

**OPENING PANDORA'S BOX:  
EXPLORING EDUCATORS' CONCEPTIONS OF CULTURE AND MULTICULTURAL  
EDUCATION**

by

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#### ABSTRACT

This case study explores educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education in four schools (three elementary and one middle), in a relatively large urban district in the state of New Mexico, where multicultural education policies have been in place and supported since the early 1970s. A great deal has been written regarding both effective pedagogical practices and the relationship between educators' beliefs about their students (racial biases, setting high expectations, etc.) and their students' academic success. However, understanding the forces that influence and shape local educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education remains a relatively unexplored area. Because the purpose of multicultural education has always been to increase equity for students from non-dominant backgrounds or, in other words, those who are more likely to be negatively impacted by teacher bias and reductive notions of culture, this omission needed to be addressed. In order to study these influences, interviews with two focal teachers at each of four participating schools, the principals of all four schools, and district level administrators were used as the primary data source; however, there were observations, additional interviews, and two focus groups as data sources as well. The results of the analysis indicated that educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education are most significantly influenced by personal experiences. Further, the data suggested that certain types of experiences related to the development of particular conceptions of culture and understandings of learning. In related analyses to explore whether these educators' conceptions were connected to their pedagogical practices in predictable ways, the data suggested that educators' chose and

implemented multicultural education practices idiosyncratically. In other words, their reported practices were not necessarily consistent with their reported conceptions of culture and multicultural education. These findings may be particularly useful for teacher preparation and professional development programs as they illuminate potential entry points for helping prospective and current teachers develop more robust notions of culture and better understand its central role in learning processes. Based on the study results, I suggest that multicultural education programs, practices, and policies, could potentially be more effective if they were based on robust conceptions of culture and were more tightly aligned to expansive theories of learning such as sociocultural theory.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

### Purpose and Rationale

When I took a cultural studies class, the very first one I ever took, and that lady opened my eyes. She hurt my feelings so bad...I was ignorant, I was proud...and after that class I'd look at her and I'd say 'Hey, Pandora,' you know, and she'd ask, 'you wanna look in the box again, John<sup>1</sup>?'. ...I went to my sister in tears and I said 'I just learned this,' and she said 'education can be bittersweet,' and it changed my life, it did, it opened my eyes, and I'd never had my eyes opened, because they don't want you to have your eyes open. (Interview, 12/12)

For educators like John, recognizing the extent to which culture influences both their own and their students' lives and learning –can be a difficult and overwhelming experience; it can feel like opening Pandora's Box and being ill-prepared for what it contains. John, a special education teacher, identifies as Mexican, Indian, and White, grew up in a diverse community in the American southwest, and shared that throughout his life he has repeatedly experienced discrimination and oppression. He explained,

the more I study this the more I understand that I need to know my adversary, and it's there at Phillips<sup>2</sup> [his school]. I've been treated badly. I've been through that 10,000 times...So from my point of view, I was a survivor from back when I had to be - and the only way to do that was to assimilate and conform. And the minute I didn't conform I was fired, I was hurt, I was beat, I was threatened, so I'd conform again and assimilate again...culture is so powerful. (Interview 12/12)

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms. All pseudonyms reflect the linguistic origin of the participant's real name.

<sup>2</sup> All school names are pseudonyms.

In John's own words, while he understood how being outside the dominant culture had limited his professional opportunities and personal choices, it wasn't until his first cultural studies course that he became aware that he survived by assimilating. For John, this recognition included a new understanding of how the process of assimilation had influenced how he saw the world. In other words, his experiences with discrimination did not, on their own, result in an understanding of the way dominant cultures operate to reproduce themselves and marginalize others in the larger world. John's interview responses note that the cultural studies class allowed (perhaps even required) him to critically examine how the dominant culture influences the production, privileging, and transmission of knowledge; as a result of this critical examination, his life was significantly changed. The pedagogical approach to cultural studies John describes is considered to be a 'best practice' for critical multicultural educators who argue that this has been particularly effective with students from non-dominant backgrounds (Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). His experience as an adult student illustrates one reason that effective, appropriate multicultural education is important for all students, but particularly for those studying to be teachers who are unlikely to be prepared to guide students in this process if they have not engaged in it themselves.

As previous research has shown, educators' unacknowledged biases and stereotypes associated with all forms of 'difference' can influence teachers' interactions and relationships with their students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999; Sleeter, 1992). Despite these findings, with the exception of some teacher preparation programs, educators are rarely asked to examine how their experiences, background and/or beliefs (conscious and unconscious) with respect to their own and others' cultural practices might affect their

pedagogical choices and interactions with students (Picower, 2009). This dissertation, then, addresses educators' reported understandings of culture and multicultural education, how their views have shifted over time, as well as what contributed to those shifts. As I began this dissertation, I was interested in capturing how state and local policy influenced teachers' and administrators' conceptions of culture and multicultural practices. While the interview protocol was designed to gather this policy information, understanding teachers' views and sense-making about culture and their accounts of what helped shaped their beliefs became more prominent in the data. Further, it was difficult to glean or identify any policy influence on their conceptions, as discussions of policy always reverted to discussion of their classroom practices, not their beliefs. It is important to note here that the chapter on practices in this dissertation addresses instead the relation between teachers' beliefs and their reported and observed practices. I hope to analyze and write about the ways policies shape and constrain their practices in subsequent work.

Why this research focus? In the current contentious socio-political context where difference is being challenged in public discourse, in the courts, and in educational and social policy, multicultural approaches to education, particularly critical approaches to multicultural education are increasingly vulnerable to being replaced, water-downed, or eliminated. Due to the many influences on and challenges to critical multicultural education, it is increasingly important to understand the forces that shape multicultural education programs and the beliefs of those responsible for their implementation. As the typical American classroom rapidly diversifies, large categories of human difference such as race, ethnicity, and culture become central issues that should not (and indeed cannot) be ignored in school environments. Given this demographic reality, it is important to recognize that both the historical framing of multicultural education, and the current socio-political climate suggest a profound need to better understand

the relationship between attitudes, policies, and practices. Historically, the intent of multicultural education was to create equitable educational opportunity for students of color<sup>3</sup> and, although equality (not necessarily equity) of educational opportunity and outcome is currently presented as a prominent national goal, achievement disparities and inequity of educational opportunity continue to be the status quo. Additionally, the current sociopolitical context presents a scenario in which policy at all levels (national, state, and local) is increasingly taking the lead in shaping the landscape of public education while, at the same time, many states are becoming openly hostile to the idea of multiculturalism and multicultural education. It can be argued, then, that there is an increasing risk that these sociopolitical factors will influence future policies related to diversity in a direction that is more restrictive and less supportive of multicultural education.

More central to the focus of this dissertation, documenting what beliefs educators' hold about culture and how those beliefs are shaped, is an important first step to understanding how teachers make sense of their own practice and, eventually, the policies that support or limit those practices. A focus on teachers' beliefs and practices, then, is key. Educational research has identified that teachers' beliefs and practices can have a profound influence on students' engagement and learning through the establishment of positive, respectful (or negative, disrespectful) student-teacher relationships. The development and maintenance of positive, respectful relationships is particularly essential for students from non-dominant backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). In addition, studies have shown that unconscious teacher biases can lead to differential treatment and decreased opportunities to

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<sup>3</sup> This has been broadened over the years to include *all* who are excluded or marginalized for some form of "disadvantage" or "difference," such as disability or sexual orientation, but the original intent of the movement was to eliminate racial inequities Banks (2004).

succeed in classrooms for students from non-dominant populations (Ladson-Billings, 2002). While there is clearly a constellation of factors that influences teachers' relationships with students and the beliefs they develop about students and their potential, this study focuses on identifying the primary influences on these beliefs and practices, with a particular eye toward understanding how educators themselves make sense of the notion of culture in multicultural education. For these reasons, exploring how educators' conceptions of culture are shaped, and how those conceptions inform their pedagogical practices with respect to multicultural education is important to the future success of the field. Of particular interest to me is what notions of cultural community, and roles of culture in learning are indexed in educators' conceptions of multicultural education.

One way I will make sense of educators' reported beliefs about culture and multicultural education is to locate them in a history of multicultural education and its related literature. As I address later in this chapter, the concept of culture within the field of multicultural education has been theorized differently across curriculum theorists, as well as across district and state policies and curricular approaches. Across time, the literature in multicultural education has contained different conceptions of culture, ethnicity, and race, and weighted differently the role these constructs play in the instantiation of the multicultural curricula, its social organization, and, thus, how learning is taken up. I will address this issue and its relevance shortly.

## **Problem Statement**

### **Contextualizing Multicultural Education**

**Lack of Policy.** Since the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) better known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), attention has been increasingly focused on narrowing achievement gaps for non-dominant populations. Multicultural education is an

approach to addressing inequity in education with a relatively extensive history in K-12 education. Although multicultural education has an approximately 40 year history in both the literature and curricular reforms, there are no federal policies in multicultural education and state level policies are rare (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000). Multicultural education, then, is implemented idiosyncratically without the support of official policies to shape programs and ensure effective practice. This is a missed opportunity given the demographic changes taking place in classrooms across the country, particularly the increase in students whose first language is not English. Despite the tacit but broad acceptance of multicultural education by K-12 educators and teacher education programs, and a significant body of research demonstrating the potential of identified best practices to improve academic outcomes for students from non-dominant backgrounds, it has yet to be broadly embraced by state education agencies in the form of policy.

In 1974 James Banks, one of the leading scholars in multicultural education, stated “The concept of multicultural education and the practices which it describes... did not emerge from a carefully delineated philosophy which was developed and envisioned by enlightened educational leaders, but rather it is a term which was hastily coined in order to help educators to deal with militant demands, harsh realities, and scarce resources” (1974, p. 3). Banks’ statement helps to shed light not only on why there are few state level policies in place, but also why even multicultural education’s opponents have declared it is now a permanent presence in society and schools (Schlesinger, 2001; Glazer, 1997). Banks states that reactions to identified inequities were hurried, indicating that new practices were put in place without official policies to support them. New practices were rushed due to the legitimate animus spurred by obvious inequities which could not be ignored without continued negative attention, leading to quick acceptance



with relatively little push back. Early changes in practice resulting from the multicultural movement focused on curriculum, at least in part, because it was considered to be one of the quickest ways to effect meaningful change in schools. These early changes to curricula have proven to be relatively stable over time until recent changes to social studies standards in Texas and the banning of Mexican American Studies classes in Arizona (Biggers, 2012). Multicultural education's theorization and instantiation through curriculum studies over the years has led to significant and lasting changes in content, particularly within social studies, but despite this success, it has also drawn numerous substantive critiques.

**A shift in multicultural education.** Many scholars whose research is relevant to multicultural education policy and practice do not explicitly associate themselves with multicultural education and have offered substantive critiques of the way it has been taken up in school districts, classrooms, and teacher education programs. The primary critiques identify a lack of focus on systems of power and oppression, racism, and narrow conceptions of culture as significant problems with the paradigm. Scholars advancing these critiques from outside the field of multicultural education have often done so while adopting alternate terminology such as culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995), antiracist education (King, 2009; Gillborn, 2004), multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996), and most recently culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) to highlight issues of race, inequity, and empowering pedagogy. In general, scholars across these views advance improving the educational and social lives and outcomes of youth from nondominant communities. Even scholars who continue to explicitly associate themselves with multicultural education also offer constructive critiques about how multiculturalism has been instantiated in classrooms and now tend to write about critical multicultural education as the way forward (Sleeter & Bernal, 2003; Nieto, 2004).

Critical multicultural education, in the simplest terms, is multicultural education organized around critical pedagogy as a primary component of practice—an approach that helps ensure that it goes beyond simply adding to or changing curricular content.

Further, conceptions of culture have not always been dynamic. For example, in the early multicultural education literature, culture was often addressed from a nationalistic or ethnocentric perspective (Banks, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Because multicultural education shares roots with ethnic studies, and has been theorized and researched through the lens of curricular studies (Banks, 2004), it is understandable that the instantiation of multicultural education has been more content and less process oriented. In more recent scholarship a critical stance toward multicultural education has become more common, asserting that all sources of difference (race, class, ability, gender expression, etc.) are relevant to multicultural education practices. This strand of the research focuses on critical pedagogical practices rather than curricular content, and has found an audience in some teacher education programs, but as yet has not managed broad influence on classroom practices or the policies that govern them (Banks, 2009). Although adding a critical stance focused on pedagogical practices to the more limited but stable curricular changes that have been instantiated is a significant improvement, the ways in which culture and cultural practices are integral to learning processes remains an under-theorized area in multicultural education.

A significant omission to multicultural education, however, is any explicit theory of learning, including sociocultural theories of learning that offer more robust notions of culture than the established frameworks of multiculturalism. Therefore, this study, as I will elaborate shortly, employs a sociocultural analytic lens to understand how local educators make sense of culture and multicultural education. This is particularly important as the definitions and

conceptions of culture and cultural community within the field of multicultural education continue to be aligned with the conceptions of culture used in established frameworks of multiculturalism. These conceptions are relatively narrow and less useful in the context of understanding learning, particularly when compared to the more robust notions of culture commonly used in sociocultural theories of learning. This is also key, as a potential approach to improving multicultural education and increasing understanding of its importance is to directly connect the curricular content and effective pedagogical practices identified in the literature to expansive theories of learning, an approach that is nearly absent from multicultural education research, policy, and practice. While there have been some attempts to connect critical pedagogy to sociocultural theories of learning (Gutiérrez & Larson, 1995), none have emerged from the broader field of multicultural education.

**Framing of multicultural education in K-12 settings.** In addition to varying understandings of culture in multicultural education theories, policies, and practices, through the years, it is important to understand how the interaction between proponents of multicultural education and the institution in which it was enacted (the public school system) worked to frame multicultural education. Historically the work in multicultural education has been most influenced by the curricular domain and as a result it has predominantly been framed as additive content, usually in the area of social studies (Banks, 2004). For example, adding historical figures such as Cesar Chavez to the required curriculum was the most common response to complaints of inequity in education early in the movement. Although certainly important, including content acknowledging the contributions of persons from non-dominant backgrounds in the curriculum cannot, by itself, create more equitable opportunities or eliminate achievement gaps. This *content integration* (Banks, 2004, 2009) approach, and the curricular changes it

produced had proven to be relatively stable until recent actions by the states of Texas and Arizona (which will be discussed further in a later section) began to erode the progress that has been made. Although stable changes to the curricula remain a desirable outcome, the acceptance of this framing of multicultural education may have made it more difficult to introduce and gain the same acceptance for more critical pedagogical approaches. Agreements to curricular changes allowed those who sought to limit the influence of multicultural education to argue that difference was being addressed appropriately, and that little more needed to be done to create equity.

Due to the necessity of locating itself within the highly institutionalized arena of public schools, broader societal trends have also significantly contributed to the curricular frame of multicultural education remaining relatively stagnant. One of these sociological trends is the shift from overt forms of racism and discrimination common before and immediately following the *Brown v. Board* decision and passage of the Civil Rights Act to more covert and subtle forms described by Bonilla-Silva (2001) as *color-blind racism*. According to Bonilla-Silva, societal shifts in discourse have served to minimize or mask the effects of structural and systemic instantiations of racism common in what he calls *racialized social systems*, or “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races” (2001, p.37). Within a society that maintains racialized social systems, attempts to include multicultural education in institutions such as schools, will naturally encounter resistance anytime it seeks to challenge the status quo. The central ideal of equity of opportunity and outcome for all students has continually challenged the status quo since the beginnings of public education in America; multicultural education focused this challenge on equity of opportunity for students of color, however, it has not successfully shifted the frame, or

pedagogical practices, within K-12 education as research and scholarship in the field has progressed. The ideas of racialized social structures and color-blind racism, and their relationship to multicultural education are explored in more detail in chapter two.

**Current socio-political context.** Currently, tolerance for multicultural education and broadening understandings of cultural communities, both locally and globally, are being challenged. In the past five years, the United States has seen the election of its first Black president result in more frequent, and often heated, discussions in the media about race and racism. Consider the recent trend in rolling back of civil rights gains, including escalated anti-immigrant policies, a school board elected in North Carolina that dismantled a well-established diversity (desegregation) plan with which more than 80% of residents expressed satisfaction. Since April of 2010, when Arizona passed SB 1070, at least five additional states – Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, and Utah – have passed strict anti-immigrant laws, some including provisions that would restrict undocumented children from enrolling in school. In May of 2010, Arizona passed another law, HB 2281, aimed at eliminating popular Mexican-American Studies classes in the Tucson Unified School District. In late December of 2011, the classes were found to be in violation of this law and under the threat of losing \$14 million in funding, the district eliminated the program. In addition to eliminating the classes, in January of 2012 the district administrators banned and physically removed nearly 80 books from classrooms and in a meeting “informed Mexican-American studies teachers to stay away from any units where “race, ethnicity and oppression are central themes” (Biggers, 2012).

