavior problems in their classrooms. Most of the African American teachers were well-connected with the students and their families. Those teachers and the African American male teacher often made home visits when there were problems with students. The

participants were envious that those teachers had such good connections with so many students and their parents. However, in some instances the students were often intimidated by Mrs. Brant and Mrs. Stark, two of the black teachers mentioned by the participants. Those teachers operated with a “tough love” attitude towards the students and although some of the participants thought that was a harsh approach, they were amazed by the respect the students gave those teachers. Maggie pointed out that she did not want to have a class driven by fear and intimidation and she argued that there were other ways to maintain a well-behaved group of students.

The teachers talked about two other female African American teachers who taught with more thoughtful strategies. Those teachers were not only respected, they were highly admired by the students. The teachers mentioned made strong connections with their students through literature that connected to the students’ lives. For example, the primary teacher used drama from a wide range of genres to teach her students about reading different aspects of literature. The teacher who worked with older children used poetry and history to make connections with her students. She also taught her students to challenge what is in the history textbooks. Those well-respected teachers took the time to really evaluate the required curriculum and they brought in outside sources to help the students understand what they were teaching. Finally, the teachers mentioned had strong connections with the parents of their students because their goal was to see all of the children make progress in school.

The white teacher mentioned as being a well respected teacher has taught at Pine for about six years. She teaches math and coaches some of the students in

basketball and soccer. She also mentors many of the eighth graders and does helpful things such as assisting students in the process of applying to high schools. This white teacher was described as a teacher who had exceptional connections with her students. During our discussion, the participants began to realize that being respected by the students did not necessarily have to do with race. Brenda continued to feel apprehensive and said at times she thought she was incapable of making the same connections with her students. For example, she told the group about how her students continue to ignore her, but they are always eager to please Mr. Scott, the African American male teacher who works as a discipline support staff member. Like the white teacher, Ms. Schwartz, Mr. Scott also coaches some of the school's sports. Brenda shared that she knew the students had a strong sense of admiration for Mr. Scott and she also knew that because he was African American male, Brenda believed she would not have those same connections with her students. Brenda said that she could not compete with being that type of role model for her students. However, she yearned for the respect and admiration the students showed to Mr. Scott and Ms. Schwartz.

The teachers discussed different teaching styles used among the current and former black teachers at Pine. During our discussion, they talked about teachers who had connections with the students because they spoke to the students similarly to how their mothers, aunts, or grandmothers spoke to them. The students responded to some of the black teachers almost out of intimidation. The participants did not think that this was such a good thing, but they admired the sense of order those teachers had with their students.

McGee Banks (2001) wrote about how important it was for teachers to be effective communicators and good listeners (p. 403). She believed that there were often problems between students, teachers, and parents when "...communication breaks down and when there is a lack of trust and respect" (p.403). McGee Banks' advice was significant because she had valuable suggestions for involving parents in the children's education. The teachers in my study wanted to be respected by their students and by their students' parents and as McGee Banks shared, it is crucial for teachers to really listen to the issues that are important to the both groups. McGee Banks also wrote about the problems involved when teachers do not understand a cultural group (p.410). She cautioned that misunderstandings about children and parents of different cultures and of low-income families often cause teachers to view those groups as deficient (p. 410). McGee Banks suggested for teachers to be aware of cultural and class related differences because to ignore those factors often creates more barriers between parents and teachers (p. 410).

Some of the teachers mentioned as having good relationships with students and their parents also worked as coaches or mentors. This was a key factor because it illustrated how working with students outside of class time helped the students, teachers, and the students' parents form more caring and trusting relationships.

### **Attempting to Find a Middle Ground**

Shelly discussed how often she thinks about what it must be like for the students when they are at home. There are children at Pine who are poor and come from stable homes with supportive parents. However, there are many students who do not have such experiences at home. The teachers talked about how they would like to



become more connected with the students' community, but they feel a barrier because of their race. They also shared how they admire some of the African American teachers who make an effort to make home visits. Shelly continued to talk about what it would be like for a seven year old to walk home and walk into an empty house. The teachers agreed that it would be difficult for them to go into the students' homes because they are white and they would not feel welcome. Pam shared a story about going to a shower at a Pine parent's home,

I remember going to a baby shower. A Black family hosted it for a Spanish [Latina] woman. It was very interesting and they felt like we [the white teachers] needed an escort when we left because it was nighttime. But sometimes we make assumptions about our students because for one of the assignments they had to measure a bed. And I didn't even think that they might not have a bed.

Shelly responded to Pam's story,

That blew me away my first year-finding out how they slept; five kids to a bed. At lunchtime now I just ask because I'm curious, "Who do you share a room with?" My first year I was so naïve, I was like, oh two sisters might share a room. That's totally me come from my background and not like thinking and now I think it's interesting. [Shelly shares another example of what a student might say] "Oh, I sleep with mom, dad, brother, and sister and my brother and his wife and their baby sleep in another room." It's really interesting.

Shelly realized that she had been naïve and she previously made assumptions about her students' lives based on her own experiences. She explained that she learned to make an effort to find out more about her students' lives. She did this by sitting by different groups of students each day for their twenty minute lunch. Maggie agreed that finding out something as simple as whom a child shares a room with is very telling. She added, "That's huge to understand. I mean there's been so much research on sleep deprivation and small children and how it causes attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) symptoms early on in kids because they are sleep deprived." Maggie said that this saddened her because it was something that "could get fixed" and it was not actually a disorder.

Shelly's taking time to find out about her students is a step in helping the teachers move beyond making assumptions about their students. In March of 2006, The Sun Times published a report that found only 20% of children get enough sleep. The report stated, "School-age children and teenagers should get at least nine hours of sleep a day, according to The National Center on Sleep Disorders Research at the National Institutes of Health." The study interviewed 1,602 caregivers and their children and determined that only 20% of the children were getting enough sleep each night. This is important because it is another obstacle many of the students at Pine deal with and according to the research, "Without enough sleep, a person has trouble focusing and responding quickly." The study also gave evidence that students who do not get enough sleep often receive lower grades than students who are well-rested. At Pine it is common to see students who are tired and it clearly affects the way they function at school.

The next theme discusses how the teachers feel about the amount of multicultural-based education taught at Pine. The teachers shared their opinions of Pine's attempts to make multicultural connections with the students and the teachers gave examples of what multicultural education means to them personally.

#### **Theme IV: Multicultural Education at Pine**

Banks and Banks (2001) and Sleeter and Grant (1999) discussed different approaches to multicultural education. The approaches are listed in the Review of Literature. When I asked the teachers to tell me their feelings on multicultural education they asked me to give a definition of multicultural education. I explained that there are so many opinions and perceptions about what multicultural education is that it was impossible for me to give them one definition. However, I did give some examples including the *single-group studies approach* (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 65). I also spoke about another minimalist approach such as studying one group of people per month such as African American Month or Asian American Month. Pine has a Black History themed assembly in February and a Pan American assembly in May. The conversation turned to a tone of frustration when the teachers admitted that they too were often guilty of being a part of Pine's minimalist approach to multicultural education. The following is a telling conversation between Janet and Maggie:

Janet: Well if schools are mainly doing it month to month then at Pine it's only twice a year as a school and not necessarily in the individual classroom [teachers may or may not be incorporating it].

Maggie: Yeah, it should be treated as an approach.

Me: Think about how the school addresses it.

Maggie: They don't address it; it's not addressed. They go to two themed assemblies, but there are no guidelines, no structure, no awareness. Look at what gets put on stage.