In addition to new political and legislative actions, there have been several other noteworthy trends in the U.S., driven both by economic and social forces, that contribute to the ‘more hostile’ sociopolitical context I am referring to. Several large cities including, most

notably, Philadelphia and Chicago closed large numbers of schools in the last year (23 and 49 respectively), virtually all of which were located in neighborhoods that served primarily poor students of color, prompting significant push-back from the communities faced with losing their local schools. The NBA finals and the MLB All Star Game garnered disturbingly intolerant and racist social media responses to their choices of American citizens, 10 year old Sebastien De La Cruz and singer Marc Anthony, to perform the national anthem and God Bless America respectively. The winner of the most recent Miss America pageant and the Coca-Cola Company were also on the receiving end of intolerant, racist social media backlash; Miss America due to her Indian-American heritage and Coca Cola for highlighting the multicultural reality of America in a Super Bowl ad that featured people of many races and ethnicities singing America the Beautiful in seven different languages. Finally, there have been several instances of young, unarmed black youth being killed by white men that have created enough public outcry to make national news and became part of the national narrative on race. While the racist backlash created by these events is met with equally fervent responses by those who find it repugnant, it is still demonstrative of the hostile societal context in which predominantly middle-class, white, women are teaching ever increasing numbers of students who do not share their racial, cultural, or economic background. The incendiary nature of the current rhetoric with respect to racial and cultural difference, combined with the increasing influence of policy on shaping classroom practice, makes understanding educators' perceptions and practices of culture and multiculturalism, and what influenced those views a necessary and timely endeavor.

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

Critical pedagogy has been increasingly addressed in the critical multicultural education literature as a necessary component of effective practice (Sleeter & Bernal (2003)); however,

neither multicultural education nor critical pedagogy has been closely tied to learning theory. According to Ladson-Billings (2002), teachers' beliefs about students and critical pedagogical approaches matter a great deal with respect to academic achievement and performance, particularly with students from non-dominant backgrounds. Teacher belief in students' abilities (high expectations) and effective instructional approaches are also strongly associated with positive, respectful student-teacher relationships in the literature (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valenzeula, 1999). A learning theory lens may help to more coherently tie together factors, such as critical pedagogy, culture, race, language, student-teacher relationship, and community – all of which have been identified as important components of effective multicultural education (Drummond, 2013).

Research has demonstrated that the student-teacher relationship is of great import to student learning, and has particular consequences for students from non-dominant backgrounds. This relationship depends on the teacher's ability and willingness to connect in a meaningful and genuine way with students and to value equally their various cultural backgrounds and experiences (Valenzuela, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004). While the teaching population remains predominantly white (84%) and female (74%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004), the student population is rapidly becoming more diverse with respect to language, race, culture, and other factors not associated with the dominant population, such as low socioeconomic status, disability, and gender expression (Sleeter & McLaren, 2009). The difference in backgrounds of teachers and many of their students often results in teachers who lack a deep and meaningful understanding of the worlds their students inhabit outside of school (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999) and the effects that those worlds can have on their classroom engagement and performance. Therefore, it is

important to understand how teachers become culturally competent. Even when teachers' backgrounds are more similar to their students', as the culture of testing and accountability has become more prevalent, teachers feel increased pressure to focus solely on academic content and ignore other aspects of their students' lives and struggles (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This singular focus on test scores creates an environment that is detrimental to the process of establishing meaningful student-teacher relationships.

In contrast, research focusing on the economics of education often argues that out of school worlds and circumstances should have no impact on what happens in the classroom. In other words, effective teaching should always result in substantive learning no matter what students experience outside the classroom walls, but other research has demonstrated definitively that out of school influences matter a great deal (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2013; Heath, 1983). Due at least in part to the common differences between teachers' and students' lives, teachers can use faulty assumptions about students' work ethic, parental support, and innate ability to explain poor performance. In addition, they may unintentionally devalue students' language, local cultural practices and knowledge, and contributions to their classroom community, leading to poor student-teacher relationships. All of these factors, including poor relationships with their teachers, can have a negative impact on students' learner identities and desire to participate in the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). These student-teacher disconnects are also likely a contributing factor to the high rates of teacher turnover in schools generally termed "hard to serve" with large percentages of students from non-dominant backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2010), another issue of importance in education today.



## Research Questions

The discussion above provides an argument for the importance of exploring the complex interactions between teachers' conceptions of culture and multicultural education, their classroom practices, and ultimately the policies that shape multicultural education programs. The state of New Mexico provided the most promising context for this study, as it passed the first multicultural education policy in the United States in 1973; a state with a long standing record of supporting and implementing multicultural education policies offers a better chance to gain an understanding of these influences. The primary research questions that guided this study were:

- What are New Mexico educators' (teachers, principals, and district level administrators) conceptions of culture and multicultural education?
- What practices do local educators employ with respect to multicultural education?
- How do educators understand the relationship between culture and learning?

In seeking answers to these questions, I hoped to gain an understanding of the convergences and conflicts between teachers' beliefs, official policies, and school level practices. I believe that the insights gleaned from this study may be useful in informing future policy and program design with respect to both teacher education (including professional development) and K-12 classroom practice.

In order to understand the context in which New Mexico teachers' conceptions are shaped, a basic understanding of the state's bilingual multicultural education policy is necessary as all study participants are guided by it in their local context. A detailed discussion of New Mexico bilingual multicultural education policies can be found in the review of literature and a brief analysis appears in the methods chapter.

## Theoretical Framing

### Sociocultural Theory

Because my primary purpose is to better understand how educators view culture and multicultural education, as well as what practices they employ, I bring a sociocultural lens to my analysis. A sociocultural perspective, which places culture at the center of all learning, is useful in helping me understand how educators' understandings of culture and multicultural education are constructed, and how they influence practices (Cole, 1996). I will briefly elaborate this theoretical perspective and its relation to my research. The sociocultural perspective is a theory of development and learning that privileges the role of cultural mediation, asserting that *everything* we learn is socially and culturally mediated through interaction, and cultural tools, both material and ideational; within this framework, language is the primary mediational tool (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this theory, all interactions and artifacts are understood to be influenced or produced by the cultural and historical context in which they took place or were developed. Although this perspective does not ignore individual cognitive processes, or suggest that they are unimportant, it views them as connected to the social in that they are always *preceded* by a learning experience that is mediated through interaction with others within the context of a cultural community, or by tools and/or artifacts created by that cultural community (e.g. texts, language).

A basic tenet of all sociocultural theories maintains that everything is first learned and experienced on the social (or intermental) plane (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, learning first occurs through interaction with others or through the use of cultural tools (including language) before it can be considered and accepted, rejected, or modified by the individual in his or her own mind (the intramental plane). This view is important when considering multicultural

education because it helps push existing notions of culture in multicultural framework; further, if it can be demonstrated that all learning is inherently culturally mediated, the foundation on which we build appropriate and effective policies and practices must begin to support learning as socially and culturally mediated processes. In other words, policies and practices would neither conflate race and ethnicity with culture nor reduce culture to the property of particular kinds of communities. Programs and practices that encourage teachers' and students' use of the cultural knowledge and skills learned and developed in their homes and communities would better leverage students' repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) to create more relevant and robust learning opportunities in the classroom. Multicultural education, so far, has failed to accomplish the goals of reducing (and eventually eliminating) disparities in achievement and providing more equitable educational opportunity and, while research suggests a more critical pedagogical approach could offer better outcomes, I believe these outcomes might be further enhanced by approaching multicultural education through the lens of sociocultural learning theory. This approach would provide a more instrumental notion of culture and cultural practices. Such a robust view of culture and its role as a primary mediator could support educators' understanding of the cultural dimensions of learning for all youth, not only nondominant youth. By placing culture at the center of all learning processes, it becomes necessary to acknowledge school practices as cultural rather than acultural.

### **The Culture of School**

In this section, I use the term culture to talk about the ecology of schools, its practices and what has given rise to this history of practices. Michael Cole (1996) uses the term, *idiocultures* (Gary Fine) to distinguish the use of the term culture to talk about smaller communities that have their own rules and norms (such as schools and classrooms) and function

as a cultural community. I will use both terms interchangeably. Sociocultural theories and understandings of learning make visible and concrete the idea that the experience and knowledge of each individual has been shaped by a multitude of different cultural influences before they ever enter a school building. And the inverse is also true; schools have been influenced over the years by the cultural practices of those who build, work in, and attend them. Understanding these reciprocal influences includes recognizing that often the learning activities students are asked to engage in once immersed in the cultural practices of school, may bear little resemblance to their prior learning experiences. A particularly cogent example is evident when one considers language as a cultural practice; that is, that all language is socioculturally organized; many students enter school with language practices that fall outside of standard or academic English and often have not experienced the kind of question-answer-evaluation exchanges common in middle-class households and classrooms; nor do schools know how to capture and use the linguistic tools that students have. Thus the issue becomes building educators' understandings of the significance of these differences (in terms of both learning and engagement) and their capacity to draw on the repertoires students develop across all contexts. With respect to the student-teacher relationship, and its importance in academic success, when teachers do not recognize cultural practices as fundamental to learning and do not share cultural practices with their students, they are more likely to unintentionally devalue and dismiss these practices rather than recognizing they are central to learning. Further, when students experience the feeling of being devalued and dismissed in the classroom, it often results in poor student performance and poor student-teacher relationships that have consequences in and outside the classroom.

Educators are influenced in both obvious and imperceptible ways by the larger society; they have been shaped by their families and communities, their own educational experiences, the

sociopolitical narrative, and more. We know that neighborhoods and schools over the past few decades have grown more segregated, so it is fair to assume that most teachers' familial, educational, and societal experiences have been relatively homogenous and have not provided a great deal of exposure to ways of thinking and being in the world outside of dominant practices. Society continues to demonstrate the overwhelming tendency to be more readily accepting of individuals from non-dominant backgrounds when they, at least outwardly, seem to accept dominant cultural practices as the norm and choose to participate in their reproduction. Schools' valued practices generally mirror broader society and do not question or even see their role in cultural reproduction (Bonilla-Silva, 2001), and this mirroring of broader society is certainly true with respect to current multicultural education policies and practices. Typical instantiations of multicultural education, particularly those that involve curricula, often reinforce and reproduce the myth of meritocracy, by presenting a few examples of 'exceptional others' rather than a more complete historical picture. In addition, when multicultural education is conceived as something that must be added to the school day, it reinforces the idea that it is about teaching 'other' cultures and tolerance for difference. This, in turn, reinforces a hierarchy of cultural practices where the dominant practices are viewed as superior and remain unexamined.

As a group, educators rarely acknowledge that success in school is often predicated on a student's ability to assimilate to the (dominant) culture of school and leave home and community cultural practices outside the classroom door (Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). Certainly there are individual educators from all backgrounds who understand the role of schools in reproducing dominant cultural practices, and engage in practices intended to minimize this outcome, but rarely is it addressed at the school, district, or state level. Events over the past two years in Arizona with respect to the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson provide an example

of the dominant society reacting with fear to organized, district level approaches that resist unconsciously reproducing dominant social norms and cultural practices. While the MAS program has received a great deal of support within education and outside the state of Arizona, the situation provides evidence that larger scale attempts to approach education in ways that seek to eliminate racial and cultural hierarchical structures face a long, uphill battle for acceptance, let alone institutional support.

Unfortunately, in this same vein, school is often viewed by those who belong to the dominant population as culturally neutral rather than as a cultural institution in and of itself (Sleeter & Bernal, 2003) —one organized around the cultural values and practices of the predominantly white middle-class (those in power). Similar to all cultural institutions, schools have their own widely recognized structures and long accepted practices that serve to continually reproduce themselves; however, they are not static nor are they impervious to change. Multicultural education is an example of how long standing practices in large cultural institutions can be ruptured, even when there is resistance and backlash. For this reason a theoretical framework that privileges a dynamic notion of culture and cultural practices as primary mediating forces that support and constrain learning, is both appropriate and necessary to a discussion of school policies that attempt to create equity for students from non-dominant cultures. In addition, it is important that the theoretical frame forwards an expansive notion of culture that doesn't equate it to race, ethnicity, or the language spoken. This conflation has been a tension in the well-intentioned efforts of multicultural education and its uptake (Gutiérrez, 2011). Multicultural education policies and programs, although currently not widespread, are likely to increase in number as the demographics of the school age population continue to shift in the coming years, and the number of students from non-dominant backgrounds increases across

the country. Given this probability, it is important to engage in research that addresses the benefits and limitations of policies that are already in existence and relatively well established whenever possible. In short, multicultural education policies and practices should be pushed to adopt these more robust notions of culture to encourage a move away from one-size fits all approaches.

According to proponents of critical multicultural education, it is important to understand schools as a cultural space and cultural community because all of us move across and within multiple cultural communities and take up a variety of cultural practices in everyday life. Understanding U.S. public schools as organized around monolithic white, middle-class cultural practices and as one of the many cultures, subcultures, and idiocultures of which students are a part, encourages a nuanced and complex view of both students and schools. It also allows us to be more cognizant of how these cultural communities interact, recognize that they may conflict with each other in ways that influence student learning, and could potentially help us embrace new ways of thinking about school and organizing learning. In the absence of these understandings, differences in students' academic performance continue to be painted as either cognitive or motivational in nature – as differences in students' inherent cognitive abilities or the effort they put in – when they are more likely the result of differences in the ways students have experienced the world. Students learn through cultural lenses and within a wide range of economic and social contexts with varying constraints and supports. Further, because schools in the U.S. are overwhelmingly structured around the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of the white middle class – an inherent, embedded advantage is created within the educational system for students who come from this or a similar background (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition, schools neither recognize the repertoires of

students from nondominant backgrounds, nor do they provide them the support they require to appropriate new knowledge. To address this naturalized inequity, the goals of multicultural education are to recognize differences as strengths, to complicate the idea of what qualifies as knowledge and challenge how it is produced, and to create an environment in which all children, regardless of background, can learn (co-create knowledge) and thrive. To accomplish these goals, I believe a strong and unifying foundation that includes learning theory would be useful to conceptions and practices of multiculturalism. Of relevance to the present study, sociocultural learning theories are particularly useful when conducting research that addresses broad issues of culture, ethnicity, race and language (as multicultural education must), because of the centrality of culture and cultural mediation in these theories of learning.

### **Sociocultural Learning Theories as a Lens**

In this section, I will illustrate more directly the appropriateness of sociocultural learning theories as a framework for studying multicultural education. Specifically, I discuss the understanding of culture and three central constructs of sociocultural theory to help illuminate how multicultural education could be enhanced by a more robust and dynamic notion of culture and cultural mediation. Because I am most interested in the role of culture in learning processes, and because this concept has been under-theorized in the multicultural education literature, a sociocultural frame provides a rich theoretical approach to understanding and analyzing local educators' beliefs and practices, and the major influences on those beliefs and practices. Sociocultural theories of learning also provide robust conceptions of both learning and culture, and the inherent connection between them, that will help illuminate a more nuanced picture of educators' conceptions of culture, multicultural education, their classroom practices, and the relationship between them.



## **The “Culture” in Sociocultural Theory**

For sociocultural learning theory and its constructs to be useful as an analytical frame in this study, the construct of culture must be adequately defined and understood. How culture is conceptualized is crucial to which notions of multiculturalism will emerge from analysis of the data. In particular, a well-articulated notion of culture becomes essential to the analysis. Consider that the most common understanding of culture, the one often employed by teachers refers to a wide range of things; it is often a reductive, more nationalistic approach to culture, tying culture to country of origin or a focus on essentialized practices such as “food and festivals.” This reductive notion ties culture to large, heterogeneous groups effectively negating intragroup differences, essentializing whole groups, and reinforcing stereotypes. Unfortunately, the most common approach to multicultural education is content integration (Banks, 2004), in which the curriculum is changed to include a more balanced view of those who have contributed to our current society. This approach tends to reinforce the idea that multicultural education, in its totality, is learning about other cultures narrowly. While it is clearly an important goal to learn about other cultures, reducing culture to something “others” have tends to reify the idea that culture belongs to only particular groups of people and is static rather than dynamic; more troubling it is something “different” and involves “othering.” In these models of multiculturalism, the dominant culture is left unexamined and is therefore implicitly understood to be culturally neutral or “normal.” These are problematic definitions of culture in general and unproductive within the field; for multicultural education to move forward in an effective way, it must seek to shift away from conceptions of culture that do not recognize learning as a culturally mediated process or that learning is expanded when horizontal knowledge, that is the knowledge and expertise developed across everyday life (Gutiérrez, 2008), is leveraged. Culture must be re-

framed and understood as an integral part of learning and everyday life rather than as a separate, static entity or characteristic.