Janet: Even we were guilty of it, as cute as it was, it was supposed to be Pan American.

Field Note: Janet gave an example about a cute song her class sang about friendship for the assembly and how it did not relate to Pan American culture.

Maggie: The reason we were having the assembly...

Brenda: It's partly my fault because I didn't research [material for the assembly].

Maggie: At some point you also, we don't. You would like to make it meaningful. In the back of our heads we would. We all know what we would like for it to be like, but if the leader isn't leading that way; it's hard to get every individual teacher to put the time and effort into it. The first two years I was definitely more conscious of what I was choosing. We would do a lesson, they would read a book, they would make connections, you just run out of the... you run out of energy and if you are not collaborating it's not going to happen.

Field Note: We talked about how a fifth grade bilingual class did a presentation on poetry reflective of the work of Cesar Chavez. We thought it was very meaningful and it was what would be appropriate, but the students were not a good audience and it was difficult to hear the presenters.

That discussion was difficult for the teachers because it made them realize that Pine was not even doing month to month studies of different cultural groups. Furthermore, the two assemblies did not even include “meaningful” reflections of Pan American or African American culture. The teachers believed that the school leaders did not support or assist them in planning the assemblies. In a sense, the students would rather see lip sync performances or a dance to a popular song than listen to poetry written by students about the struggles and bravery of Cesar Chavez.

### **Personal Perceptions of Multicultural Education**

The following are specific examples of the teachers’ personal feelings about multicultural education. I obtained the information from the focus group interviews and from follow up interviews that were done on a one-on-one basis. In the follow up interviews I reviewed the information that the participants gave me about their personal perceptions of multicultural education. In most cases I did not need to contact the participants about the answers given in the original focus group sessions. However, I contacted the participants and gave them the opportunity to further explain their definitions of multicultural education. It was optional to add more to the explanations and the only participant who added some additional information about her personal perception of multicultural education was Janet.

#### **Pam’s Perception**

Pam and Janet do not think that first graders are aware of issues about race and the following conversation shared Pam’s feelings about the subject:

Pam: In first grade, race doesn't even come up. We're just learning how to co-exist with other people and they don't, I mean they know the difference, but they don't choose their friends by a race at all.

Janet: I don't see it in my classroom.

Pam: The only time I hear it is sometimes when they describe the person that they saw like "white girl" or "black girl".

Me: OK

Shelly: It's been coming up more towards the end of the year in third grade.

Pam: So that's why it's like I don't think I talk about race because we're just trying to get along with people.

Pam seemed intent that her students do not address issues of race and she believes that it is her duty to stick to academic frameworks and standards instead of moving into complex issues of multicultural education. When asked about how she adapts the *Chicago Academic Standards and Frameworks* to reflect multicultural curricula, Pam stated:

Um, I try to focus on their (her students') ethnic background and our school does some multicultural activities that focus on different months of multiculturalism. Uh, not multicultural, but African American History Month which is what most of the population I have is...but I probably don't do as much as I should.

Pam also discussed biases in textbooks and she talked about how many standardized tests do not relate to her students' experiences. When asked to give specific examples

Pam shared:

I find that if I'm teaching about different cultures and it's...we do have a lot of books that reflect the culture of the students [African American and Latino], but not always books that reflect other cultures. I don't think we are able to recognize a variety of perspectives and the students often don't see themselves in the books. The materials we have don't necessarily reflect their community and their lives. You know I can give an example of teaching reading or even math where I come across some word problems where they are making assumptions about the experiences that the children have had. Or [about] anything that the children would know that would help them solve the problem and the children can't relate to the question. I find this in reading texts as well and absolutely with standardized tests.

Throughout the interview Pam admitted that she could do more to add multicultural education to her own teaching and she also shared that Pine should do more than it is doing to teach the students about different cultures of the world. Pam feels it is important to recognize the cultural groups of the students in her classroom, but in the final meetings, she recognized that students must value and respect other cultures. Pam chose not to focus on her own identity and she admitted that she should share more information about her personal background with her students. Pam seemed to be reframing her feelings about multicultural education and she has come to the understanding that she must not allow the pressures of test preparation to stop her from teaching her students about diversity. For example, she recognizes that the standards and frameworks she uses to build her curricula are lacking in multicultural

perspectives. However, Pam has shared that she would like to make more of an effort to not only teach her students about their own cultures; she would like for them to learn about a variety of cultures. Pam would like to gain more knowledge about teaching her students about diversity and she believes that the school should offer professional development relating to multicultural educational practices. She believes such professional development is something, "...you could use over and over again no matter what kids you had, no matter where you teach."

Delpit (1995) viewed it as problematic when teachers said that they saw children not as different colors or different races, but simply as children (p.177). For example, Delpit believed that a child's color should not go unnoticed and a child's color is a part of his or her identity. Although Pam thought that she was doing something positive by being, as McIntyre (1997) described, "colorblind", she was actually contributing to what Delpit described creating as a sense of unworthiness or invisibility towards a child (p. 176). This is an example of how critical multicultural education could help teach educators to change their teaching practices. As Pam shared, she is open to learning more about multicultural education and moving beyond the "colorblind" approach would be an excellent first step.

### **Maggie's Perception**

Maggie believes that the teaching of multicultural education at Pine is not supported by the administration and it ends up being based on whether or not teachers choose to use it in their classrooms. Maggie described it as being "on your own". Maggie attributed some of her teaching of multicultural education as being strongly influenced by the civil rights movement. She also said that when she first began



teaching, she did not share much information about her own experiences, but now she shares more with her students. The following is the conversation about Maggie's decision to share more information about herself with her students:

Maggie: When I was willing to share my feelings and background and stories and traditions then they [the students] would do it. Whereas when I was asking them to do it when I wouldn't share, I didn't get very good stuff which makes sense and I didn't understand that at first.

Janet: Like how deep are you going? Are you telling them your nationality roots or are you telling them your beliefs?

Maggie: It kind of depends on...

Janet: (finishes for her) the situation?

Maggie: But I think it comes up a lot with Black History and I talk a lot about how Martin Luther King was a hero to me and is a hero to me. He's always been my hero and this is what I think and this is why I think it. So I tell them this is why I teach and I go into my philosophy on education so...

Me: It just makes it more real and complete and it's not just another lesson?

Maggie: Uh huh.

Me: So after three years when did you decide to share more about yourself?

Maggie: It just, I can't remember. I think someone asked me a question. No [excitement in her voice] I couldn't get them to understand how horrible it would feel because you couldn't do something because of the color of your skin because second graders are so developmentally into what's fair and what's not fair. I was thinking, "Why aren't they getting riled up about this?"

I did a role playing example where I said, “Be honest do you like me as your teacher or would you like to have a teacher with different colored skin?” Their response was “No”. I said, “Well what would happen if all of your parents were outside and I drove into work and they said I couldn’t teach you?” “Well, how would you feel?” And they were like, “That’s not fair!” “That’s not fair at all. Why would it matter what color your skin is?” I don’t remember all of the details of it, but we went through this whole thing and they said and came to the point that it shouldn’t matter. Like that’s ridiculous you are our teacher and we want you to be our teacher and then we started talking about friendship and the whole thing about Martin Luther King came out and it was in one of those moments where grasping for it to make sense to them [she started putting her experiences into her teaching]. I was getting angry and I didn’t want to get angry because it’s important and it’s important to me and it’s not just another unit of study [racism/ civil rights] to me.