Alternative and more productive notions of culture have also been theorized within the context of sociocultural theory. Culture is our sociocultural past and mediates our existence in the social world (Cole, 1996). Further, Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) advanced and clarified the idea inherent in sociocultural theory that culture is not something that is carried within the individual but is continually created within the multiple social contexts in which students participate. In other words, culture is co-constructed in interaction with others (and with artifacts) and is therefore dynamic and represented in individuals' daily practices (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). This conception of culture necessarily leads to the understanding that cultural practices will vary considerably based on the parameters of the social context the student is immersed in at any given time. It is important to clarify, however, that this conception of culture, though it forefronts, the fluidity and reciprocal influences that result from interaction between individuals and their communities' and cultural practices, does not ignore the historicity of these practices. To clarify, it recognizes that there are historical roots to cultural practices - that they are rooted in historical conditions such as oppression - and that although all practices change with the passage of time, the specific history of any given practice continues to impact its instantiation in the present (Cole, 1996). This view of culture, as the fluid practices we engage in rather than something that is inherently present within us, stems from a cultural historical activity theory approach (a branch of sociocultural theory that focuses on activity as the unit of analysis, Leontev) and offers a robust alternative to more reductive conceptions of culture that tend to essentialize students by accepting and perpetuating the notion that all people with similar national, ethnic, or racial heritage participate in the same cultural practices in the same way.

Others have also thought about culture in ways that are useful to this analysis. Lave and Holland (2009), for example, also describe culture in terms of practice but state that from a social practice theory perspective, emphasis is placed on “tension, conflict and difference in participation in cultural activities” (p. 5). They also state that the social practice theory approach to culture places emphasis to the integration of emotion, motivation, and agency, all of which are important to conceptions of identity in education. In addition, Lave and Wenger (1991) focus on the importance of the ways “shared cultural systems of meaning” (p. 54) interact with political and economic structures to help create learning in communities of practice, and emphasize the importance of recognizing learning that occurs outside of school environments. This view parallels the idea in multicultural education that the learning that occurs in the home and community is integral to the students’ classroom learning. Cole, in his chapter “Putting Culture in the Middle,” (2005) also suggests, using a garden metaphor to discuss culture; he argues that “from the earliest times the notion of culture has included a general theory for how to promote development” (p. 216), a primary reason for, and goal of, formal educational environments today. In addition, he states that this form of development, where activities of prior generations are the human part of the environment underscores the “special importance of the social world” (p. 217) suggesting that the human endeavor of promoting development (providing education) is inherently a culturally mediated process. These views of culture, while compatible with the idea of culture forwarded by Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) discussed earlier, offer additional ways to think about culture and learning both within and outside of formal learning environments that can be useful to multicultural education.

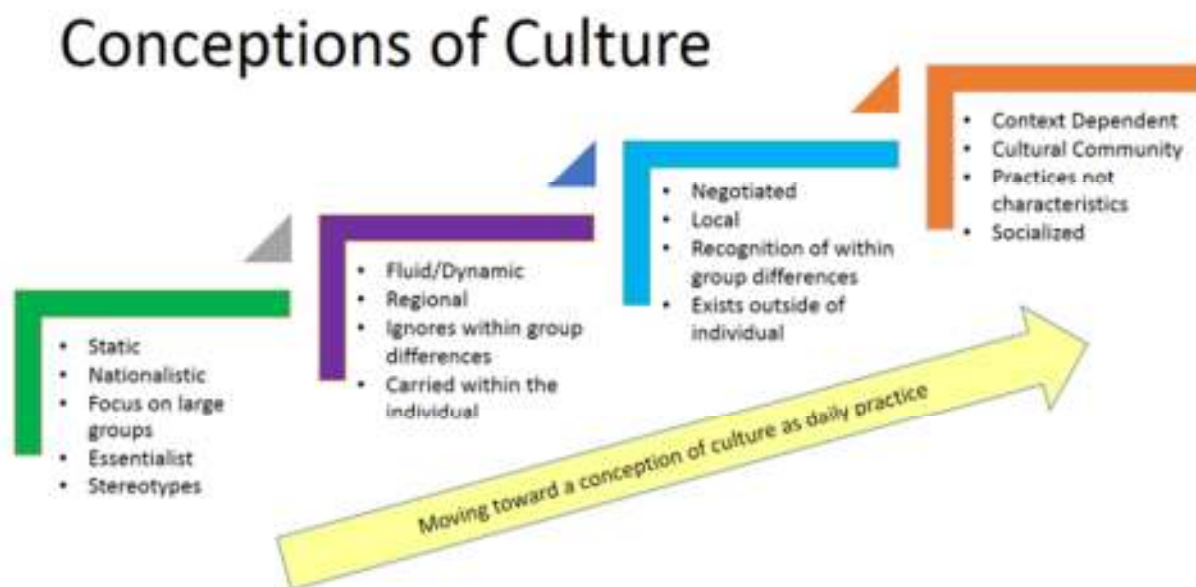
In terms of multicultural education policies and practices, focusing on students’ and families’ valued cultural practices as a way of understanding students’ learning offers significant

advantages over traditional instantiations of multicultural education (Moll et al, 1993). This conception of culture, which is more evident in the literature on critical multicultural education, does not privilege the teaching of discreet “facts” about other cultures as an additional area of content that has to be covered, but allows a more integrated approach where students’ cultural and linguistic practices are valued and utilized in all subject areas throughout the day. In addition, this approach encourages a far more valuable and authentic understanding of culture and cultural practices and affords the opportunity to examine the dominant culture alongside non-dominant cultures in critical and thoughtful way. The conception of culture as practice is also useful in that it fosters understanding of how culture is co-created, how it shifts and changes over time, and that everyone participates in multiple cultural contexts every day; ultimately, sociocultural views of learning and development argue against progressivist notions of culture where some cultures are considered superior to others.

This robust and more nuanced conception of culture is important as part of the analytical frame of this study because of the study’s focus on educators’ beliefs and practices with respect to multicultural education and its inherent link to culture. The conception of culture as practice is also important when considering what influences local educational practice, which is itself a cultural practice (Stigler & Hiebert, 1998). For example, in the analysis of local educators’ conceptions of culture, multicultural education, and its affordances and constraints, as I will illustrate in this dissertation, there was a continuum of responses that ranged from a more monoculturalist view to more critical understandings of culture and multicultural education (see Figure 1 below). Responses demonstrated narrow, stereotypical conceptions of culture, as well as more expansive notions that include culture as important to learning and student identity. This range of expected responses necessitated an analytical frame that would account for a wide

variety of understandings of culture, as well as which conceptions are tied to practices that have been shown to be effective. Further, the practices employed in participants' schools and classrooms also demonstrated a range that employed traditional practices based on narrow conceptions of culture, as well as some that were consistent with sociocultural theories of learning.

Figure 1. *Conceptions of culture as a progression from traditional to a conception of culture as practice.*



Finally, it became apparent during analyses that the conceptions of culture held by individual educators were not predictive of the types of practices they chose to use with their students. In other words, educators with more dynamic notions of culture were not necessarily more likely to employ practices consistent with sociocultural learning theory.

### **Constructs of Sociocultural Learning Theory**

The closely related constructs of distributed cognition, communities of practice, and identity as it relates to language and language ideology are extremely important to sociocultural

theories of learning and can be directly related to multicultural education. Relating these constructs to multicultural education helps to demonstrate their potential usefulness as analytical tools in the proposed study. The purpose of this section is to give an overview of these relevant theoretical constructs and how they can be employed to theorize multicultural education in a more robust way. All three of these constructs have been theorized under the umbrella of sociocultural theory and, as such, help demonstrate the necessity of recognizing and understanding social, and cultural influences on learning that are not accounted for by strictly cognitive understandings of learning. This section will explore how each of these three constructs: distributed cognition, communities of practice, and identity formation are central to sociocultural learning theory, issues of access (a primary concern of multicultural education), and the idea that learning is inherently a social and cultural activity. In addition, I will discuss how each of the constructs is useful in the reframing of multicultural education as a robust pedagogical approach that is essential to the learning processes and success of all students. I selected these three constructs because they demonstrate a conception of culture and learning that closely aligns to the goals and identified effective practices of multicultural education, making them useful analytic tools for this study.

**Distributed cognition.** The construct of distributed cognition directly challenges the assumption that knowledge and the ability to construct that knowledge resides within the minds of individuals. An early expression of the idea that cognition did not take place solely in the minds of individuals came from Wundt who argued that “while elementary psychological functions may be considered to occur ‘in the head,’ higher psychological functions require additional cognitive resources that are to be found in the sociocultural milieu” (Cole & Engeström, 1993 p. 3). This view that knowledge is constructed, reconstructed, and transformed

socially within cultural contexts that are dynamic, historically situated, and rooted in lived practice is important to learning theory for at least two reasons. First, the idea that knowledge is constructed and “stretched over persons activities and settings” (Lave quoted in Moll et al, 1993) rather than discovered and residing in the mind, helps to situate “factual” knowledge as cultural artifact, explicate differences in conceptual understandings across cultures, and demonstrate how these multiple understandings can be equally valid (Cole &Engeström, 1993; Moll et al, 1993).

Second, if cognition and knowledge are shared cultural productions, it allows us to address access to resources as a factor that materially changes the potential trajectories of learning for both individuals and whole communities (Lave &Wenger, 1991; Cole & Engeström, 1993). The latter is particularly important to learning theory and multicultural education because the current view of cognitive potential and intelligence, as well as the predominant pedagogical practices being used in schools, are directly related to more individualistic views of cognition and knowledge production. For students from non-dominant backgrounds in particular, the idea of distributed cognition in learning theory and multicultural education to broaden understandings of knowledge production, cognition, and access to resources has proven to have valuable results with respect to equitable outcomes (Moll et al, 1993). To date, the vast majority of the literature on multicultural education<sup>4</sup> has addressed access to resources and the devaluing of “out of school” (community and home) learning and knowledge, but has not connected the challenges of access directly to the idea of distributed cognition as a construct of learning theory that supports their arguments.

**Communities of practice.** Although it originated in the field of anthropology, not education, Lave & Wenger (1991) introduced the construct of communities of practice in order

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<sup>4</sup> The notable exception is Moll, however, he does not necessarily connect himself specifically to multicultural education as a field of study.

to describe the situated and contextual nature of learning, and the concept has been used in the development and discussion of learning theory ever since. At its core, the concept of communities of practice is a way of describing individuals' roles and the relationships between those engaged in a particular practice. There are learners (community members) who are new to the practice and therefore are not yet full participants and those who are more competent and moving toward full participation and, finally, there are masters or full participants. Inherent in this construct is the idea that communities engaged in a particular practice will have cultural practices, tools, and artifacts specific to that practice that mediate learning and foster movement toward full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The primary contribution of this notion is that it addresses *how* to organize learning that is distributed, reciprocal, and more expansive. While these goals have been articulated, albeit differently, in multicultural education, static and reductive notions of culture remain present and create a barrier to understanding and implementing practices that align to the construct of communities of practice. Another important influence this construct has had on learning theory is that it challenges the predominant view that learning is exclusively (or at least predominantly) the domain of formal learning environments such as schools. At the same time, the idea of a community of practice has demonstrated the importance of context, cultural tools and practices, and the importance of the opportunity to shift roles in learning over time. Finally, an important connection to learning theory and critical multicultural education is that the notion of communities of practice challenges formal education's progressive movement toward the conclusion that gaining discreet knowledge or skills is the sole purpose and outcome of learning. According to Lave and Wenger (1991) "learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities – it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of



person” (p. 53). This connection is particularly important for students from non-dominant populations as the cultural knowledge they share is often devalued by formal learning institutions but would generally be seen as valuable in a community of practice. The construct of communities of practice offers the field of multicultural education a way to approach the construction of classroom and school environments that value all learners’ contributions.

Communities of practice are closely connected to the previously discussed construct of distributed cognition. Both constructs challenge the more traditional beliefs about knowledge and how it is produced and transmitted. The construct of communities of practice offers another conceptual tool with which to think about *how* cognitions are distributed as Cole & Engeström (1993) state “Precisely how cognition is distributed must be worked out for different kinds of activity, with their different forms of mediation, division of labor, social rules, and so on” (p. 42). In education, this indicates that every classroom will have its own unique and fluid context affecting how cognition is distributed in learning activity. Finally, within the concept of communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) explicitly address issues of access to resources and how this affords or constrains learning opportunities. Within this view “to become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation” (p. 100-101). With its focus on access to resources as critical to learning, communities of practice can be used in conjunction with the construct of distributed cognition to further research in the field of multicultural education by providing a configuration for classroom practice that is more supportive of students from non-dominant backgrounds. The construct of communities of practice offers the potential to position students from non-dominant backgrounds as legitimate participants moving in the direction of full participation, where

cognition is understood to be distributed among the participants. These two constructs, used collaboratively, help to demonstrate how social and cultural influences can affect learning and performance within multiple cultural spaces such as schools and neighborhood communities.

**Identity and Language.** Identity is a complex construct that is generally associated with its origin in Erikson's theory of social development (Nakkula, 2008). But this is now a view that has been contested, examined, pushed on, and changed. In their discussion of learning within communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) state that "learning involves the construction of identities" (p. 53). A sociocultural approach to identity, as defined by Penuel & Wertsch (1995), views "the poles of sociocultural processes on the one hand and the individual functioning on the other as existing in a dynamic, irreducible tension" (p. 84). Empirically, Wortham's (2004) study of a ninth grade classroom demonstrated how social identities are developed through academic activity and in educational settings. He states that "if learning involves changing participation in social activities across time, learners become different kinds of people as they learn – because they shift their positions with respect to other people and/or with respect to socially defined activities" (p. 731). Identity, because it is closely tied to understandings of who we are and how we fit in the world is necessarily an important component of learning theory and although it is often considered in multicultural education research, it has not been explicitly tied to the larger conception of learning theory.

Another example of the centrality of identity formation, or negotiation, within the educational process is identified by Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones (2009). Nasir, et al conducted a mixed methods study on constructions of race and academic identity that demonstrated that some students were able to "blend both strong school identities and strong racial identities" (p. 100). They also found that students who had adopted "street savvy identities" and were "less aware of

themselves racially and what that means in a social, political, and historical context,” overwhelmingly viewed academic performance negatively, demonstrating the importance of the construct of identity to learning and academic success (as it is traditionally defined). Nasir et al also make the crucial point that the students’ identities did not develop in a decontextualized setting and were therefore reflective of “the types of learning experiences the students had access to and the opportunities they were afforded” (p. 101), again highlighting the theme of access. This study demonstrates the need for educational institutions to directly address issues of student identity if they intend to address issues of equity and access. In addition, it suggests that connecting learning theory constructs to multicultural education can support the argument that understandings of identity and effective practices identified in research should be considered in the writing of multicultural education policy.

Cultural practices, especially language, are closely tied to identity development and, as such, need to be addressed explicitly within the discussion. Non-dominant languages, within the United States school system, are typically viewed as obstacles to be overcome rather than assets, and very few states (where most policy decisions are made) value a bilingual and biliterate population enough to use policy to encourage its development. Students who speak languages other than English in United States schools are often made to feel that their language is inferior and of no value to them or their communities. This hierarchical ideology of language has resulted in students disassociating themselves from their families, communities, and cultures in an attempt to find success in a system which actively devalues their cultural and linguistic heritage, skill, and knowledge (Valenzuela, 1999). This same phenomena can be seen in African American communities in which children grow up speaking “non-standard” forms of English and learn to separate themselves from the language and culture of their communities when in school

in order to demonstrate academic success, as it is currently defined in schools (Nasir, et al, 2009). This requirement to “check yourself at the door” of a classroom necessarily affects how identity develops and influences how students view and feel about their linguistic and cultural knowledge and heritage.

Finally, in addition to sociocultural theory, relevant perspectives such as critical theories, and broad frameworks of multiculturalism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) and colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) are explored in the literature review, as these theories are useful to understanding teachers' orientations toward multicultural education, as well as the social influences on those orientations. In addition, Banks' (2009) conception of common paradigmatic responses to external pressure to include multicultural education practices in school is discussed as it relates to other theories in the field and the current socio-political context. These theoretical perspectives and frameworks may be used as additional lenses, if needed, to add depth and complexity to the analysis. Given these theories relationships', either directly or indirectly, to the issues of multicultural education, they may help to clarify what is learned as well as improve understandings of how learning theory may add a beneficial dimension to multicultural education policy and practices.

### **Summary**

There are a multitude of difficult issues faced by students from non-dominant backgrounds and those responsible for their education. The beliefs and practices of local educators' about multicultural education can be significant to how they approach their students from non-dominant backgrounds. These educator perceptions and practices with respect to culture and multicultural education are the result of a multitude of influences and while multicultural education policy is one of those factors, the data collected in this study indicates

that educators identify personal and academic experiences as the most influential. Educators' interpretations of and responses to multicultural education programs and policies are important to understand because principals and teachers are tasked with their implementation - and their beliefs about their students and the necessity of the programs can affect their approach to practice (Spillane, 2002). In addition, teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding students' backgrounds are a key factor in their relationships with students, and the student-teacher relationship is a significant factor in student success. This study seeks to increase our understanding of the ways policies in multicultural education both support and constrain administrators' and teachers' efforts to develop and implement effective programs and practices in their schools and classrooms. Exploring the connections between policy and practice is an important first step in understanding a complex issue, and should eventually lead to research on the effects of multicultural education policy on students. Policies in education should support the learning of all students and the teachers who guide and foster that learning. Multicultural education, if reframed in the national dialogue in a way that answers the critiques and demonstrates a legitimate connection to how students learn, could become a policy area that effectively supports learning and meets its goals of equitable opportunity and outcomes for all. The goal of this research is to glean insights regarding policy and practice in multicultural education that will help us understand how to make both more effective for both students and teachers.

## CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

As a former teacher, I understand on a personal level that teachers' understandings of their students, local contexts, and the programs and policies they are asked to implement influence how they design and deliver instruction in their classrooms. I also understand the essential role played by district and school leadership in supporting teachers' learning and pedagogical choices. Understanding that interactions between educators' personal understandings and the institutional systems in which they operate play a significant role in shaping the experiences of students, and with a primary interest in equity, my research interests quickly came to focus on multicultural education. Multicultural education is an educational movement (and in some places a policy area), that at its inception was aimed directly at creating equity for students traditionally marginalized by the public education system. In addition, the implementation of effective multicultural education is highly dependent on educators' personal understandings of their students, local contexts, and any programs and policies that may exist in those contexts. With a desire to better understand what influences and shapes the ways multicultural education is viewed and instantiated in typical K-12 classrooms (in order to eventually help improve programs and policies) – I designed my dissertation study to answer questions related to these issues. I view this study as one way I can begin addressing issues of equity within a system that tends to resist change and is slow to adapt, as multicultural education has already created some lasting, positive changes and has gained tacit, but broad-based support from the system. Despite the positive changes the movement has created, it is far from accomplishing its original goal of equity for all; a better understanding of how individual educators, working within the system, come to their understandings of culture and multicultural education may improve those results. Therefore, increasing our understanding of what influences

and shapes educators' conceptions culture and multicultural education; what practices they choose to employ; and how they make sense of the relationship between culture and learning, are the goals that were central to the analysis completed for this dissertation.

To properly contextualize the need for this study, the methods chosen, and the analysis of findings, I focus the review of literature on areas that are most relevant to the analytical goals of the study discussed above. In order to adequately understand the issues being discussed, a brief history, or overview, of multicultural education is necessary. This history includes the origin and original purpose of multicultural education; views of multiculturalism and multicultural education as a kind of continuum; and shifts that have occurred over time, including a relevant [societal/sociolinguistic] shift with respect to race and the various institutional responses to demands for change in multicultural education (Banks' response paradigms, 2009). Following this overview, research that identifies effective critical multicultural education practices will be discussed. Next, literature that provides a useful lens through which to analyze educators' roles in the implementation of multicultural education policy is explored and, finally, current national and state policies relevant to multicultural education will be presented as additional context for the chosen research site – the state of New Mexico.

### **A Brief History of Multicultural Education**

#### **Origin and Purpose**

Prior to its official beginnings following school desegregation and the civil rights movement, multicultural education can trace its roots to the intercultural and intergroup education movements in the 1930s and 1940s respectively as well as the Ethnic Studies movement of the 1960s (Banks, 2004). Multicultural education has been defined in a multitude of ways, since its inception but racial equity was the primary motivating force behind the

origination of the movement and the push to have it included in schools. There was initially significant resistance to its inclusion and rhetoric that decried it as divisive and useless (Schlesinger, 1998; Glazer, 1997), and some in the field pointed out a substantial gap between theory and classroom practices (Gay, cited in Banks, 2004). A period when multicultural ideas were more widely embraced by educational professionals as an effective way to approach closing or narrowing the achievement gap followed, resulting primarily in changes to curricular content. Currently there is significant evidence, particularly in some states, that the argument that it divides us as a nation and is a threat to society as a whole is experiencing a resurgence (Banks, 2009; Cooper, 2010; May, 2009). Despite the widespread use of the term and the insistence of some scholars that it is firmly entrenched in our schools and curricula (Schlesinger, 1998; Glazer, 1997; Ravitch, 2000), it continues to be implemented idiosyncratically and, in most cases, without the support of policy (Banks, 2004, 2009; Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000). For the most part, multicultural education has become increasingly accepted within the K-12 public school environment, particularly in the area of curriculum change, however, some of the progress that was made has recently begun to erode. For example the state school board of Texas redefined social studies standards in Texas, and new state laws and district policies have passed in Arizona targeting the Tucson Unified School District's Mexican American Studies Program. This brief overview, demonstrates that multicultural education was contentious in its early years and remains so today for some state and local education agencies.

### **A Continuum of Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education**

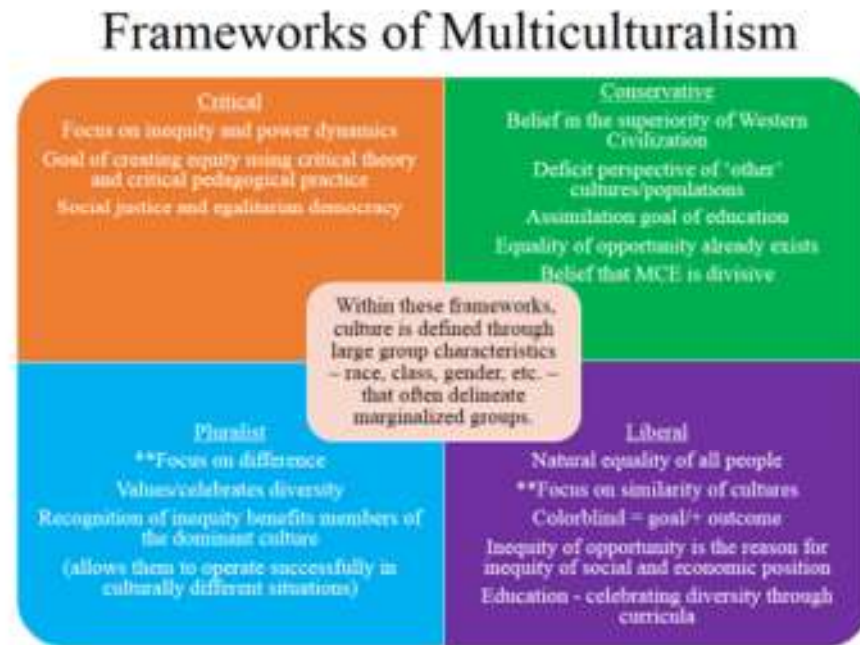
As Multiculturalism became common terminology both within and outside of education, several different frameworks were identified that demonstrate the different ways people think about diversity in the United States as a whole as well as in classrooms. Kincheloe & Steinberg's



paradigm of five types of multiculturalism identifies conservative multiculturalism (or monoculturalism), liberal multiculturalism, pluralist multiculturalism, left-essentialist multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism as the different categories into which peoples' beliefs will generally fall (1997 – See Figure 2). The conservative or monoculturalist view is one that insists that multicultural education is divisive in nature and does not contribute to the goal of creating one American culture – which in this view is one of the primary purposes of public education. This conservative view privileges the belief that all students currently have an equal opportunity to succeed in school and is exemplified by scholars such as Schlesinger (1998), Glazer (1997), and Ravitch (1997) – although in recent years Ravitch (2011, 2013) has shifted her position and acknowledged the disparities in access to educational opportunity. The liberal and pluralist views are very similar to each other in that they both recognize the differences in opportunity afforded students from various marginalized groups, but the liberal

view emphasizes similarities between cultures and the pluralist view emphasizes difference.

Figure 2. *Summary of Kincheloe & Steinberg's 1997 framework of multiculturalism.*



These two types of multiculturalism function through an assertion of the basic equality of all human beings, and the belief that the differences in outcome for various groups result from differences in social and educational opportunities, not inequities (such as racism) that are structural or institutionalized in nature (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). These views are often associated with terminology such as “culture of poverty” and “culturally disadvantaged” insinuating that the ‘othered’ culture or category (poverty is not a culture) is in some way inferior to the dominant or ‘normal’ culture or category. Due to their similarity, they will generally be discussed as one category unless there is a clear distinction to be made that is important to the study

The left-essentialist view of multiculturalism is associated with Afrocentrism and other ethnocentric responses to the dominant culture, and according to Kincheloe and Steinberg

produces an “inverse dualism” (p. 21) where the dominant culture is viewed negatively and marginalized cultures are viewed positively. As this view of multicultural education does not currently play as prevalent a role in the larger discussion of multicultural education as it once did, it is not likely to be a view held by many teachers. Given the current socio-political context, however, it is obvious that the program Arizona targeted was interpreted as left-essentialist and seen as threatening to the dominant culture. Finally, the critical multiculturalists’ view is one that recognizes a more complex model of social identity that includes but is not exclusive to race and ethnicity. Critical multiculturalism within education is concerned with schools tendency to “work in complicity with cultural reproduction, as teachers innocently operate as cultural gatekeepers who transmit dominant values and protect the common culture from the Vandals at the gates of the empire” (p. 26). Within this paradigm of multicultural education, cultural, political, and economic forces, and their overlapping effects, are all critically analyzed by students and teachers. Consideration of students’ developing and intersecting multiple identities (racial, cultural, ethnic, class, gender, learner, etc.) is considered essential to providing an effective educational experience. In short, critical multiculturalism is contextualized rather than decontextualized. Although not necessarily intended as a theoretical framework for further study, Kincheloe & Steinberg’s definitions of the types of multiculturalism lend themselves nicely to this inquiry into teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education and may provide a useful starting point for the analysis of teacher and administrator interview responses.

In 1987, Sleeter & Grant conducted a review of the multicultural education literature and characterized the approaches to multicultural education they found. They identified five types of multicultural education described in the literature. The first approach they referred to as “Teaching the Culturally Different” (p. 422) and was focused on the assimilation of students of

color into the existing social structure which can be related to Kincheloe & Steinberg's monoculturalist type of multiculturalism. The second they called the "Human Relations" approach which attempted to help students from different backgrounds appreciate each other and get along. This second approach is similar to the pluralist type of multiculturalism. The third approach identified was the "Single Group Studies" which is most closely related to the teaching of ethnic studies today. Those who oppose ethnic studies programs would likely term these classes left-essentialist in the Kincheloe and Steinberg model, but it does not actually parallel in the same way the other approaches do, because the intent of single group studies was to foster cultural pluralism, which is not the intent of left-essentialist multiculturalism. The fourth approach was deemed the "Multicultural Education" approach and equates to the liberal type of multiculturalism in the previous model. The fifth and final approach to multicultural education identified by Sleeter & Grant (1987) was "Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist" which closely aligns to the critical type of multiculturalism in the Kincheloe and Steinberg model.

### **The Shift to Critical Multicultural Education**

In more recent years, research and scholarship in multicultural education has shifted and now argues that curricular changes are not enough to have a broad impact on opportunities or outcomes for students from non-dominant backgrounds (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003; Nieto, 2004; Lee, 2009); however it is important to make clear that this same shift is not evident in current policy or practice. This realignment has resulted in a body of research that focuses on what has been termed critical multicultural education. Much of the current literature and dialog in critical multicultural education focuses on the failings of multicultural education to adequately address issues of power, privilege, racism, and systemic or structural

inequities within education, as well as other systems in which students are required to participate. Sleeter & Bernal (2003) and Nieto (2004) argue forcefully that multicultural education needs to incorporate tenets of critical pedagogy if it is to be a successful method of instruction for students from non-dominant backgrounds. Nieto states that critical pedagogy's central tenets of including student voices, and recognition of the political nature of education, bring to multicultural education a "sharp institutional analysis that might otherwise be missing" (p. 179). Sleeter & Bernal state that critical pedagogy develops several concepts related to multicultural education including "voice, culture, power...and ideology," and that by doing so it "offers tools for critical reflexivity on those concepts" (p. 242). These authors, along with others, advocate for a model of critical multiculturalism that will challenge "the status quo and the basis of power" (Lee, 2009 p.15) by keeping the sociopolitical context at the forefront. Those who support the more critical definitions point out that the typical instantiation of multicultural education, meaning the simple addition of non-dominant cultures and individuals to the curricula, equates to teaching disconnected facts and lacks the context necessary to allow students to relate the instruction and information to their lived experiences, thereby minimizing its effectiveness (Gonzales, 2005; Au, 2009; Tatum, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004).

Anti-racist and anti-bias education proponents use many of the same arguments regarding the limitations of the traditional multicultural education approach including that it is decontextualized and does not address issues of power and privilege (Gillborn, 2004; Lee, 2009). In the anti-racist education literature, however, there is also the argument that multicultural education is deracialized and that this is a problem because students live and learn in a racialized world (Gillborn, 2004; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003, Lee, 2009); and this argument was supported by the data collected in this study. Most proponents choose to use anti-racist or anti-bias

terminology because they believe it better encompasses the issues that multicultural education was intended, but has failed, to address. Given the apparent 'acceptance' of a multicultural approach within the field of education, however, I would argue that modifying the definition and refocusing multicultural education to include the tenets of anti-racist and anti-bias education offers the possibility of both improving the quality of classroom practices and, possibly, giving the goals and tenets of anti-racist education a broader base of support in discussions of policy and practice. An understanding of critical multicultural education is important to the study because it is in alignment with research on effective practice and can help to make sense of how educators choose and think about their practices. In addition, despite these shifts in scholarship, multicultural education continues to be perceived primarily as a curricular additive in K-12 education, and this stagnation and resistance to more critical practices can be related to broader sociological shifts that have likely influenced how multicultural education has been taken up and instantiated over the years.

### **Responses to Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education**

As was briefly discussed in the previous chapter, there have been several shifts in the past decade and a half in education policy in general, as well as within the realm of multicultural education. With the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and the more recent Race to the Top "competition," and their focus on high-stakes testing, federal education policy's influence on classroom practices is on the rise. This is particularly true in schools with high percentages of students from non-dominant and low socio-economic status backgrounds as it is often these schools that are labeled as "failing," and it is "failing" schools specifically that are targeted by these policies. At the state level, growing anti-immigrant sentiments have given rise to laws in at least six states that would restrict or refuse educational services to children who

cannot produce documentation of legal status. In the state of Arizona, this anti-immigrant sentiment also resulted in the passage of an education law (HB 2281) targeting the popular and successful Mexican American Studies program in the Tucson Unified School District for elimination. Following a January, 2012 court ruling that the program was indeed in violation of the new law, TUSD removed nearly 80 books used in that program from classrooms and put them in the district's central storage facility, effectively banning them, despite the official stance that they were not banned because students would still be able to access them in their school library. These highly charged current events in national and state level education policy, as well as the broader sociopolitical context discussed in the introduction, necessitate exploring broader sociological trends, as well as literature that helps shed light on the ways in which educational institutions have reacted to people's demands for change in the realm of multicultural education. The following sections explore broader sociological trends around race and racism, and the response patterns (or paradigms) identified by Banks (2009) that describe reactions to demands for change in institutions such as schools.

**Racialized social structures and response paradigms.** As was mentioned previously, racial equity was the primary motivating force behind the multicultural education movement and the push to have it included in schools and there was significant resistance to its inclusion. Bonilla-Silva (1996) puts forth a useful framework for considering the history of multicultural education and its connection to larger sociological patterns. Bonilla-Silva's conception presents racism as structural in nature rather than as the result of individuals' irrational, incorrect, or prejudicial thinking by using what he terms "racialized social systems" (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 469). This framework asserts, among other things, that race and racism are fundamental to the structure of the current social system in the United States (which includes schools), that they are

not static phenomena, and that they can be viewed as rational by those invested in the social system. Bonilla-Silva defines racialized social systems as “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races” (1996, p. 469). According to Bonilla-Silva, this framework offers flexibility that allows for the shift from domination “achieved through dictatorial means” and overt racism, to hegemonic control and “covert,” indirect forms of racism that continue to exist in the post civil rights era (1996, p. 470). He states that the classification of people in racial terms “has been a highly political act” (1996, p. 471) and that

What and who is to be Black or White or Indian reflects and affects the social political, ideological, and economic struggles between the races. The global effects of these struggles can change the meaning of the racial categories as well as the position of a racialized group in a social formation (p. 472).