Maggie views multicultural education as teaching the students through the lessons of the civil rights movement and she explains that she can not make the same connections with her students if she does not include her own experiences in her teaching. Janet, Brenda, and Pam have more difficulty sharing with their students, so this conversation was helpful to them because they admitted not wanting to share much about their experiences with their students. This focus group caused Maggie to re-examine her thoughts about multicultural education and she became frustrated that Pine really wasn’t doing much to teach students multicultural perspectives.

### **Shelly's Perception**

Shelly began her answer by saying she was usually consumed with testing because third grade is a testing year; meaning a year in which the standardized tests scores for third grade are measured as part of the school's overall score. Shelly is constantly forced to give her students test preparation activities and she has to hand in the results to the administrative staff. Shelly shared that she learned a lot about multicultural education in graduate school. However, she believed it was more about reading and discussing articles and it would be helpful to have on-going training as a practicing teacher. Shelly described her knowledge of multicultural education as:

...more like the things like a lot of articles about being a white teacher with African American students and how you bring your own view point in and kind of impose it without realizing where they come from. You know we come from a different background already. There were suggestions for I mean this was four years ago when I was in grad school and I wasn't teaching at the time, so a lot of just reading about it, thinking about it, but not applying it yet.

Shelly continued by saying she teaches her students about diversity as more of a conversation rather than a planned lesson. She gave an example of talking to her students about why she does not celebrate Christmas. She said that her students assumed that everyone celebrates Christmas and she treats that as an opportunity to teach her students about her Jewish background. Shelly said that it is important to teach students that there are different customs and beliefs and she believes that "otherwise Christmas is just thrown in your face." This will be discussed more in the segment about religion.

Shelly stated that art is an important tool for integrating multicultural education into the classroom. She enjoys integrating art into her lessons, but admits that the pressures of standardized testing have interfered with her once creative lessons. Now Shelly feels:

...there is very little time to do anything creative at all and it's the creative teaching that really sticks and transfers. And it is unfortunate because there is so much pressure and the kids are so far behind and I rarely get to teach social studies, science, or do any special art project. I remember being in elementary school and all of the excitement of doing that kind of stuff.

Shelly has knowledge of teaching students about diversity through multicultural education, but she believes that she needs more support and professional development to assist her and expand on her current knowledge base. Shelly believes Pine does not value multicultural and creative teaching because there is so much pressure to increase the school's test scores.

### **Brenda's Perception**

Brenda shared that she does not like to give students information about her background. She said that she answers questions the students ask her, but she does not volunteer information about her background. Brenda also shared, "They ask, 'Are you Irish?' and I answer, but I don't volunteer information. But, I guess it just doesn't work itself in very well. There's just not enough time. It's like where are you going to fit it in? So I just you know..."

Brenda stated that she and the other sixth grade teachers are trying to teach the students about stereotypes. They use literature to try to make connections with the

students, but Brenda got frustrated because she said the students do not take the lessons seriously and they do not seem to care about learning about tolerance or about different cultures. She also shared that as Jenny and Shelly indicated, Brenda often teaches about multicultural education "... as it comes up [and it] is like someone will say something negative about someone else." Throughout the interviews, Brenda was disheartened about how disrespectful her students are towards one another and she said, "... I don't know how much difference it's making because they are not exposed to a lot of diversity either." Brenda would like to teach the students about multicultural education by making literary connections. She said she has tried, but her students do not seem interested in learning about other cultures. Brenda indicated that if she got more administrative support to help with her students' behavior issues; she could teach her students more about multicultural education.

### **Janet's Perception**

As stated, Janet is the youngest and the newest teacher. She benefited a lot from the discussions and she was very open about her feelings towards teaching multicultural education. In the interviews, Janet admitted that she was overwhelmed as a second year special education teacher and she did not think she could focus on multicultural education because she felt the pressure to teach her students to read. Janet viewed multicultural education as adding another component to her curriculum and because she was so overwhelmed, Janet did not think she could handle it. She also shared that she was concerned because she is not sure how to approach it and she did not know if her students would understand. After sharing that information, Janet retracted her statements by saying, "But, what if I address it from another angle and

we all understand each other first? It would make the teaching so much different, but I haven't gotten into it yet." After thinking about her fears that her students would not understand multicultural education and getting feedback from the other teachers in the study, Janet decided that it would not be fair to not try using multicultural-based curricula in her classroom.

Janet admitted to getting a small amount of multicultural training in college, but she wanted more support and more information about actually using it in her classroom. Janet thought that she has not made strong enough multicultural connections with her students and she revealed, "I just think that sometimes there is such a barrier between what I think and what they think and I'm not sure how to address it." She then described reading books to her students to try to make cultural connections. Janet went on to say that she gets the information from the books, but does not know how to move into making deeper multicultural connections with her students. She continued her self critique by describing her multicultural curricula as being "...a scattered read aloud here and there". She went on to say, "I mean I'm embarrassed to say it, I'd like to change it [the amount of multicultural education she uses in her classroom]. When asked about how she teaches her students about diversity Janet explained,

When I first began teaching at "Pine" Elementary, I had a very different view of multicultural education. When entering this school populated with African American and Hispanic students, I initially thought a curriculum sprinkled with read-alouds from these two cultures meant that I was teaching them about different cultures. How wrong I was! I now know that "multicultural"

encompasses more than just race and/or ethnicity. I now attempt to integrate information from other religions, beliefs, socioeconomic standards, and family dynamics. These are the aspects of multiculturalism that I try to integrate into my curriculum now. Sometimes I think it comes up casually and I don't always plan it. Sometimes someone will say something then we will talk about it, but I don't know if I necessarily plan to teach diversity of any kind in my classroom.

Diversity is described by Janet as something that is not always a planned curriculum, but rather it is addressed as needed depending on how it comes up in a conversation. Janet is open to learning more about multicultural education and she understands that she needs to make more multicultural connections in her classroom. At the end of the focus group interviews, Janet decided to enroll in a master's program where she hopes to learn more about how to use multicultural education in her classroom. She also changed her opinion about multicultural education and in the previous statement, Janet showed progress in expanding her thoughts about multicultural education.

### **Obstacles**

Throughout the interviews, the teachers referred to some common obstacles that they believed interfere with their ability to teach creative multicultural lessons. Those obstacles included the following: poor classroom behavior from students, lack of administrative support such as multicultural-based professional development, and lack of time due to the pressures of standardized testing. Although there is no clear solution to solving these problems; it was evident that the teachers would make more

effort to use multicultural-based lessons in their classrooms if they received support within those areas. Standardized testing and constant test preparation has taken away creative and fun academically enriching lessons that the teachers experienced as youngsters. The teachers have admitted to increased levels of stress because they are always worried that there is not enough time to get through all that they are expected to teach their students. All of the teachers are saddened with the direction education is taking and they blame the No Child Left Behind Law. The following conversation illustrates how the teachers feel about the lack of creativity in their current methods of teaching;

Me: If you are saying those creative activities are the things that stick then why not do more?

Shelly: Because it is too time consuming to squeeze it in. You know it's like so much stuff and you want to do something fun, but it takes time. I'm drained from all of that [the required test preparation] so I don't really have the energy to plan and also behavior- behavior is part of it.

Pam: I just feel like they are never given the opportunity to do fun things, so then how will they know how to behave?

Janet: I find myself justifying that it has to be connected to something I just read about. I don't think it has to be connected to something in the curriculum then it's forced and it's not creative stuff that they do connect with. Right now that's all I'm willing to give. I don't know if that came out right, but now I can only do that.



Maggie also shared that when she first started teaching she was much more creative with her teaching. She said now she makes sure she does not spend too much time on one subject so that she will cover all of the subjects in the short school day. Maggie explained:

The thing is watching from the outside and being the grade just below a testing year- watching from the outside and knowing the demands and knowing where my kids are coming from academically...it's... I feel so conflicted because I know a majority of my kids will not be prepared to tackle the stuff that I know is going to get thrown at them. Not by you, but by the school culture of testing.

Maggie described the culture of testing as “frantic” and believes it is not helping the students. Maggie said that in her first two years of teaching, she was more conscious of what she was teaching and she was making more collaborations and connections in her curriculum.

The teachers are forced to fend for themselves with behavior as well as multicultural education and this is stifling. They suggested that if the school leaders valued multicultural education, then it would be part of the current curricula. Also, the culture of testing has clearly hurt the students of Pine because they are not learning through creative multicultural-based lessons; they are being force-fed test preparation which is mainly the cause of some of their behavior and academic issues. Much of the literature included in my study suggests that students respond to creative lessons that connect to their lives. Teachers should not have to justify teaching multicultural-based curriculum.

The teachers explained that they feel they are on their own and they did not receive any support in terms of administrative or professional development to help them move beyond doing what is currently going on at Pine. Maggie shared that she blamed the leadership at Pine. The following explains Maggie's feelings about what it is like to teach at Pine and how the lack of support from the school's administration is draining and frustrating:

I just think our leadership is ill-equipped or I don't know, I don't think they deal with the reality or the students in the building. I think they operate from a philosophical or theoretical point of view where they are using the guidelines from the federal government, but they are not actually looking at the kids. They aren't thinking about, "How are we going to address the needs of these kids and create a school community that respects and is tolerant?" I feel like just teaching tolerance would make a huge difference. It doesn't come to; it's you and your four walls doing the best you can and when there is no support it falls by the wayside because one voice isn't enough. One voice in 50 classrooms is not enough! It isn't going to do it because there is no consistent message which is why we talked about having month to month assemblies with the principal to have consistent messages to the students.

Maggie's opinion about the lack of administrative support at Pine was very powerful. The teachers thought it summed up how they teachers felt about wanting to connect with their students through multicultural education, but they admitted needing support from the administration. They also shared that although they want to make more multicultural connections in their classrooms, they can not be expected to

do so alone. They admitted to reading about multicultural education in undergraduate and graduate school, but as Janet pointed out, the discussions took place with their peers who, although were not always from the same backgrounds, were privileged in terms of education. The following section discusses the participants' feelings about teaching students to avoid inappropriate stereotypes and generalizations about an individual's religious beliefs or sexual orientation.

### **Teaching Sensitive Topics and Questioning What is Appropriate**

The teachers in my study have articulated that they need help teaching students about multicultural education. As the interviews progressed, the teachers shared that their students often brought up homosexuality in a derogatory context and they also talked about religion quite often. These topics were difficult for the teachers to deal with, but they understood that it was not correct to continue to ignore what the students were saying. Uphoff (2001) wrote about religion and multicultural education (p.116). He pointed out public schools in the United States were dominated by Protestant-based views in the past (p. 116). However, the United States has become much more religiously diverse and it is not appropriate to assume that students have those views. Uphoff admitted that this was a complex situation because he did not believe educators should "...move in the opposite direction, to a position of open hostility to religion" (p. 116).

The teachers shared many examples about how the students brought up the topic of religion in their classrooms. In the following conversation, the teachers discussed how they handle talking about religion with their students.

Shelly: I think for me it's more of a conversation and not like planning teaching diversity. For example, with Christmas and I have to explain, "Well, I don't celebrate Christmas." Then we have a conversation about religion and diversity as far as not everyone believes the same things and its okay.

Maggie: That's another one that comes up and it's pretty safe.

Janet: I have a Jehovah's Witness in my class and it's very touchy. I mean I'm not even allowed to touch on the fact that there are differences [among religions]. I mean the students can't even understand that there's more than one way to think about things. And it's really difficult. It's really difficult to plan around a typical curriculum and I can't even get into it. I mean holidays like St. Patrick's Day or like Thanksgiving are almost taboo and off limits in my classroom.

Maggie: Those are two pretty major things to design and develop around religious differences and racial differences. [And] that we are tackling those is even to our credit. You have to talk about religion at Pine.

Shelly: Otherwise, Christmas is just thrown in your face.

Maggie: It's just very Christian and there's nothing; it's not a balanced perspective.

Janet: What is it?

Maggie: That it's very Christian and there is no balance.

Pam: I think it comes up when the student population is, when you are teaching in a school where for example it would be half Jewish and half Christian. I think there would be more programs.

Pam and Janet did not have the same feelings as Brenda, Maggie, and Shelly did about addressing issues of religion at Pine. Janet and Pam talked about their experiences attending parochial schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade and they admitted that they do not see talking about religion in a public school as being completely problematic. Pam shared that she deals with it by assuring her students that they should believe whatever their parents teach them about religion. She admitted to telling her students that she attends church, but she does not discuss the topic unless specifically asked to by the students. Janet has dealt with more complex issues relating to religion, because one of her students is a Jehovah's Witness. She also talked about how she questioned whether or not it was appropriate to teach her students about religious-based holidays such as Christmas, Easter, or St. Patrick's Day.

The conversation continued and Maggie tried to help clarify why it is important to talk about the historical contexts of religious-based holidays. The conversation began when the teachers discussed the December assembly presented each year at Pine and how it is primarily centered on Christian beliefs. Many of the classes sing religious songs, and in one case, a class even performs a song with a nativity scene where a student holds a baby Jesus on stage. Pam did not feel that it was necessarily problematic and she explained,

Pam: I don't think when they have baby Jesus they teach about Jesus. Some of the kids might not even know what they are saying.

Maggie: It's so irresponsible; it's the fact that it is so common and kind of taken over and that lack of the education behind it...if you're going to do it, the kids need to know why they are doing it.

Janet: If you are going to do it, then do it right.

Maggie: I had the same reaction too. I remember coming home and talking to my mom [who is also a teacher] and being like, "Oh my God."

Janet: That wouldn't have any kind of effect on me because I went to Catholic School.

Janet: For example, Tommie de Paula books have Jesus all over them.

Pam: I know.

Janet: I mean, I pick my battles, but I couldn't even find a St. Patrick's Day book that didn't deal with religion.

Maggie: But it is religion and you have to teach the history about it in a historical context.

Janet: But then how is that different from teaching about Jesus?

Maggie: I don't think it is.

Janet: Ok, so you just have to do it right? So I just have to steer clear from St. Patrick's Day altogether?

Maggie: According to what, the First Amendment?

Janet: Yeah.

Maggie: Oh that's tricky because I think it's a historical fact.

That conversation illustrated that the teachers have conflicting views regarding what is appropriate and what is not appropriate in terms of teaching

students about religion at Pine. Maggie clarified that if teachers choose to teach about something such as a religious-based holiday, they should be prepared to teach it in a historical context. Brenda later shared that although she is Christian, she tries to avoid the subject and she does not feel comfortable talking to her students about religion. Shelly is Jewish and felt that she needed to speak up because the students need to understand that not everyone is Christian. She teaches her students that there are different religions in the world and they should be respectful of people's differences. Shelly also shared that Pine was a difficult place to teach because Christianity was often "pushed" by the students and even by members of the staff.