This flexibility of racial categorization and the idea that race can be rearticulated to move forward a particular goal is evident in educational responses to ethnic revitalization movements discussed by Banks (2009) in the multicultural education literature.

Banks (2009) asserts that whenever “structurally marginalized ethnic groups...demand changes in a range of social, economic, and political institutions so that they could participate and exercise power in them” they are met, within the multicultural education realm, by various “response paradigms” (p. 17). Bonilla-Silva (1996) also addresses the idea of various populations demanding change within his framework, referring to it as “racial contestation” and defining it as the “struggle of racial groups for systemic changes regarding their position at one or more



levels” (p. 473). These levels are identified, similarly to Banks’ institutions, as social, political, economic, or ideological. Banks (2009) identifies nine response paradigms and explains that they tend to occur non-linearly and at different phases within the “ethnic revitalization movements” (p. 17). For example, the “ethnic additive” and “self-concept development” paradigms (which manifest as additive curricular features and the goal of increasing non-dominant groups’ self-esteem) tend to be fairly immediate systemic responses to these movements and tend to wane as the revitalization movement reaches later phases. According to Banks (2009), at the beginning of the multicultural education movement these types of responses were implemented with little planning or thought and their primary goal was to “silence the ethnic protest and discontent” (p. 13). This is similar to the function of the frames of colorblind racism presented by Bonilla-Silva (2006), in that surface level changes are made that allow the *appearance* of improvement and honest effort at substantive change, without actually disrupting the status quo.

The structural response paradigm operates under the assumption that schools are part of the problem and recognizes their primary role in reproducing inequity, and therefore have an impeded ability to contribute to change. Banks (2009) presents the goals of this paradigm as “to help them (students and teachers) develop a commitment to radical social and economic change,” (p. 20) which indicates that agency is not absent from this response paradigm despite the idea that schools are a part of the problem and cannot easily contribute to change. The Anti-racist response paradigm recognizes and encourages agentic action with respect to both institutional racism and personal prejudice. Both the anti-racist and structural response paradigms recognize that structural changes in the political and economic fields are needed to insure educational equity for low-income and racially, culturally, and linguistically non-dominant students. Some of Banks’ response paradigms map to other theories of race and education, such as the Cultural

Ecology paradigm which relates directly to Ogbu's theory of minority students' development of oppositional identities that reject mainstream culture, and the Protective Disidentification paradigm that incorporates the idea of stereotype threat theorized by Steele (Banks, 2009, p. 24). Banks' description of how these paradigms move in and out of favor within the context of education states that

“The leaders and advocates of particular paradigms compete in order to make their paradigms the most popular in academic, government and school settings. Proponents of paradigms that can attract the most government and private support are likely to become the prevailing voices for multicultural education within a particular time or period” (p. 20).

This leads to the conclusion that the paradigms that will tend to garner the most support, will nearly always be those that support or reinforce the dominant population's advantageous positions in all areas – economic, social, political, and educational. While it may seem, on the surface, to be about providing best practices in multicultural education, the system is often functioning to perpetuate inequities in education and reproduce advantage for the dominant population, which is also the primary function of colorblind racism in Bonilla-Silva's argument in *Racism without Racists* (2006). It is clear that, using Bonilla-Silva and Banks' frameworks, schools are racialized social systems that actively employ practices that maintain racial inequities.

**Colorblind racism and multicultural education.** In addition to his framework of racialized social systems, In *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva (2006) presents a theory of the metamorphosis of racism, and demonstrates how it is currently enacted in the United States

through everyday discursive features; these features can be directly tied to common classroom practices. He utilizes interview data to illustrate how the way we talk about race has been transformed in order to allow a new form of racism, colorblind racism, to exist and thrive in a society that *officially* subscribes to an ethos of equality of opportunity for all persons, regardless of race. He argues that society in general and white people in particular use four central “frames,” rhetorical styles, and stories and testimonials to bolster the idea that racism is no longer a central issue in American society, and to explain or justify the ‘failure’ of individuals of color to attain equal footing. Essentially, he is stating that those in a position of privilege (whites) utilize these new tools to maintain their relative positions of power and justify the advantages they are afforded on the basis of their skin color, without appearing to have racially biased motivations. He also explores the idea of “white habitus,” which he defines as the “uninterrupted socialization process that *conditions* and *creates* whites’ racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters” (p. 104, emphasis in original), and abstract liberalism, which he identifies as one of the four frames of colorblind racism. Bonilla-Silva (2006) asserts that the abstract liberalism frame uses the rhetoric of equal opportunity for all, the meritocratic mindset, and the American ideal of freedom of choice in all aspects of life (e.g. where you “choose” to live and go to school, who you choose to socialize with, etc.), as the primary ideals that whites use to “ignore the effects of past and contemporary discrimination” and its impact “on the social, economic, and educational status of minorities” (p. 31). Using multiple quotes from a large sample of three different interviews, he argues effectively that whites use the idea of individual choice to defend their “right to live and associate primarily with whites” (p. 36), reinforcing the idea of a white habitus that socializes white children into a highly segregated and racialized world. This is particularly salient in today’s context of increasing

resegregation of public schools occurring all over the country.

The frame of colorblind racism Bonilla-Silva (2006) terms “abstract liberalism” can be directly linked to the official and unofficial curricula of American schools. The entire structure of schools is predicated on the liberal ideal of individualism and rewarding merit. Students are given daily messages regarding success and working hard, without any qualifications or caveats to help them understand why two people can both work very hard but one continually benefits from systematic advantages. Although most teachers are well aware that many of their students of color start school with different skill sets than their white counterparts (which are generally considered to place them at a disadvantage in a school setting), the small percentage of “disadvantaged” or “at-risk” students who “make it,” for various reasons and with various levels of out of school support, allow teachers and the general public to buy into the idea that it was simply hard work and anyone who displays the same effort will garner the same results. Indeed President Obama’s oft told *story* of relative disadvantage (an African-American/biracial boy being raised by a single mother) serves this rhetorical purpose and can be seen as an example of the stories Bonilla-Silva suggests are tools of colorblind racism. The simplification of President Obama’s story, ignoring the differences between the context of his story and the context of most inner city students growing up in abject poverty (without supportive grandparents or a highly educated mother) serves to reinforce the myth that hard work can ameliorate *any* “disadvantage” with which a student enters the classroom.

Teachers, in an effort to encourage hope and hard work in their students from non-dominant backgrounds, tend to reproduce this decontextualized fallacy simply by giving students the widely accepted message that if they work hard, they can do and be anything they wish and overcome any obstacle. Indeed, Polanyi (1985) asserts that virtually all stories told by the

dominant population can be shown to tell “The American Story” of success, as the result of independent effort regardless of circumstance. When students begin to challenge these statements and stories because they no longer ring true in the face of their lived experiences, the trust that is necessary between a student and his or her teacher in order for learning to thrive, deteriorates and ultimately disappears causing disenfranchisement (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). This frame of colorblind racism and use of story is in direct opposition to many of the identified effective (critical) multicultural education practices and needs to be addressed by making it visible in teacher preparation and professional development if local educators are to be effective with their students of color.

Another common frame of colorblind racism that is strongly linked to schools current practices is the cultural racism frame. Bonilla-Silva (2006) states that this frame replaces the previous frames of racism that were used by whites to explain the ‘inferiority’ of other races; where a biologically based justification for racial inequity and the eugenics movement were formerly used, whites now use culture, framed initially in education as the “culture of poverty,” (p. 40) to explain the group disadvantages of non-dominant populations in general, and blacks in particular. Unflattering characteristics such as laziness, a lack of morality, and an absence of stable family structure are attributed to the entire group (culture) in an attempt to explain the failure of the majority of the group’s members and justify the superiority of the white population. Recently the cultural racism frame was used by a high profile politician, Republican Congressman Paul Ryan, on talk radio where he stated

“We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that

has to be dealt with” (Lowery, 2014).

Within education there are widely held beliefs about parents from non-dominant populations not valuing or supporting their children's education, and language differences are generally seen as a disadvantage rather than a resource which can be used as an additional path to learning. Rarely do white teachers have adequate knowledge of their students' various identities and cultures or receive the training they need to be able to effectively use students' local cultural practices to help them connect the knowledge and skills they are learning in school to other contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Sleeter, 1992; Nieto, 2004).

My personal experience in schools with large numbers of students from non-dominant backgrounds was that much of teacher discourse in staff lounges, hallways, and even classrooms in front of students was organized around deficit understandings of students and their “cultures.” These discourse practices are often not perceived by the teachers to be racial in nature; Bonilla-Silva (2006) offers an explanation as to why; the accepted argument that non-dominant cultures are somehow inherently deficient is now tightly woven into societal discourse and he terms this the cultural frame of colorblind racism. Finally, the two previously discussed frames of colorblind racism are often combined with one another or with one or both of the other two frames - naturalization and minimization. Naturalization includes dialog such as “it is *natural* for black students to want to sit with other black students.” Minimization is characterized by dialogue that refutes the idea that the incident in question had anything to do with race. Minimization may be particularly salient to student experiences because school age children and teens' identities are fragile and in constant flux. When teachers, often from the dominant culture, minimize their students' lived experiences, by insisting that the treatment they have received from peers (or other teachers) is not race-based, the effects can be detrimental to the student-

teacher relationship and, thus, the student's learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). The cultural frame of colorblind racism parallels Banks' cultural deprivation response paradigm in which school goals are "compensatory and behaviorist" in nature (p. 19). The cultural frame of colorblind racism and the cultural deprivation response paradigm so common in schools, are in direct opposition to identified effective critical multicultural education practices as the review of literature in the area of effective practice will demonstrate.

Bonilla-Silva's (2006) work is essential to consider when researching local educators' perceptions of multicultural education and the policies that shape them because it makes clear the pervasiveness of colorblind language throughout all social and cultural institutions. Further, it demonstrates how traditional classroom stories and educational attitudes, such as the meritocratic mindset, can be seen and felt as oppressive to students from non-dominant backgrounds and negatively impact teacher-student relationships. All of these concepts, racialized social structures, Banks' response paradigms, and colorblind racism, help to make clear how teachers, principals, and even district level personnel and community members (especially with respect to the response paradigms) may hold perceptions and maintain or support practices that they don't believe are racialized or prejudicial but may have unintended negative consequences for the students of color they serve. Finally, with frames of colorblind racism evident in common societal and school discourse, the use of language by teachers in classrooms and that of multicultural education policy should be considered and analyzed critically.

### **Effective Practices and Student-Teacher Relationships**

In pursuing a study of what influences educators' conceptions of culture and how they may or may not relate to their multicultural education practices, it is useful to explore the research literature that identifies effective or 'best' practices in the field. Research has shown

that one particularly influential factor in non-dominant student success is the relationship between the teacher and student; therefore, an important and effective multicultural education practice is to develop caring, respectful student-teacher relationships (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela 1999). These relationships are necessarily influenced by both teachers' attitudes toward their students and their pedagogical practices, and teachers' attitudes and practices are influenced by policies (Spillane, 2004). Therefore, it can be argued that multicultural education programs and policies; teachers' perceptions of those programs and policies and their students; and the development of caring, respectful student-teacher relationships are inextricably linked. This section will explore in more detail the literature that identifies effective multicultural education practices and connects these practices to the importance of caring, respectful relationships between students from non-dominant backgrounds and their teachers in students' academic success.

Three small studies of pedagogical practice with students from non-dominant backgrounds, when taken together, offer some idea of what critical multicultural education practices should look like. Ladson-Billings (2009) conducted an ethnographic study of eight teachers identified by parents, principals and colleagues as successful teachers of African-American students using interviews, classroom observations and videotape, and collective interpretation. Valenzuela's (1999) three year ethnographic study of academic achievement and schooling orientation of immigrant Mexican and Mexican American students used participant observation, questionnaires, and informal interviews with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. Nieto (2004) completed a small case-study of two male students – one Hispanic and one African-American, who had been unsuccessful in traditional schools but were succeeding in an alternative school environment. All three of these



studies demonstrate that the teacher's approach to her students, which is understood to be influenced by her beliefs about students' abilities, cultures, and communities, is important to building the respectful relationships necessary for improved student outcomes. All three studies also point to the importance of critical pedagogy and challenging the traditional notions and paths of knowledge construction.

Ladson-Billings' (2009) study of successful teachers of African-American children revealed patterns in the following three areas: the teachers' conceptions of self and others, teachers' social relations with students, and teachers' conceptions of knowledge. In terms of conceptions of self and others, teachers who were culturally responsive in their teaching saw teaching as an art and themselves as artists. They situate themselves as part of the community, believe all students can succeed, and view teaching as "pulling knowledge out" (p. 38) of the students and helping them make connections between local, national, and global contexts. With respect to social relations, successful teachers demonstrated connectedness, maintained fluid and equitable relationships that extended beyond the classroom with all students, and encouraged a community of collaborative learners where students were "expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other" (p. 60). Culturally relevant teachers' conceptions of knowledge centered on the idea that knowledge is flexible and contestable, it is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared, and should be critically viewed. Finally, teachers were "passionate about content," saw excellence as a "complex standard" (p. 89) and the best teachers had "personal charisma and sense of drama" (p. 26) that held their students' attention and made their lessons memorable.

In Valenzuela's (1999) study of an urban Houston high school with a large Mexican immigrant and Mexican American population, and Nieto's (2004) case study of two male

students of color who had initially been unsuccessful in school, but were demonstrating success in alternative public high schools, student narratives indicated that teachers often did not display 'authentic caring' with their students. This theme of caring was quite predominant in the narratives in both studies, and it clearly had a significant impact on the students and how they viewed schools and their value within those schools. Valenzuela concludes that "in a world that does not value bilingualism or biculturalism, youth may fall prey to the subtle yet unrelenting message of the worthlessness of their communities" (p. 264) and suggests that the answer is for teachers and other school personnel to "embrace a more authentically caring ideology" and "search for connection where trusting relationships constitute the cornerstone for all learning" (p. 263). Although this conclusion is somewhat diffuse, it indicates that a deeper understanding of, and respect for, non-dominant students' cultures is necessary in the classroom. Nieto's case studies identified several critical multicultural practices in use at the alternative schools where the boys were experiencing success. They included affirming students' cultures without trivializing the concept of culture itself, challenging hegemonic knowledge, complicating their view of pedagogy (there is no one right way to teach), problematizing a simplistic focus on self-esteem, and encouraging 'dangerous discourse.' All of these studies identify important 'intangibles' that constitute effective multicultural practices, and both Nieto and Ladson-Billings (2009) identified a critical approach to knowledge and knowledge production as important. All three of these studies make clear that, particularly for students from non-dominant backgrounds, the approach of the teacher with respect to both knowledge and personal interactions was extremely important to student success.

### **Co-Construction of Policy**

Bilingual multicultural education, as a policy area, is ignored or neglected by most states

but New Mexico has taken it up aggressively since the late 1960s and early 1970s, passing the first legislation in the country (BMEB, 2009); this history will be elaborated further in a later section of this chapter. As was previously discussed, the initial purpose of multicultural education was to provide more equitable educational opportunities to students from non-dominant backgrounds (Banks, 2004), making New Mexico's adoption of such policies during that time frame, a significant political act; one intended to create meaningful social change during a time when most of the country continued to struggle with the idea of forced desegregation. Fairclough refers to "moments of crisis" (Woodside-Jiron, 2004 p. 177) when things are changing or going wrong in his attempts to understand how policy and power create social change, which seems to fit the timing of New Mexico's initial legislation (BMEB, 2009). New Mexico's history as a place where Mexican Americans retained a significant degree of power and were able to keep numerous legal checks on the power of the much smaller Euro-American population since prior to gaining statehood (Gomez, 2007) helps to explain why it was the first state to take up the idea of multicultural education as a path to educational equity. Exploring the terminology of education policy (including definitions of student populations), and identifying what has been normalized through its use, is critical to understanding what influences educators' conceptions, as the language used in policies may prove to be one of these influences. Finally, the notion of co-construction of policy may prove useful in analyzing how educators' perceptions and practices with respect to multicultural education are shaped within an educational context that includes explicit, related policies that have been in place for several decades.