The teachers benefited from talking openly about religion at Pine and they shared that they wanted support in terms of professional development. The teachers also shared some more complex examples about the students' religious beliefs. For example, some of the students spoke openly about Satan and their fear of the devil. Shelly told the group about how one of her students was often told by her mother that she could not participate in school activities because they were reflective of Satan. In that situation, the teachers agreed that it might be helpful to have a social worker or counselor meet with the student, the teacher, and the parent. However, this was not an isolated incident; there were several examples dealing with Satan.

The teachers also discussed how they found it upsetting when students called each other "gay" in a derogatory context. They all admitted to having students call each other gay, but none of the teachers knew how to address it. Because Brenda teaches older students, she experienced the problem quite often. When I asked Brenda to explain how she dealt with issues of homophobia she explained,

Well gosh, um a couple of different things I've said are "Well are you gay?" And they respond no [and she says] "Then don't worry about it." Or you try to be like "Someone you know someday will be gay and they are like "Oh..." or they are in denial that anyone they know could be gay. Or I am just like you know I just try to down play it you know like it is not and you are using it in an offensive way and that's wrong. You know there are a lot of people who are gay and you can't offend them. They are still ready to fight over it. I don't have a specific thing I do. You know you try to talk about it or say that it is not a big deal, but I really don't know what to do.

Brenda struggles with how to address the subject and she needs support with how to talk to the students about their negative feelings about homosexuality. Maggie felt that students at Pine often use the word gay with hostility. She stated, "I think more than anything it is using language that is a weapon. They're not saying what the word means; they are saying it for the reaction. I refuse to even acknowledge it because that's not what their point is." Maggie did not think it was appropriate to have a conversation about homosexuality with second graders, but it was clear that throughout the grades, students were treating the word "gay" with hate and disrespect and an intervention of some kind seemed long overdue at Pine.

Although the teachers in this study were reluctant to intervene with the way the students talked about homosexuality, authors such as Sleeter and Grant (2001) stressed that it is important to look at and be aware of inequalities faced by different groups in society (p. 67). Sleeter and Grant clearly explained how education that supports a multicultural and reconstructivist framework, "...deals more directly than



the other approaches have with oppression and social structural inequality based on race, social class, gender, and disability” (p. 69). The authors advocate for teachers to teach students how to be critically conscious of social inequalities (p. 69). Students would learn skills needed to have democratic discussions about dealing with issues of oppression and discrimination. The teachers shared that they were open to getting training which specialized in dealing with teaching for tolerance and they would benefit from the teachings of Sleeter and Grant.

The teachers in my study found that it was uncomfortable for them to talk to their students about discrimination against gays and lesbians because society continues to be uncomfortable with the subject. Maggie explained,

That’s tricky because with race you can teach with the civil rights movement. We still as a society are reconciling with disabilities and sexual preference. With the civil rights movement it already happened. We don’t have a period where we can look back and learn from it. We are still in the period of figuring out what to do. It’s trickier, it’s a much trickier topic, so you kind of deal with it. To go back to how do you plan for teaching diversity, you kind of go at it in two ways, like you have to look at what kind of diversity is naturally occurring in your classroom and you think about how you approach these kids...

Maggie was passionate about teaching the civil rights movement and she is comfortable teaching it because she has a variety of literature and historical text to use to enhance her curricula. She was also comfortable teaching her students about holidays, but believes that she has the duty to teach them about the holidays from a

historical context. Maggie believes in the First Amendment and she believes that it is her responsibility to uphold the expectations of the First Amendment. However, Maggie is not comfortable teaching her second grade students about gay rights. She feels that second graders are too young to deal with the content involved with teaching gay and lesbian rights. Maggie tried to rationalize her not wanting to talk about homosexuality in her classroom by talking about how her students call each other gay as “a weapon”. She knew that the students at Pine use the word “gay” in very derogatory and hateful contexts, yet she and the other teachers were reluctant about tackling the problem. Samuels (2006) reported on the importance of schools to getting involved and to having discussions about sexual orientation (p. 5). She included helpful resources such as The First Amendment Center and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network which have worked to produce a guide for administrators and school leaders (p. 5). Samuels stressed that most people want to find a common ground around issues of sexual orientation and that it was possible to do with guidance and supportive leadership. The guide offered by The First Amendment Center and GLSEN is one tool that would be helpful in teaching, students, teachers, and parents about tolerance for gays and lesbians.

Britzman (1998) wrote about the absence of gay and lesbian theory in education (p. 211). She believed that educators often ignore gay and lesbian issues. She stressed that it was important to recognize the demand for gay and lesbian civil rights (p. 212). Britzman wrote about the complexities involved in what she terms *queer theory* and she hoped that individuals would rethink current pedagogy and knowledge to allow space for gay and lesbian theories in education (p. 215).

Maggie discussed how she uses the civil rights movement of the 1960's to frame many of her multicultural lessons for her second graders. However, Maggie went on to say that the lack of resources available for teaching students about current civil rights issues often makes it difficult. She shared,

You know you shift your instruction and then you look at what these kids don't know yet about who's sitting in front of them. You know about the community and then you go digging for it (information). Then you find the few and far between read books that might touch on it a little bit farther and try to get them to that place; a place of understanding. But, it's tricky because there aren't a ton of resources. To go back to Black History if you wanted to talk about Black History you could have three crates full of Black History books, but not anything developed specifically of a curriculum that deals with that issue [homosexuality]. You develop the curriculum through connections and integrating of reading, writing, and math. How do we do that in a five and a half hour teaching day? You know how important it is so it is really tricky.

The teachers agreed that they are not happy with the way many of their students speak negatively about homosexuality, but they are not sure how to go about teaching their students to be more tolerant and respectful of gay and lesbian individuals. Maggie described the situation as "tricky" but it is evident that the derogatory attitudes about homosexuality should be addressed.

Kevin Kumashiro's research (2000) examined different anti-oppressive educational practices. His research looked at different aspects of oppression and he addressed how oppressive beliefs worked to marginalize some groups and to privilege

other groups (p. 1). Kumashiro's work described ways that educators and students worked to support students who experienced oppression based on their sexual orientation (p. 3). His research stressed that schools should be safe places for all students (p. 3). For example, Kumashiro looked at the work of other researchers and concluded:

...The school needs empowering spaces, where *Other* can find resources and tools to challenge oppression themselves, such as informational pamphlets by various organizations, and a wide variety of literature in libraries such as resource rooms.

Kumashiro's work included valuable resources for teachers to use when teaching about various forms of diversity. The teachers in my study did not seem comfortable teaching their students about changing their attitudes about homosexuals. However, with the help of administrative support and current resources such as the ones Samuels (2006) suggested could work to create positive changes at Pine.

Finally, the teachers agreed that teaching students to have respect for other religious beliefs and sexual preferences is the most complex area of multicultural education to teach. At the conclusion of my study, they remained unclear about how to teach students democratically about those topics.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS,**  
**AND REFLECTIONS**

When analyzing the data for this study, the reoccurring themes were examined. In this analysis, the following themes were identified: teaching as a service-oriented career, assumptions about race and class, us versus them, and multicultural education at Pine. The above themes were formed based on the teacher's beliefs and perceptions of multicultural education. As discussed in the previous section, the four themes identified details how the participants dealt with multicultural education. The themes were based on the teachers' perceptions of their whiteness as well as many other aspects of their teaching experiences at Pine. For example, the teachers agreed that they chose to teach at Pine and they also chose to teach for Chicago Public Schools because they wanted a career that would "help" others. At the same time, they admitted that there were no other teaching jobs in the city that paid as well as CPS. For example, Pam started out teaching at a Catholic school in Chicago and moved to teaching for CPS because she could not live on the salary offered at the Catholic school. Janet also shared that she was interested in teaching at a Catholic school, but she knew the pay was much lower than the pay CPS offered.