Studies that offer complex conceptions of how local educators interact with policy during the implementation process are instructive to this study because all educators in the focal district

are responsible for implementing the state's Bilingual Multicultural Education Act, and are undoubtedly affected or influenced by the policy in some way. Mehan, Hubbard, & Datnow (2010) argue that educational reform is, by nature, a co-constructed, messy process that does not necessarily follow a rational line. They assert that co-construction "foregrounds questions central to human sciences research related to power and authority" (2010 p. 99) and Spillane (2002) makes the case that district personnel make policy in the process of implementing it through the acts of learning and interpretation. The construct of policy co-construction (Mehan et al, 2010), provides a lens through which to analyze whether the data collected in this study offer any explanatory power with respect to whether and/or how policy influences educators' understandings of [culture or ] multicultural education. Mehan et al (2010) also theorize that the co-construction process, while inherent, is not necessarily a conscious one. They state that the co-construction perspective "does not assume that policy is the only, or even major influence on people's behavior" and that those implementing reforms "are active agents making policy in their everyday actions...educators may act in a variety of ways in response to reforms – initiating alternatives, advancing or sustaining reform efforts, resisting or actively subverting reform efforts" (p.100). This perspective is particularly useful in thinking about teachers' practices with respect to policy, and how different responses may translate into particular classroom practices that materially or academically affect students. The difference between conscious and unconscious responses with respect to bilingual and multicultural education policies is important to note because official and unofficial discourses of school actively (and sometimes aggressively) push a meritocratic, colorblind ideology that can be harmful to students from non-dominant backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). Finally, the co-construction perspective acknowledges and considers all contexts and seeks to address their interconnections

(Mehan et al., 2010) which is useful when considering multiple policy layers (federal, state, local), and policies in a genre (such as the literacy policies discussed by Woodside-Jiron, or the Bilingual Multicultural Education policies in New Mexico) that have been intentionally layered to build support for and advance a particular agenda.

In the co-construction paradigm discussed by Mehan et al. (2010), the concept of achieving consensus through negotiation and strife relates strongly to Woodside-Jiron's (2004) discussion of eliminating resistance and the role of experts in influencing policymaking. In Woodside-Jiron's (2004) analysis, consensus seems to be reached through manipulation, well thought out strategy, and a conscious use of social discourse. What Mehan et al (2010) seem to be suggesting is that consensus, no matter how it is reached, is fragile because, ultimately, implementation of the product of consensus will be carried out by active agents, who are co-constructing policy (and it's outcomes), whether or not they are conscious of their active role. It is also clear that what is termed co-construction may be unintentional, even if the agent is consciously attempting to support the reform or policy in question he or she may unintentionally co-construct unwanted or different outcomes through misunderstanding or misinterpretation. These ideas provide a way to think about the interview data and what it suggests about teachers' choices regarding the implementation of multicultural education in a state where it is, at least in name, supported by state policy.

How teachers understand their own agentic action is an essential question in this research. It seems unlikely that educators view implementation as co-construction due to the power relations involved, and this was born out in the data. However, if an educator makes the decision to intentionally subvert policy, for whatever reason, it may change their view of the power structure and allow them to feel that they are legitimately co-constructing policy. This

type of subversion seems unlikely to be common, but the possibility raises two questions that could be explored: Does it matter how the actors view their actions – in other words, does it matter if they believe they are actively co-constructing policies and reform efforts? And, what would the benefits and disadvantages be in recognizing policy as a co-construction from the outset? It is quite possible that teachers would feel more supported and less penalized by education policies if they had an acknowledged role in the development of those policies. It is also possible that it would benefit the entire system to abandon the belief that policy can and should homogenize schooling, and guarantee equal (as opposed to equitable) educational opportunities and outcomes. The notion that any educational program, let alone major reforms, can be implemented in the exact same way across all contexts is a spurious one. An explicit attempt at co-creation rather than maintaining the current top down approach might broaden the conversation and offer an approach to multicultural education programs and policies that is more inclusive of local cultural practices. The idea of co-construction as a lens for how local educators interact and interpret multicultural education policy will allow the fore fronting of issues of power, perspective, and access - both students' access to programs and teachers' access (or lack thereof) to the resources, professional development, and policy processes that directly impact their actions in the classroom.

### **Relevant Policies**

#### **National Policies**

While the above literature demonstrates practices policy should support, it is necessary to understand what the current, relevant policies are, and what explicit and implicit supports and constraints they contain. In a study that seeks to understand the influences on local educators – what shapes their conceptions of culture and practices in multicultural education – it is necessary

to know the policies that contribute to the local context. The only federal policies to specifically address issues of cultural and linguistic difference in education are often either addressed together or treated synonymously in the literature and they are Title I Part C, Title III and Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. These Titles are basically funding streams that states use, within broad guidelines, to address the educational needs of students who are part of a migrant population (Title I Part C), non-native English speakers (Title III) and students of Native American descent, including Hawaiian and Alaskan Natives (Title VII) (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). With little federal policy addressing these issues, it would seem that the majority of the conversations and policy decisions surrounding the issue are likely occurring at the state and local level. Data collected for this study indicate that the participating district chooses not to interpret the policies written at the state level any further or create their own more targeted policies based on the state guidelines, therefore, this overview will concentrate on New Mexico's state level policies.

### **State Multicultural Education Policies**

How states define their programs and the language they use when constructing policy can potentially affect educators' understandings of the purposes of multicultural education as well as how they view the potential benefits for their students. In the absence of more local policy, state definitions of multicultural education may contribute to local educators' understandings of these policies, and their willingness to accept and implement them. Based on the findings of policy implementation research, local educators' constructed understandings and interpretations of policy will play a role in the support and implementation of multicultural pedagogical practices (Spillane, 2002). Given the substantial scholarship on the importance of well thought out and

effective multicultural education for all students (Sleeter & Bernal, 2003; Howard, 2006; Nieto, 2004; Au, 2009; Lee, 2009; May, 2009; King, 2004), it seems imperative that we consider how states are currently framing these programs and policies, and whether or not these policies encourage and enable teachers to implement effective multicultural education practices. As was mentioned in the introduction, New Mexico provides an appropriate context for this study, therefore, a brief history of New Mexico policy is presented next.

### **New Mexico's Multicultural Education Policies**

New Mexico's history regarding bilingual and multicultural policies differs significantly from other states. The New Mexico constitution (1912) "protects the right of all New Mexican citizens to vote, hold office, or sit upon juries regardless of religion, race, language, or color, *or the inability to speak, read or write English or Spanish languages*" (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000, p. 176, emphasis added). New Mexico was the first state to pass a bilingual education law (1969) and passed a state bilingual multicultural education law four years later in 1973. This law was amended and updated in 2004 after New Mexico became the first state to approve teacher endorsements in bilingual multicultural education (1978) and pueblo languages (1990), licensure for the Navajo language (1986) and a Native American Language and Culture Certification (2002). In addition, the state passed a bill (HB212, 2003) requiring instruction in a second language in addition to English for **all** students in grades 1-8, and in 2006 Governor Bill Richardson issued an Official Proclamation that declares New Mexico to be a Multicultural State (NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, 2010). The state's constitution implies that segregation by race is illegal in the state of New Mexico and the local school districts are required to identify and assess all students who are not native English speakers (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000). The state also began piloting two-way dual language immersion programs in



1997 and the program doubled in size over a two year time period. In 2009 thirty-one bilingual schools were recognized by the legislature for exemplary programs for English Language Learners (NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, 2010). Finally, the state requires each district and school to prepare an Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS) which describes how schools will provide an equal educational opportunity for all K-12 students, including how assessments and screenings will be used (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000). It is apparent that New Mexico, as a state, has taken the stance that two languages are better than one for *all* students and that it is important to preserve the cultural diversity of the state. This is a far different approach than any other state, and particularly unique when one considers the states with which it shares its eastern and western borders, Texas and Arizona respectively.

New Mexico is thus a relatively progressive state in terms of both language and multicultural education policies, and would seem to be more supportive to teachers in implementing any of the identified effective practices. New Mexico has truly embraced its heritage and states that the goal of the state bilingual multicultural education programs are for **all students to** (1) Become bilingual and biliterate in English, and a second language, including Spanish, a Native American language (where a written form exists and there is tribal approval), or another language, and (2) meet state academic content standards and benchmarks in all subject areas (NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, 2010). This commitment to all students achieving biliteracy in addition to bilingualism is a strong statement regarding the importance the state places on a diversity of language practices and the level of competence expected from students. To this end, New Mexico has an extensive assessment program to determine English, Spanish, and Navajo language proficiency; it is quite clear that both second language and English language development practices are strongly supported through state

policy. Finally, New Mexico has signed contracts with 16 tribes and Pueblos to establish a process for certifying tribal community members to teach native language *and culture* in the public schools, increasing the connection between communities and their schools (NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, 2010).

Despite all of these positive steps, however, there are some issues that should be addressed with respect to areas of multicultural education with which New Mexico does not seem to be engaging. The first concern is that, despite the NM Public Education Department creating an entire bureau dedicated to the state's bilingual multicultural program and funding it at approximately the 39 million dollar level (with local districts spending an additional 48 million), there is little evidence that the program addresses culture as unique and distinct from language (NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, 2010). In the reports generated by the state, there is discussion about the number of students participating in the "bilingual and multicultural education programs" decreasing due to the students being re-labeled as Fully English Proficient (FEP), indicating that students who are proficient in English are not participating in the program and that the 'multicultural' piece is not being addressed sufficiently (NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, 2010). From a critical multicultural perspective, if the goal and responsibility is to provide a free *and appropriate* public education, it is problematic to assume that once a student is deemed proficient in English, it is no longer necessary to consider the influence of other cultural factors on their academic outcomes. In addition, the lack of attention to anything 'cultural' other than language in the text of a 'multicultural education' policy suggests an inherent assumption that all speakers of a given language will be culturally indistinguishable from one another and will respond in the same way to instruction. Nowhere on the NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau's webpage or in the 2009 report on

programs currently in place is there mention of programmatic features that are specific to culture, nor does it indicate that there are professional development opportunities focused on aspects of culture other than language (NMPED Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau, 2010).

In the case of New Mexico, then, it is not that state officials are unsupportive of multicultural education, nor that current policies are directly constraining effective practices; it is that policies are narrowly defining the parameters of culture to exclude everything but language. This exclusion serves to distract from a broader conception of culture and the advantages that might be gained by recognizing all aspects of students' cultures and multiple identities and embracing them as fundamental to learning and pedagogical practice. More specific to a sociocultural learning theory perspective, it discourages, if not prevents, the definition of culture as repertoires of practice that is far more useful and aligned to critical, multicultural pedagogical practices. The lack of specific policy content addressing culture, or any acknowledgment that language practice is not the only dimension of culture fundamental to learning, is a primary reason this study was conducted. While language is indeed a cultural practice ubiquitous in education, and should be recognized as such, the conception of culture within multicultural education and the policies supporting it needs to be broadened to include all cultural practices.

### **Summary**

The literature that has been discussed in this chapter represents the most relevant to the question of what factors influence local educators' conceptions of culture and their understandings of, and practices in, multicultural education. It is important to understand the history of any educational movement, including related policies if any exist, as well as how it has shifted over time and is typically instantiated in local educational contexts. The idea that policy implementation is a process of learning, not just acceptance or resistance (Spillane, 2002) and

that policy is co-constructed or “made” during the act of implementation (Mehan, et al, 2010), adds complexity to the analysis of what influences educators with respect to multicultural education. Understanding multicultural education, as is true with any educational initiative, requires social and historical context; looking at broader sociological patterns and forces that have directly or indirectly influenced the way in which things develop and change over time is necessary to a nuanced view. In the case of multicultural education in particular, there were historic changes centered on issues of race and desegregation at the heart of the multicultural education movement, therefore race, racialized social structures, and the current incarnations of racism are central to a complete analysis of current understandings and practices in the field. Analyzing the language found within relevant policy is also useful to the study because language is imbued with power (Fairclough, 2001) and necessarily mediates the processes of interpretation and learning by local educators; and this interpretation and learning, affects attitudes and practices (Spillane, 2002). Although the research questions addressed in this study are not directly related to student outcomes, the primary purpose of multicultural education, and any policies written in support of it, is to improve students’ academic outcomes by identifying and implementing effective practices; therefore, an understanding of identified effective practices is necessary to the context of the study, and to making sense of the data that relates to the research goal of identifying what practices educators employ. The literature on effective practice further contributes to the study by demonstrating that educators’ beliefs about students have a significant effect on the teacher-student relationship, and that establishing and maintaining respectful, caring relationships is especially important in achieving the goals of multicultural education. Finally, when identified effective practices are viewed in conjunction with the literature on colorblind racism, it demonstrates a potentially powerful influence in classrooms that is important to

consider when attempting to understand teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices with respect to culture and multicultural education.

### CHAPTER THREE: Methods

This study was designed to increase understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices with respect to multicultural education – what shapes them, and how they relate to state and local policies. As stated in the introduction, I began this dissertation with the intent of capturing how state and local policies influence educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education; however, teachers' accounts of what shaped their beliefs did not relate directly policy and suggested that certain types of experiences may contribute to particular conceptions of culture. The revised focus on what educators' identified as influences on their conceptions of culture and multicultural education came after all data were selected and the first round of analysis was complete. Due to the shift in focus, not all of the data were analyzed in detail; the data that focused on conceptions of culture and multicultural education was analyzed and the data that focused on policy and teachers' beliefs about which policies are supportive and which are constraining was set aside for later analysis. As previously stated, despite the shift in focus, this analysis is seen as a first step – one that will contextualize the later analysis of the data focused on policy – however, some awareness of the current New Mexico policy is still useful and is provided in this chapter.

As multicultural education is intended to create equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for students from non-dominant backgrounds and has not, to date, succeeded in achieving this goal, one could argue that rarely is equity achieved without policy intervention. With respect to multicultural education, despite a body of research that points to effective practices for students from non-dominant backgrounds, policy is still rare at the state level and in general does not reflect the research on effective practices. Regardless of the state of policy, typical classroom instantiations of multicultural education do not reflect the research findings on

effective practices. Perhaps most importantly, the current sociopolitical climate of anti-immigrant backlash and aggressive curricular changes discussed previously, points to a need for research at the intersection of multicultural education, educators' beliefs and practices, and policy. In order to study the influences on educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education, I designed a case study of two schools within a single district in the state of New Mexico. As previously stated, New Mexico was chosen because it was the first state to adopt multicultural education policies (1973) and they remain in place today, demonstrating a long-term commitment to valuing linguistic and cultural diversity in education. An exploration of educators' conceptions in a place that has officially supported multicultural education and linguistic diversity in public policy for many years is [instructive/beneficial/preferable] as it provides a less ambiguous context than most other states and districts.

Prior to designing this dissertation research, I engaged in two smaller studies that laid the groundwork for the current study. The first study was a frame analysis that used the public websites of 13 state departments of education as the primary data source. The 13 states were those that self-identified as having a state-wide multicultural education program in a 1998 nation-wide survey conducted by Mitchell & Salsbury. This analysis provided a broad look at how various state education agencies were defining and implementing multicultural education. The second project was a pilot survey study intended to clarify where on the multicultural continuum (discussed in chapter two, Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) the majority of teachers were located. The primary purpose of this study was the development of a survey instrument that could accurately differentiate between the categories of multiculturalism identified by Kincheloe & Steinberg (1997). The survey had 24 Likert items and two open-ended questions that were designed to be analyzed qualitatively. The results of these two studies are briefly discussed to

provide adequate context for the methods chosen in this study; following the brief discussion of these two studies, the methods employed in the current study are presented. Included in the presentation of methods are participant recruitment (including the recruitment of the district and focal schools) and descriptions of the district and focal schools, basic demographics of the educators who chose to participate, the methods and results of data collection, and the approach to analysis that was used for each data source.

### **Preliminary Studies**

#### **Frame Analysis**

In 1998, Mitchell & Salsbury (2000) distributed a fourteen-question survey to all state education departments regarding multicultural education policies. Survey answers indicated which states purported to have "planned" multicultural education programs, whether the programs were funded, and several other important pieces of information, including the availability of language supports for non-English speaking students. In order to analyze how these 13 states<sup>5</sup> were framing multicultural education, I attempted to identify multiple data sources, including various print media, that would allow different perspectives to be represented; however, although this is no longer the case, at the time the analysis was completed media sources offered limited insight into how governmental bodies involved in setting state policies were framing the issue. As most states put a great deal of information on the internet and use websites as a way to communicate policy to parents, teachers, and the community at large, I ultimately chose to look solely at the state departments' websites to determine their stance toward multicultural education. Analyzing documents found under the heading of "Programs," as well as other pages and documents identified through searches (or listed on website indices)

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<sup>5</sup> The thirteen states examined in this analysis were: Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, and Wyoming.



using key words and phrases such as “multicultural education,” “equity,” “bilingual education,” “diversity,” “equal educational opportunity,” and “English Language Learners,” three broad frames of multicultural education were identified.

The Mitchell & Salsbury study served as a starting point for identifying which states to include in the analysis and Kincheloe & Steinberg's (1997) descriptions of the five types of multiculturalism provided the definitions and terminology that served as a basis for the analysis of language used on the states' websites. Kincheloe & Steinberg's framework was used because it provided a well-established, theoretically based structure for considering multicultural education policies and practices, it was detailed in its definitions, and it paralleled models specific to education (including Sleeter & Grant, 1987) while offering a broader lens. Using their definitions, web documents were analyzed for similar language as was used in their descriptions of the five types of multiculturalism. Words or phrases such as “assimilation,” “American culture,” and “English only,” were identified as indicators of a monocultural framing, whereas words or phrases such as “lack of equal opportunity,” “at-risk,” and “celebrate (or appreciate) diversity” were used as indications that the state was employing a frame that was liberal or pluralist in nature. In order to identify frames related to a more critical approach to multicultural education, documents were searched for language including words and phrases such as “identity,” “power,” “anti-racism,” and “social justice.” In addition to language, which often acted as a cueing device, the documents were analyzed for evidence of references to students' learning about each other's differences, curricula that purposefully included information about different cultures' contributions to society, and references to more generalized and stereotypical views of culture such as food, festivals, or patterns of behavior associated with a particular group, to indicate a more liberal-pluralist frame of multicultural education. Evidence of

curricular design that incorporated anti-racist education or addressed issues of oppression, dominance, or power differentials, as well as any indication that students were involved in community activism through their schools, were also sought in the documentation of state programs as evidence of a more critical approach to multicultural education.

**Findings.** Although several patterns emerged during the analysis of the documents and descriptions of state programs, it was also apparent that rarely did two states frame multicultural education in the same way. Some states used the Bilingual Education = Multicultural Education frame which approaches multicultural education as though it were synonymous with bilingual education, or indicated there was a planned multicultural program on the survey, but offered no documentation beyond the description of the bilingual or English language learner programs on their websites. Other states framed multicultural education in a definitively liberal/pluralist way, emphasizing the importance of multicultural education as a way for students to learn about the cultures and values of those who belong to non-dominant cultures and as a way to reduce or eliminate prejudice and achievement gaps (the Learning about 'Others' frame). This second frame proved to be the most prevalent among the state documents analyzed, and given Kincheloe & Steinberg's (1997) assertion that the pluralist view "has become the mainstream articulation of multiculturalism" (p. 15), it was expected that this would be the most common framing. The final frame could be related directly to Kincheloe & Steinberg's definition of critical multiculturalism (the Critical Frame) and was only identified in one state's web documents. Not surprisingly, there was no evidence indicating that any of the state education agencies framed multiculturalism from a monoculturalist or left-essentialist standpoint. Given that the states being analyzed all purported to have a multicultural program in place, one would not expect to find evidence of a monocultural or left-essentialist framing in their state documents.

The Bilingual Education = Multicultural Education frame was the one in evidence on New Mexico's PED website. In New Mexico the terms bilingual education and multicultural education were used interchangeably throughout the website and in the policy documents available on the site, and none of the documents referred to program elements that were specific to culture rather than language. This indicates that the state officials who responded to the 1998 survey as well as those who wrote New Mexico's Bilingual Multicultural Education Act, believed that bilingual education is equivalent to multicultural education. There are at least two ways to interpret the meaning of a framing that makes no distinction between bilingual education and multicultural education. This frame could indicate the belief that language is so central to culture that if language is addressed through bilingual education, multicultural or culturally responsive practices are effectively in place. Another interpretation might be that the state views language as the only part of students' cultures that has a direct impact on their ability to learn and be successful in the classroom.

Equating bilingual and multicultural education, and framing multicultural education in this way, within state level documents and resources, is problematic for several reasons. It can indicate to teachers that all students who speak the same language share common cultural practices, beliefs, and backgrounds. This is clearly not the case, and the perception could result in negative interactions, serious misunderstandings between students and their teachers, or strained relationships with students' families (Valenzuela, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Tatum, 1997). Another consequence of this equation is that it promotes a reductive notion of culture and minimizes its role in learning processes. This could potentially lead teachers to overlook cultural practices (other than language) and connections to their students' lived experiences that are central to students' engagement and construction of knowledge (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003;

Gonzales, 2005). Although language and culture are inextricably linked, they cannot be treated as a singular educational tool or concept when addressing classroom practices. A state that addresses only bilingual education is missing the opportunity to support its culturally diverse learners in important and significant ways and should consider what would be gained by including more robust notions of culture and cultural practices.

This frame analysis demonstrated that states framed multicultural education very differently and only one state framed it in a way that indicated the possibility of a more critical approach in their program. New Mexico, as a state supportive of multicultural education, that clearly framed their multicultural education programs as indistinguishable from bilingual education, presented an interesting and rich opportunity to study how language and culture are defined and addressed in state level policy. By equating bilingual and multicultural education New Mexico is, in effect, minimizing the role of culture in learning and suggesting that language is the only cultural practice relevant to education. With a more robust definition of culture as practice, we can see that small communities, small institutions, even families have different and varied cultural practices, unrelated to language, that mediate learning for their participants (Moll et al, 1993). Therefore, New Mexico offered an opportunity to examine if and how an official framing of multicultural education as indistinct from bilingual education may influence teachers' understandings and definitions of culture as they relate to student learning and their pedagogical practices.

### **Survey Study**

In a small pilot study aimed at understanding teachers' perceptions of multicultural education in Colorado and New Mexico, I developed a short survey which, like the frame analysis just described, made use of Kincheloe & Steinberg's (1997) description of the five types

of multiculturalism. The types of multiculturalism were used as a framework in designing a survey that consisted of twenty four Likert items and two open-ended questions aimed at identifying which type of multiculturalism best describes most teachers, and what their primary beliefs are regarding the purpose(s) of multicultural education. Because this was a pilot, it was distributed using a snowball approach; a link to an electronic survey was sent to educators the researcher knew personally and they were asked to forward the survey to other educators in their professional circles. This resulted in a small sample size but provided enough information for some initial analysis.

The pilot study indicated that the distinction between the liberal/pluralist framing, the most common according to Kincheloe & Steinberg (1997), and a more critical framing of multicultural education is a difficult distinction to make within a small population of teachers. In a broader distribution it is expected that there would be greater variance in responses; however, it is likely that most teachers, even in a larger study, will fall into the liberal/pluralist frame of multiculturalism. Given these results, I believed a better understanding of educators' perceptions with respect to multicultural education is necessary and that more in-depth, interview data is necessary to gaining an understanding of how conceptions of culture and multicultural education develop. Although useful, a survey instrument alone simply cannot adequately address the primary questions in the current study.

### **Current Study Methods**

#### **Researcher Positionality**

It is important to discuss the issue researcher positionality in this study. As a white female and an outsider to the local community, I do not share the same history of experiences with the participants and, thus, my role as researcher certainly would be expected to have some

mediating effect on participants' responses. My background, when based on typical categories of difference and privilege is similar to "average" teachers. I am female, white and while we struggled financially when I was very young, by the time I started kindergarten we were on solid financial ground and grew up decidedly middle class. In addition my sexual orientation, gender identification, and physical ability all place me in the normative or privileged position. Where my personal experience and background diverges from the "average" teacher lies in the fact that I did not grow up in one location, region, or even country. I was born in Pennsylvania but started kindergarten in Mississauga, Ontario in eastern Canada. Half way through my third grade year, my family moved to Davis, California and half way through my eighth grade year we moved again to Alexandria, Louisiana. Living and attending school in two countries and two completely different regions of the U.S. had a lasting and profound impact on the way I think about culture, race, and power.

While in high school I became visible enough in the community as "that white girl" that went to the black high school that I had my first experiences with being treated as a 'race traitor.' I also found myself in situations that taught me that even as a numerical minority within the walls of my school, I had more privilege (power) than my peers because of my skin color. In my career, I worked with children and adolescents with mental health issues before becoming special educator in the public school system. Many of the patients with whom I worked over the years came from non-dominant backgrounds that ranged from native Alaskans to students from inner city Philadelphia. After 14 years in the mental health field, I moved to Gallup, New Mexico near the big Navajo reservation and began teaching special education at a public elementary school with a student population that was more than 80% Native American and more than 12% Hispanic/Latino. Both my experience in mental health as well as in public education were

primarily with students from nondominant backgrounds.

All of this personal history is included in this section in the service of explaining the lens through which I view the world in general and education specifically. My time in New Mexico demonstrated that both state and local education agencies there were trying to improve education for nondominant students and over the past six years of study and research, I have come to believe that particular theories of learning and conceptions of culture are complimentary to the goals of multicultural education and critical pedagogy. It is from this perspective that I approached this research and therefore, one of the biases I should acknowledge is a belief in the compatibility of sociocultural learning theories and multicultural education. I believe that a dynamic conception of culture as practice and particular constructs of sociocultural learning theories offer conceptual tools that can help educators improve classroom practices. I also believe that this is especially important for teachers who come from backgrounds that privilege dominant cultural practices or those who see their students as 'other' for another reason. With respect to the study participants, my position as an unknown entity – a white researcher from outside of their community and district, there was little about me that would inspire trust or respect in the short period of time I was in the district and their schools and classrooms, which likely influenced the responses I was given.

### **Case Study**

As previously discussed, New Mexico provides a rich context for studying educators' attitudes and practices with respect to multicultural education, and in designing the current study, I decided that a case study design, employed within one New Mexico district was the most promising approach. The final design of the case study called for the selection of two schools within a single district, and two focal teachers within each school who would consent to both

interviews and observations. The design included interviews with all administrators and a cross-section of other teachers and support staff such as counselors, social workers, speech-language pathologists, etc. in the participating schools. While not officially part of the design of the case study, staff meetings, related professional development, parent teacher association meetings, and other similar events would be attended whenever possible as a source for additional data that may prove useful. If collected, these additional sources of data would provide increased understanding of the schools' contexts with respect to climate, leadership, and other influences on teachers' lives and practices. Finally, district level administrators, and teachers and principals outside of the focal schools would be interviewed if the opportunity arose as a way to increase knowledge of the district as a whole. Such an approach was planned to allow an in-depth investigation and analysis of the complex interaction of multiple policy levels as well as the influence of these interactions on individual educators. As a result of the shift in focus for this analysis, much of the data collected will be more useful in subsequent analyses that will focus more directly on policy. Data sources originally identified as most useful included policy documents from all levels – state, district and school; interviews with policymakers, district and school level administrators, and teachers; a district-wide survey of school level personnel; and observations of at least two focal teachers in each participating school. Also included in the original design of the study was the plan to determine the necessity, or lack thereof, of additional data sources, following the initial round of collection and analysis.

The case study approach was chosen to allow an in-depth inquiry into how district personnel interpret state policy and bring a program design to fruition through the analysis of policy documents and interviews. Additionally, it was thought the case study model would create the opportunity to conduct a more fine grain analysis on how two different school leaders within



the same district interpret and support implementation of a single program with their teachers, however, none of the participating schools were implementing the same programs. Policy implementation studies suggest that the same policy directives will be instantiated differently from school to school and district to district due to individual interpretations (or misinterpretations) and understandings of the policy's intents and purposes "because district officials filter them [policies] through their existing beliefs" (Spillane, 2002). The case study approach of two schools within a single district was chosen to allow a detailed and comprehensive study of how policies, their creators, and their implementers, interact and influence each other within overlapping systems of state, district, and school policy. As with many qualitative studies, however, the original questions and intent of the study, and the results of the initial analysis, do not align one hundred percent of the time, and the choice was made during data analysis to focus more narrowly on educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education and how they develop for this dissertation.

As was stated in the introduction, when I began this study I was interested in capturing how state and local policy influenced local educators' conceptions of culture and their multicultural education practices. While the interview protocol was designed to gather this policy information, teachers' views and sense-making about culture and their accounts of what helped shaped their beliefs was more prominent and accessible in the data. It was difficult to glean or identify any policy influence on their conceptions, as discussions of policy always reverted to discussions of their classroom practices, rather than their beliefs. So, while the data collected will eventually allow the policy focused analysis originally intended, I came to believe that a deeper understanding of educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education might provide the best entry point to the larger policy questions I hope to address in future

analysis and writing. In other words, a deeper understanding of educators' conceptions of culture and the factors they identified as influential in the development of those conceptions may be helpful, if not essential, to eventually understanding the influences of policy. Due to this shift in analytical focus, a direct result of the initial analysis of interview data, the research questions were adjusted slightly to better reflect the focus on *participant* identified influences (rather than the influence of policy) on conceptions of culture and multicultural education.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study include both personal and logistical factors, some of which were impossible to foresee and therefore could not have been planned for adequately prior to data collection. For example, sending a district-wide email to all school level personnel was not something I foresaw as potentially problematic, but the focal district did not have a listserv of teachers, making a district-wide electronic survey impossible to distribute directly to teachers, making it impossible to know how many teachers had the opportunity to complete the survey. Another logistical limitation involved the length of time allowed for data collection before the beginning of the state testing window when data collection would be impossible, as well as the geographical distance between the focal district and my university. The original plan for data collection spanned a nine month time period and allowed for long stretches of time in the focal district, but the time frame was significantly reduced due to an extended wait for permission to complete the study by the district that originally agreed to the study, resulting in the need to eventually move the study to a different district. As a result the data were collected over a three and half-month period and the longest continuous stretch of time I was able to stay in the district was three weeks. This significant reduction of time in the district directly affected my ability to establish trusting relationships with school leaders and teachers and made it more difficult to

build rapport and know the participants and their views the way I had intended. Given that the focus of this study is educators' personal conceptions, the time limitation and its impact on my ability to spend significant amounts of time with the participants certainly constrained that possibility. While I believe all of the participants were relatively comfortable with me during interviews and observations, I am also aware of the fact that they did not have the opportunity to reflect on their conceptions and share insights with me over time, which may have provided additional dimensions to the analysis.

In addition to design and logistical limitations, my positionality as a researcher, as previously discussed, was also a limitation. As I explained in the earlier section on researcher positionality, I am a former special education teacher with an MA in teaching from a New Mexico university, but I did not go to school or teach in the immediate vicinity of the focal district, and the student population I taught was significantly different as it was predominantly Native American. The fact that I was an outsider to the district and schools I was in, as well as the fact that I was an unknown, white researcher may have mediated participants acceptance of and trust in me. Although the fact that I had been a teacher in another district in New Mexico may have helped this, the likelihood is that my positionality served to limit or in some way influence the educators' responses during interviews and therefore must be considered a limitation. Finally, there was information that could have been collected more systematically, such as where the participants received their teacher preparation training and what specific courses they had taken, that may have added clarity and useful context to the analysis.

### **District and School Selection**

The choice of district and schools was a multistep process. Initially, 15 districts were contacted about the study based on the complexity of the bilingual multicultural education

programs they had created and implemented. The New Mexico Public Education Department's Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau lists each district's program components along with the names and contact information for the superintendent and the district personnel in charge of bilingual multicultural education (in some cases this is the same person) on their website and the 15 districts were chosen based on this list. A secondary list was also created for use if none of the districts contacted in the first round were willing to participate. Some districts, even among the original 15, were preferable to others due to student demographics that more closely resemble the state level demographics (see Appendix C). State student demographics are as follows: 1.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.7% Black, 28.5% White, 56.7% Hispanic, 10.7% Native American and <0.1% Hawaiian Islander/Other Pacific Islander; however many districts in New Mexico are either predominantly Hispanic (e.g. West Las Vegas at almost 93% , or Española at 90%) or predominantly Native American (e.g. Central Consolidated at nearly 89% or Gallup-McKinley County at 81%), making demographics in the selection of a district an important consideration. Primary consideration in choosing to contact the districts, however, was the extensiveness of their bilingual multicultural education programs.

Of the 15 districts originally contacted, one expressed a high level of interest in working in partnership with me on this study. I considered a district seeking a partnership with me to be the ideal situation and the student demographics were similar to those at the state level, therefore, I pursued a research partnership with this district. Unfortunately, the district was undergoing changes to their research approval process, and eventually became embroiled in a lawsuit, due to the misconduct of an outside researcher the previous year – resulting initially in an extensive delay of the study, and eventually the decision to conduct the study in a larger neighboring district. The district eventually selected was a large urban and suburban district consisting of

more than 100 schools and a student population whose demographics reflected those at the state level. While this district was not seeking a partnership, they were open to the study and offered information and some direction when asked specific questions. Once permission was granted, I contacted the district director associated with bilingual multicultural education programs and scheduled a meeting. The district director assisted in the process of case study school recruitment by providing a list of all schools in the district with bilingual multicultural education programs in place and suggesting particular schools and principals she believed would be interested in the study. In addition, the director consented to an interview and provided introductions to several other members of her department she thought would be helpful and have viewpoints they might want to share.