The first theme discussed the teachers' feelings about teaching in the inner-city and how it related to social work and service-oriented careers. Although all of the teachers began the interviews by saying they wanted to teach poor children of color, later in the study, they voiced frustrations about teaching at Pine. The

discussions began to deconstruct the teachers' perceptions about their own experiences and they made comparisons to their students' experiences. Although they acknowledged that it was not appropriate to make such comparisons, it happened repeatedly. In this section the teachers discussed feelings about the children at Pine, their parents, the school administrators, and issues related to race and class.

After the teachers discussed their biases and their feelings about multicultural education, it was important to find out how they felt specifically about multicultural education at Pine. The theme "multicultural education at Pine" looked at how the school as a whole viewed multicultural education. It also focused on the lack of support the teachers received from the school leaders as well as the lack of professional development related to building skills for teaching multicultural education. The teachers felt that Pine was not even doing what is considered "month to month" studies (Banks, 2001) of multicultural education and the teachers were saddened by this revelation. The teachers clearly wanted more support with learning to teach multicultural education in their classrooms. They became frustrated with the constant test preparation and they viewed it as limiting creativity in their classrooms.

My study discussed the realities of multicultural education at a large public school in Chicago and there were many obstacles involved which attributed to the lack of multicultural education taught at Pine. However, though there were obstacles, there was also hope. For example, all of the teachers shared that they wanted more support with multicultural education. This support could be given in a variety of ways. For instance, the teachers could begin by reading some information from some of the authors I included in this study such as Banks (2001), Butler (1998), Grant and

Sleeter (2001), Gay (2005), and McLaren (2003). Those authors would be good starting points for the teachers to learn more about multicultural education. It would also be helpful to work as a grade level and to discuss information from books and articles about multicultural education. Janet is now enrolled in graduate courses and she could share some of the articles and books she is reading for her multicultural education courses. The teachers shared that they did learn some information about multicultural education in their teaching courses, but they admitted that they needed to learn how to apply what they read to their teaching. The new administration and Janet's graduate studies could provide the beginning of what would hopefully become on-going support for integrating multicultural-based lessons into their curricula.

There was strong evidence that the teachers needed on-going support and professional development related to multicultural education. There is a new principal at Pine and much of the administrative team has changed since these interviews were conducted and that could create opportunities for more input from the teachers as far as what they would like in terms of professional development.

My research covered discussions about subjects that are often difficult to talk about such as issues related to race, class, religion, and homosexuality. Although the topics were difficult to talk about, the focus group provided a safe environment for the teachers to openly discuss their opinions and feelings about such subjects. The teachers were also willing to admit that they were not doing enough to promote multicultural curricula at Pine. At the conclusion of my interviews, the teachers were saddened that multicultural education has basically been ignored, and when it was taught, it was not a planned curriculum.

My research also included discussions about white privilege and the participants' feelings about the students and their parents. The teachers admitted to having some negative feelings towards some students and parents and they questioned whether or not those feelings were based on issues of race or class. At the conclusion of my interviews, the group suggested that negative perceptions about the students and their parents were based on the participants' tendency to compare the students' lives to their own experiences. However, the participants found that it was helpful to address those negative feelings and stereotypes because it allowed them to recognize that their biases. The teachers also recognized that it was not productive to compare their students' school experiences to their own school experience. As far as their criticism about the parents, the participants began to recognize that they could approach the parents in a less threatening and more welcoming way. As Banks (2001) suggested, the teachers recognized that it was problematic for them to view the students and their parents as deficient. The teachers seemed open to finding new methods of communication to use with their students and their parents. However, they continued to stress that they would need guidance from the school leaders and individuals experienced in teaching teachers about different aspects of diversity.

### **Summary**

The findings in my study indicated that the teachers were open to learning more about multicultural education and they were also honest and admitted that they did not have enough knowledge about the subject. Although they knew more about teaching students of color than for example the teachers in McIntyre's (1997) study,



the participants stressed that it was important to have on-going training rather than counting on one or two multicultural college courses.

Many of the authors discussed in my study (Banks, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Nieto, 2005; Sleeter & Grant 1999) gave suggestions that could help teachers and administrators have more multicultural-based educational practices at their schools. The teachers' responses about their perceptions of multicultural education reflected some of the findings of other researchers. For example, as Sleeter and Grant (1999) shared, many schools try to teach the student to conform to the behavior of what it is considered normal in mainstream society (p. 38). The teachers in my study did not necessarily work on the basis of what Sleeter and Grant called "human capital theory". However, when they continued to have unrealistic expectations for their students based on their middle-class white experiences it was actually causing more problems at Pine School. The focus group interviews allowed the teachers to think more critically than they had in the past about those unrealistic expectations.

The teachers realized that they made their best connections with their students through what they described as creative lessons. Those lessons were often lessons connected to the students' culture and experiences. However, due to the pressures of standardized testing, the teachers admitted that they were limited in the amount of creative lessons they used in their classrooms. At that point, the five teachers admitted to being stressed out and burned out because they were no longer able to teach the students with lessons that they enjoyed.

McGee Banks gave some ideas for fostering better relationships with students and their parents. She suggested for teachers to try doing the following: letting

parents know when they are welcome to visit the classroom, sending information home about the class in a newsletter, calling parents regularly, giving parents a chance to respond and to ask them questions, asking for parents opinions about their child's education, and spending time in the community (pp. 411-412). It is true, that white teachers may not always have as strong of connections with their students as teachers of color, but there are ways to make more of an effort.

### **Conclusions**

At the end of the five interviews, the teachers in my study were very upset about the current situation at Pine School. In some ways, they felt betrayed because they were not getting the support or training they needed to make better connections with their students. As mentioned, Pam, Shelly, and Maggie chose to leave Pine. Brenda and Janet stayed and decided to give the new administration a try. All of the teachers admitted that they would be more vocal about getting multicultural professional development at their schools. Janet chose to enter a graduate program because she realized that it would be a great way to learn more about multicultural education.

The teachers were open to discussing the obstacles involved with teaching their students about multicultural issues. This was especially true when we talked about issues relating to homosexuality or religion. Although there are many studies about multicultural education, my study illustrates why more should be done to promote teaching various aspects of diversity. As the teachers shared, it can not be left to one out of 50 teachers; it must be a collaborative effort among all of the school's staff.

In my interviews, there was evidence that multicultural education was often done on an “as needed” basis. It is important for the teachers to learn more about the various approaches to multicultural education such as the information given by Sleeeter and Grant (2001) or Banks and Banks (2001). It is also crucial for the school leaders to recognize that too much test preparation is harmful to the students and to the teachers. There are ways to integrate the skills needed for the standardized tests into more creative lessons. This is something that should be addressed for Pine’s future professional development.

The findings of my study have shown that there is not enough multicultural education taught at Pine School. The teachers need more training about the many aspects of teaching culturally diverse students. For example, they often made assumptions and questioned whether or not those assumptions were based on issues of race or class. It is important for teachers to move beyond making assumptions about their students and to look into why they are forming those biases or stereotypes. Teaching teachers about the many layers involved with multicultural education can be a challenge. However, it is a worthwhile challenge and the teachers at Pine could benefit from learning more about the layers of multicultural education.

### **Recommendations for Further Research and Practice**

As stated throughout my research, there are many teachers who are not aware of the importance of teaching students with multicultural perspectives. It was clear that the teachers in my study were willing to learn more about multicultural education and they found that it was an important aspect of education. Unfortunately, the belief that multicultural education is important is not enough. There is a significant amount

of research that suggests white middle-class teachers and pre-service teachers are not using multicultural curriculum in their classrooms. For that reason, universities, school districts, and schools should work towards making more connections with their students.

It is true that pre-service teachers often take one or two courses in multicultural education, but they need to learn to apply that information to what they will teach in their classrooms. The teachers in my study shared that they did have one or two courses focused on multicultural education, but they believed that they would need on-going training to successfully teach with multicultural perspectives.

My study examined the way white, middle-class teachers' perceived multicultural education and that information was helpful in forming some valuable conclusions about the state of multicultural education in elementary schools. For example, the teachers spoke candidly about their teaching experiences and they spoke about their frustrations. They were extremely reflective and I believe that the focus group format allowed the teachers to feel like they had a safe place to discuss their true feelings about multicultural education. I also think that discussing sensitive topics in education in a small group format would be a helpful way to learn more about how to make positive changes in education. McIntyre's (1997, 2001) research also supported the method of working with small groups of teachers to find out more about how they perceived their own biases in education.

Because much of the teaching force is made up of white middle-class women, it is important for those who train teachers to be aware of the importance of educating teachers about multicultural education. As Banks and Sleeter and Grant have shared,

multicultural education can not be viewed as a program; it should be something that is a part of all curricula. Students in low-income schools such as Pine need to feel valued. When teachers make strong cultural connections with students it gives students opportunities to share their experiences.

For future research, it would be helpful to research schools or school districts that have strong multicultural-based curricula. It would also be beneficial to research schools and districts that use quality multicultural professional development with their teachers. It is important to think about how the students and their parents view the curriculum at schools such as Pine and it would be helpful to do a study interviewing students and parents about the multicultural practices at their school.

It is crucial to think of multicultural education as a part of education that is on-going. For future research, it would be helpful for researchers to come into the classrooms of teachers trained in using multicultural curriculum and find out how to transfer and share their skills with other teachers. There has been a large amount of research indicating that many schools do not use enough multicultural education and now it is time to focus on schools that are using it.

The teachers in my study were very cooperative and they took the interviews very seriously. The five teachers admitted that they began to think differently about multicultural education. For a follow-up study, it would be interesting to observe the teachers in their classrooms. It would also be helpful to interview the teachers after they received multicultural professional development. For the purposes of this study, I interviewed white teachers from similar backgrounds. For future research, I think it

would be helpful to interview a focus group consisting of male and female teachers and teachers from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

It is crucial to find transformative methods to help educators teach their students about tolerance for different religious beliefs and customs. It is also important for teachers to learn from the progress made with the civil rights movement. As shared in my research, teachers are often uncomfortable dealing with teaching their students about tolerance towards homosexuals. Teaching multicultural education should include teaching students to respect people regardless of their sexual orientation. For example, Banks (1996) shared, “diversity related to social and sexual orientation is becoming increasingly important as the gap between the rich and the poor widens and as more and more gay students and teachers proclaim their sexual orientation.” (p. 335). That statement was written by James Banks eleven years ago and unfortunately not much has been done in elementary and high schools to make such changes. This illustrates the need for future research about issues of class and sexual orientation and how to make multicultural connections to promote social justice.

There were many discussions in my research about the consequences of the No Child Left Behind. Although some argue that the law has created more accountability for teachers and schools, it has also created a push towards constantly using test preparation as core curriculum. The teachers in my study described their current situation as one of teaching to the test and without creative and engaging lessons. As written in a recent issue of *Newsweek* (Tyre & Springen, 2007), “... the pressure-cooker world of the nation’s elementary schools...” may be creating what is

now called the fourth grade slump (p.47). Some argue that the constant push towards testing has caused a decline in test scores for fourth graders. Some students are suffering academically and losing interest in reading because schools are spending so much time teaching to the tests (p.47). The article pointed out that teachers often stop teaching science and social studies because they are limited on the amount of time they have to teach the required test preparation. This was a factor in my research and it was one of the reasons why the teachers said they could not teach multicultural-based lessons. The teachers in my study also shared that they often had to eliminate teaching science and social studies because they did not have time to teach all of the other required subjects in a six hour day. Researchers need to further explore how NCLB and the pressures of standardized testing have affected schools. It is also important to examine “slumps” such as the one described in the *Newsweek* article because that shows how the pressures of testing are affecting students academically.

Finally, as Delpit (1995) stated, “Students of color are doubly disadvantaged in trying to get their voices heard...” (p.109). White teachers must learn to use critical multicultural education as a tool that gives those students a voice. It is one thing to talk about multicultural issues, but it is another thing to utilize those discussions to plan innovative approaches to use in their classrooms. Future researchers must work towards capturing the examples of teaching used by successful teachers of multicultural-based curriculum. It is time to think about multicultural education critically and to find transformative methods of teaching it. My research examined many of the obstacles involved in teaching multicultural education, but I believe that others can learn from the candid discussions from my focus group interviews.

## Article II. Appendix A

For the purpose of this study, the following words have been defined as follows:

1. ADHD: A special education diagnosis acronym for attention deficit hyper active disorder.
2. Background: the influences on an individual's life. For example, one's upbringing and how it is based on religious, cultural, or other traditions.
3. Best Practice: According to Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998), Best Practice is part of reading, writing, math, science and social studies (p. vii). More specifically, the authors describe it as when a practitioner "is aware of current research and consistently offers clients the full benefits of the latest knowledge, technology, and procedures"(p. viii).
4. CPS: Chicago Public Schools.
5. Capitalism: According to Webster's Universal College Dictionary (2001, p. 118) capitalism is "An economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth is made and maintained chiefly by private individuals or corporations."
6. Cultural Group: Individuals who share similar ideas, beliefs, behaviors, and values.
7. Cultural Pluralism: "Includes the maintenance of diversity, a respect for differences, and the right to participate actively in all aspects of society without having to give up one's unique identity (Sleeter & Grant, 1999, p. 153).
8. Culturally Relevant Curriculum: Curriculum that focuses on the values, customs, and cultural backgrounds of children.



9. Discrimination: Inadequate treatment of individuals or groups based on issues of race, sexual preference, class, gender, religious practices, or ethnicity.
10. Elementary Level: For the purpose of this study, this level is from kindergarten through second grade, intermediate level are grades 3-5, and upper grades include grades 6-8. In Chicago Public Schools, elementary schools include grades pre-k through eight.
11. Hidden Curriculum: Also referred to as hidden pedagogy. It was a “tool” first used by teachers in the 1970s as a way to teach “politically oriented curriculum”. Sometimes teaching outcomes are considered unintended, but regardless, hidden curriculum can cause further “silence and marginalization of ideas and voices both in the academic disciplines and in society.” Also referred to as something that “reproduces stratification.” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 2000, p.p. 248- 249).
12. Mainstream Curriculum: Curriculum designed for the dominant groups in the United States; primarily a white, Protestant, Anglo, male perspective of the world.
13. Marxism: According to Webster’s Universal College Dictionary (2001, p. 494) Marxism is, “The system of thought developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels...(that) doctrines that class struggle has been the main agency of historical change and that capitalism will inevitably be superseded by a socialist order and classless society.”

14. **Minority Group:** According to Webster's Universal College Dictionary (2001, p. 510) a minority group is "a group differing, especially in race, religion, or ethnic background, from the majority of the population."
15. **Multicultural Curriculum:** According to James A. Banks, "Multicultural curriculum is at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process." "...Regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics..." all students should be represented in school's curriculum; it promotes equal opportunity for learning. (Banks, 2001).
16. **NCLB: No Child Left Behind:** a law passed by President George W. Bush in 2001. The law was passed as an attempt to make improvements in education and it closely monitors schools based on the scores of their standardized tests. There is more information on this law in the review of literature.
17. **Oppression:** According to Webster's Universal College Dictionary (2001), oppression is "the exercise of authority or power in a cruel unjust manner" (p. 555). For the purpose of this research, oppression is often caused by dominant groups in society.
18. **Pre-service teachers:** Students who are studying to be elementary or secondary teachers.
19. **Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy:** McLaren (2003) argued that there can not be a "blueprint" for critical pedagogy because it is not an approach that can be explained in a "concrete" way (p. 26). This type of pedagogy involves examining the politics involved in education and McLaren described

revolutionary critical pedagogy as something that, "...should focus on problemizing the production of value through the work experience..."(p.31).

20. Social Justice: Promoting fair treatment to all groups in society. In particular, the empowerment of individuals and groups who have been discriminated against and treated poorly by dominant groups in society.
21. Social Reconstructionism: This is viewed by Banks (2001) as a way to "reconstruct society toward greater equality in race, class, gender, and disability (p. 69).
22. White privilege: Based on the work of Alice McIntyre (1997), white privilege is the view that white people have more privileged lives based on their acceptance in society. For example, white Americans have more opportunities in education and the working world because white culture is the dominant culture. White privilege often influences and reproduces repressive teaching practices and ways of life.

## Appendix B

Teacher's Perceptions on Multicultural Education Interview Questions:

1. What is your educational background?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. Why did you decide to be a teacher?
4. Why did you decide to teach in the Chicago Public School System?
5. How do you feel about teaching in an urban school system and how do you feel about Pine School in particular?
6. How would you define multicultural education?
7. How do you design your curriculum/lessons so that they relate to your students' backgrounds?
8. How do you teach your students about diversity?
9. How do you teach your students to appreciate the diversity of others and do you share information about your culture and identity with them?
10. How do requirements such as standardized testing and the *Chicago Academic Standards and Frameworks* (2004) influence how you plan your lessons to connect with your students' lives?
11. As a teacher, do you think the Chicago Public Schools provide you with a good framework for planning multicultural lessons?
12. What type of professional development have you attended to help you learn more about multicultural curriculum? Please specify whether or not your school has provided the professional development or if you found it on your own.

13. Do you find that your own perceptions, privileges, and ideological positions frame the way you teach? Please elaborate.
14. What barriers, if any, have you faced in making connections with your students' lives (through your lessons)?
15. How do you supplement your lessons when the textbooks don't connect with your students' lives?
16. Does your school provide opportunities for students to share aspects of their lives in terms of their culture, gender, race, and ethnicity?
17. What curricular changes do you think could be made to better meet the needs of poor, urban populations of students?
18. Do you think your educational background such as courses with a specific focus on multiculturalism, social justice, or cultural diversity prepared you for teaching students with multicultural curriculum?
19. Have your feelings about multicultural education changed throughout the time you have been teaching? If so, please give some examples of how.
20. Is there anything else you would like to add about your teaching practices in terms of how you use multicultural education?

## Appendix C

### Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Teachers:

Thank you to those of you who have participated in my previous pilot studies about teacher perceptions of multicultural education. This year, I will be working on my dissertation about *Teacher Perceptions of Multicultural Education*.

Upon the approval of my research proposal, I will be looking for participants for my dissertation research. If you are interested in participating in a small focus group, please let me know in person (or you may put a note in my mailbox).

If you agree to participate in the study the following will be required:

- You will meet with me and the focus group after school either at school or at another location.
- The sessions will involve taped interviews and each session will last approximately one to two hours. There are 20 interview questions.
- The information from the interviews will be used to frame my research around teacher perceptions of multicultural education.
- If you have any questions at anytime during the research process, you may contact me in person or by e-mail at [kitwaight@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kitwaight@sbcglobal.net)
- I have been given permission by the principal to conduct this research and your name and the school name will be changed. If you request copies of the transcriptions, I will provide them to you.
- If you do not feel comfortable continuing to be in the focus group you can drop out at any point in the study.
- Food and drinks will be provided at each meeting.
- You will also be provided with a copy of Alice McIntyre's book, *Making Meaning of Whiteness* (1997) which will be discussed in the final focus group meeting.

This is a great opportunity for you to share your own feelings about multicultural education and to learn from other teachers. As many of you know, I am a doctorate student at DePaul University and the information from the focus groups will be used for my dissertation. I am looking forward to hearing from you! Again, please feel free to meet with me if you have any questions about participating in my research.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Katharine J. Waight

## Appendix D

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This research will be used for my dissertation research on elementary teacher perceptions of multicultural education. The study will be used to find out what teachers and students think about multicultural education.

1. My name is Katharine Waight and I am a doctoral student at DePaul University.
2. I am asking you to take part in my research study to learn more about teacher perceptions of multicultural education. I want find out what you think about multicultural curriculum as well as how you plan curricula that relates to your students' lives. This study involves participating in a small focus group five teachers. The group will meet for one to two hours each session. The group will meet four times and if necessary, I will meet with you on an individual basis to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about the research. I will consult with you to set up the best possible times for you to meet with me. The group will meet at my home, which is located near the school. The focus groups will begin after school and I will let you know in advance of the meeting times.
3. If you agree to be in this study you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions about your perceptions about multicultural curriculum. I will be asking questions about how you feel about teaching culturally diverse students and how your own background influences your teaching practices.
4. Being in this study does not involve any risks other than what you would encounter in daily life. If you feel that there are any risks to participating in my study, please feel free to ask me for clarifications about the nature of the study. I will tape the focus groups and the taped information as well as my field notes will be stored on a disc which will be locked in a filing cabinet at my home. You may request copies of the transcriptions as well as the final copies of the data I will include in my dissertation. Your name will be changed so that your responses will be unidentifiable. The name of the school will also be changed to the pseudonym of *Pine School*.
5. You will benefit by participating in this study because this study will allow you to share your teaching perceptions, practices, and your knowledge of teaching culturally diverse students.
6. This study will allow you to both share and reflect on your teaching. You will be provided with food and drinks at the focus group sessions and you will receive a copy of Alice McIntyre's book *Making Meaning of Whiteness*

(1997). Sections of the book will be used as part of the focus groups' discussions.

7. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Remember, being in this study is entirely up to you and no one will be upset if you do not want to participate. Even if you change your mind later and want to stop, you may withdraw your agreement to participate without any consequences.
8. All of the information you provide in this research study will be kept strictly confidential, and any report of this research will not identify you personally or professionally in any way.
9. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you did not think of now, you can e-mail me at kitwaight@sbcglobal.net or ask me personally at the next interview.
10. Signing the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.
11. Investigator's Responsibility: I have fully explained to (participant's name) \_\_\_\_\_ the nature and the purpose of the above described research procedures and the risks and benefits in its performance. I have answered all (and will continue to answer all) questions to the best of my ability. I will inform the participant of any changes in the procedures or risks and benefits if they should occur during the course of this study. I have provided a copy of the consent form for the participant.

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Consent: I have been satisfactorily informed of the above described procedure with its possible risks and benefits. I agree to participate in this research study, I may request to withdraw at any time and I can continue to ask questions concerning this study. I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary and that I am free to stop participating at any time, without any consequences, even after signing this form. I have been offered a copy of this form.

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_



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