Following the meeting with the district director, the principals of all 64 schools in the district with bilingual multicultural education programs were contacted by email, provided a description of the study, and were asked to respond if they had any interest in participating. Four of the 64 principals expressed interest in participating in the study and were contacted to set up an initial meeting where I would provide more detail regarding the study and principals would have the opportunity to ask questions and share any concerns they might have before making a final decision. I met with principals from three of the schools and a designate from the fourth with the intention of choosing two as my case study schools, however, until the teacher recruitment phase began I could not be certain which schools would have two teachers willing to allow classroom observations in addition to consenting to interviews and therefore commenced with teacher recruitment at all four schools (see Appendix A for consent forms). Three of the interested respondents were leaders of elementary schools with dual language programs and the fourth was the principal of a middle school with a bilingual program. While all four schools had

two teachers willing to be interviewed and observed as focal participants, convincing other teachers at the schools to grant interviews proved nearly impossible. Because this difficulty significantly limited the number of participants, it was decided that all four schools would remain in the study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

**Policy documents.** State policy documents were intended to serve as the primary data source for understanding the guidelines the district must operate within when creating multicultural education programs as they provide the framework all districts must work within. The New Mexico Public Education Department's Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau produces a text that is referred to as a "technical assistance manual." This text is intended to provide the local education agencies (LEAs or districts) in the state with the guidelines they need to design and implement programs that meet all policy requirements for addressing the cultural and linguistic needs of all students who are eligible for services (BMEB, 2009). The technical assistance manual is available on the state website and is a lengthy document that sets guidelines on everything from how students qualify for program services to instructional practice and teacher training and professional development. The technical assistance manual is a rich data source providing all of the information shared with districts that they are required to interpret and turn into a district level program that supports school and teacher level effective practices.

In addition to the state level policy document, district and school level policy documents relating to the bilingual multicultural education programs were sought, however, the district director informed me that there were no written district policies. I was informed that the district simply uses the state technical assistance manual as their primary policy document. In addition, despite the fact that there are several different dual language models used in the district, the

individual schools do not write school level policies based on the model of dual language they choose to implement, again using nothing but the description of dual language models contained in the state technical assistance manual. As a result, the only policy document for bilingual multicultural education available for analysis in the focal district is the document produced at the state level. Finally, where districts and schools used to distribute handbooks containing attendance, dress code, discipline and all other policies explained in detail, often they are now only accessible online. This is the case for all of the schools that participated in this study and other than dual language program descriptions, there is no information regarding bilingual multicultural education policies on the schools' websites.

**Analysis.** The Bilingual Multicultural Education Technical Assistance Manual was examined and analyzed before data collection at the district level began. The manual lays out the state policies alongside the relevant sections of federal policy, as well as a timeline of the history of both sets of policies. The analysis of the Technical Assistance Manual demonstrated clearly that access to programs is determined by students' *English* language proficiency and that the success of these programs is solely determined by whether or not they move students toward this proficiency. Whether or not students are developing and maintaining skills in more than one language, are demonstrating increasing cultural competence, or are making greater academic gains across the board due to critically focused multicultural pedagogical practices is irrelevant within the framework of this policy as it is currently written. This is not particularly surprising given that there is little evidence in the policy that culture is considered relevant to learning processes. Outside of the title of the legislation and the use of the generic term "bilingual multicultural education program" throughout its text, the most attention culture is given is the statement "Many students bring to their school classrooms cultures and linguistic structures that

are fundamentally different from a 'standard' English-speaking tradition. The diversity that students bring to school must be highly valued as a resource to build upon" (TAM, 2013, p. 8). This statement is contained in the chapter that describes the approved models of instruction for bilingual education in the section titled Scientifically-Based Research. Other brief references to culture occur in the descriptions of the program models that are available to schools - specifically in the dual language immersion model and the heritage language model. In the dual language model, "develop cross-cultural understanding" is listed as a major goal of the model, and in the description of the heritage language model it states that "many aspects of the home culture of heritage language students must also be included" (TAM, 2013, p. 11).

The Technical Assistance Manual specifically addresses the areas of student and program eligibility; instruction; assessment; staffing and professional development; funding application and approval processes; and program evaluation and renewal; I limit further analysis to a brief look at the language used to define populations in the section that addresses students' eligibility to access the programs being offered. Because access is foundational to equity of opportunity and, therefore, to the goals of multicultural education, this section of the TAM is analyzed in relative detail to identify the inherent priorities and embedded conceptions of culture contained within the policy. This section of the technical assistance manual was analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). To review, CDA offers a method and lens for analysis of policy that forefronts the inherent power of language and linguistic devices. As was discussed in more detail in the review of literature, Fairclough's model of CDA and Bernstein's theory of relationship among the various levels of discourse can be used to analyze the language used in the policy. This section begins with the statement that there are "two sets of criteria used to determine eligibility for participation in a Bilingual Multicultural Education Program. One set of criteria is



the federal requirement; the other is the state requirement” (BMEB, 2009 p. 1). The federal requirement section is brief but contains lengthy definitions for the terms limited English proficient and immigrant children and youth. The basic statement of the federal requirements is as follows:

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, Title III Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students provides funding for school districts to identify and serve the linguistic and academic needs of English Language Learners (ELL) or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students (BMEB, 2009 p. 1).

This brief statement indicates that there are educational problems, “limited” English proficiency and students’ status as immigrants. The use of the word “provides” indicates that the policy itself is the agent that will address these “problems” in the classroom by providing funding to the districts to “identify and serve” students. In the same sentence the students are stated to have linguistic and academic “needs” which serves to locate the “problem” within the students; the students carry with them their level of level of English proficiency and immigrant status and cannot leave them at the door of the classroom. The federal policy section then turns to providing definitions for the populations meant to be served by the funds being provided. In examining this brief section of the technical assistance manual, it is apparent that the state policy is heavily influenced by the federal regulations and defers to its definitions of the subpopulations targeted by the policy. This is a clear indication of the power structure at work within education policy and it is firmly rooted in a deficit perspective of students who speak a language other than English. [I have a longer analysis of this section if I need it...]

This brief review of the state bilingual multicultural education policy allows us to see that

the language used continues to reflect deficit model thinking and that the priority continues to be English-language development and the goal of English line which proficiency. Despite a section of the policy that requires all students in kindergarten through eighth grade to be developing proficiency in more than one language (English and another language) this mandate has never been implemented or adequately funded. While some districts in the state may forefront this goal and offer second-language instruction to all students is not the case in the focal district nor did the state website indicates that this was offered in any of the districts in the state.

**Interview data.** The focus of this study is educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education as well as their classroom practices in multicultural education. Specific beliefs and interpretations of elusive concepts such as culture would not be easily accessed through surveys and cannot be measured quantitatively, therefore, the second form of data collected at all three levels—state, district, and school—is interview data. Interviews at each level were important to answering the original research questions, as gaining full understanding of how policies are constructed and how each level influences the others was key to answering the questions. Interviews at the school level were especially important to the study design as they allowed a focus on the beliefs and feelings of educators who are closest to students and examining beliefs and feelings is difficult to do with other forms of data. An interview with the state director of the Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau (BMEB), the department within the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) responsible for the production of the technical assistance manual, was completed as part of the preliminary survey study described above. Unfortunately despite numerous attempts to contact the new director regarding a second interview at the end of the study, I was unsuccessful in getting a response from the state department. Despite this failure, the original interview can still shed light on how state policy

was developed as well as the overall goals of this division of the NM Public Education Department.

At the district level, interviews were conducted with the director of the Department of Language and Cultural Equity, the district multicultural education coordinator, and other participants in the district level policy production process. These interviewees were “nominated” by the director and all who were willing to participate were interviewed. More detailed information about all individual participants is provided in a later section of this chapter. Collecting data regarding who is (or was) involved in the process of multicultural education policy development was the intention, however little information was obtained regarding policy development as the district has not interpreted the state policy document for the schools or engaged in active policy development outside of responding to an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) determination that the district was out of compliance in “every possible way” (Interview 10/12) in 1994. Knowing who (which groups) was represented in the policy development process would have been helpful in contextualizing teacher responses with respect to how they ultimately feel about policies. For example, if teachers are not included in the development of district policies, they may feel the expectations for implementation are unrealistic (or even impossible), this could potentially lead to lower implementation levels or other unintended consequences.

The majority of interview data were collected at the school level because local educators' perceptions and practices were key to understanding policy's influence - and because these are the factors that most directly influence equity for students. Interviews were all conducted between mid-October of 2012 and the end of January of 2013, so teachers were not asked to participate during or near the state's standards based assessments testing window. Interviews were scheduled at the teachers' convenience in a location of their choosing, and (with consent)

were audio-recorded for later content logging and transcription (see Appendix B for interview protocols). Interviews were sought with regular education teachers, teachers within the bilingual multicultural education programs, specialist teachers (such as reading or special education), school counselors, and school administrators. I hoped that interviewing a cross-section of teachers would help me understand if and how multicultural education policies were implemented throughout the case study schools, as well as whether these policies produce patterns of responses among particular groups of teachers. For example, one might hypothesize that if a program is designed in a way that requires students to leave their regular class to participate, the classroom teacher may feel differently about the policy than the bilingual multicultural education teacher providing the service to the student. Although I attempted to recruit teachers across grade levels and content areas in all four schools to capture the possible variances described above, it proved to be a difficult task. I was able to recruit at least two focal teachers at each of the four schools willing to allow observations and give interviews, and in three of the four schools I was able to interview at least one additional teacher. At the middle school I was also able to interview two special education teachers, the school counselor and one of the two social workers assigned to the school. Finally, I interviewed all administrators at the four case study schools (see Appendix B) and was able to secure a few supplemental interviews with educators who worked at other district schools, as well as the president of the local teacher's union, all of whom were recommended and introduced to me by consented study participants.

**Analysis.** Initial analysis of interview data were inductive and used a grounded approach of allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the data, with the one exception that I was consciously looking for the ways educators expressed their conceptions of culture. This approach

to coding the interview data were completed first so there was less likelihood of predetermined coding schemes masking subtle patterns by focusing the coder's attention in a particular direction. As an initial data reduction technique, all interviews were first content logged and imported to the qualitative data analysis program Nvivo, a first coding of all content logs was completed and a coding scheme emerged from this initial run through. Following the initial coding of the data, the focus on educators' conceptions of culture and their multicultural education practices were analyzed further. In order to focus on educators' conceptions of culture, I explored the data again for language used in the frameworks of multiculturalism as well as the linguistic devices used in the frames of color-blind racism. I planned to code in these phases as I believed the attitudes to multiculturalism identified in the Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) framework and the discourse patterns associated with the frames of colorblind racism would be useful analytic tools with respect to interview data as well as open ended survey items. With respect to the Kincheloe & Steinberg (1997) framework, I believed this coding process would help determine the extent to which teachers' beliefs and attitudes leaned toward more critical views. In the case of the frames of colorblind racism, I believed the frames would help to create a more complex and nuanced picture of how the language of policy and typical classroom discourse can influence teachers' beliefs and practices. Finally, I believed that using both the Kincheloe and Steinberg framework and the frames of colorblind racism as analytic tools may offer some insights as to how these two frameworks support each other and contribute to the reproduction of inequity.

**Conceptions Coding.** In the initial phase of analysis, the only predefined code used was that of 'conceptions of culture,' but almost immediately after coding began, the subcodes 'complex' and 'reductive' were added under the original code. As coding progressed I saw a

difference between traditional understandings of culture and more reductive notions and a third subcode, 'traditional,' was added at the same hierarchical level as the 'complex' and 'reductive' nodes. Following the initial coding of all content logs, survey responses, and field notes, the data were reviewed again and additional, more detailed codes were added to the hierarchical coding structure to allow a more fine grained analysis of educators' conceptions. These subcodes were generated using the notion that there is a continuum of conceptions with respect to culture (presented in chapter 1, Figure 1, pg. 26) and included codes such as "dynamic notions" under the complex node and even more specific codes such as 'culture as race,' 'culture as language,' and 'stereotypes' under the reductive conceptions code. An example of language used by participants that resulted in excerpts being coding at the dynamic notions node include descriptors such as 'layered' and 'negotiated,' and the use of terminology such as "white culture" or "black culture" are examples of language coded at the "culture as race" node. In addition to adding new codes as the analysis progressed, field notes were removed as a data source for this research question, as there were no references to educators' conceptions of culture in the observational data. Finally, the educators' whose responses were coded under each of the nodes were identified and their personal and professional characteristics (also coded in the initial review of data) of the educators examined for patterns. The most refined coding level that continued to be useful in finding consistent patterns was the level with 'complex,' 'reductive,' and 'traditional,' nodes therefore the codes were collapsed to that hierarchical level. Despite this collapsing of codes for the broad analysis, the excerpts under the more refined codes allowed me to see nuanced differences within the groups, which was useful in helping me to better understand how individual participants thought about culture and consider how that fit (or did not) with the larger pattern.

**Practices Coding.** During the analysis of the practices data, I initially coded for traditional and critical practices based on the research literature in multicultural education. Employing these codes resulted in the discovery that while none of the practices described were similar to those found in the literature on critical multicultural education, there were a few practices that were something 'more' than traditional. Further analysis of the practices that did not fit into my original coding categories resulted in the creation of descriptive codes such as 'classroom culture' and 'identity focus.' In examining these codes, the language used by specific participants seemed to correspond well to particular foundational ideas in sociocultural theories such as communities of practice and identity. While it was specific language in only a few responses that cued this connection, when other responses I had coded the same way were revisited with these concepts in mind, the practices seemed to offer potential, the potential to connect practices educators already employ with robust learning theory and the conceptual tools it makes available. Additionally, there was one response that described school-level support for educators making love the foundation of their classroom instruction, which connected well to Valenzuela's idea of genuine caring. While caring as an emotion is hard to 'see,' there were instances where participants interview responses indicated that caring was what provided the motivation and rationale for teachers' choices with respect to multicultural education.

**Survey.** Initially the plan to distribute a revised version of the pilot survey described earlier was planned, however it was later decided that a survey with no more than five short open-ended questions, mirroring some of the interview questions, would be more useful in conjunction with the interview and observation data being collected (see appendix A for survey email and consent form). The survey asked for demographic information including race, gender, length of time in education, current position type (teacher, administrator, etc.) age range at

current location (elementary, middle, or high), and a question that asked where the respondent had come by their understanding of multicultural education (university classes, personal experience, etc. – see Appendix D for full survey). The open-ended questions on the survey asked respondents to define culture, to state what they believed the purpose of multicultural education to be, and to reflect on policies that support or constrain multicultural education practices. The survey was distributed electronically to principals district-wide, and administrators were asked to forward the survey to their staff<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, despite sending the survey link multiple times, the response rate was very low so the usefulness of the data is very limited.

### **Description of Participants**

The following section provides a brief description of the case study district, the four schools that chose to participate, and the educational leaders and any from each school. Included in the descriptions are comparative demographics, information regarding each school's location and history, and the basic structure of the programs within each school that fall under the purview of the PED's Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau. In addition, there is a final section that describes the broader participant population as a whole as many individuals chose to participate as a regular interview subject (rather than as a focal teacher, which included allowing at least two classroom observations), a focus group participant, or survey respondent. The descriptions provided in this chapter are only intended to give a basic overview of the participants in the study, however, more detailed information is provided in the next chapter where participants' conceptions of culture and multicultural education are explored and analyzed.

### **Description of Focal District and Schools**

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<sup>6</sup> This process was used due to district logistical restraints that prevented a direct email to all teachers.



The district in which the data were collected is a large urban/suburban district with more than 100 schools a relatively diverse student population that is similar in make up to the state's student population. As Table 1 below demonstrates, however, the state and district both differ significantly from national population statistics.

Table 1. *Student racial demographics for the U.S., New Mexico, and the focal district in percentages (2008-2009 were the most recent available at the state and district levels).*

State/District/School	AA/Black	Asian/PI	White	Hispanic	Native American
U.S. Student Population	16.8	5.0	54.2	22.1	1.2
State of New Mexico	2.6	1.4	29.0	56.1	10.9
Focal District	4.0	2.4	31.1	57.1	5.4

In the state of New Mexico the student population in many districts are skewed either heavily Native American or Hispanic/Latin@. Districts are predominantly Native American when proximal to or contained within reservation lands, and Hispanic/Latin@ in areas near the border and where the population has deep, historical roots that extend back to when the area was part of Mexico. This same skewing, or segregation (which is perhaps more accurate terminology), that exists *between* districts is also apparent *within* districts. In the district where the study was conducted – there are schools with a much higher concentration of white students, as well as schools with populations that are almost entirely Hispanic/Latin@ and other students of color . It should be noted that 80% of the schools in the district have a population that is less than 50% white (see Table 2), and that approximately 20% of the schools have a white population that is within 10% (+/-) of the total percentage of white students in the district (31%), making the focal district's public schools, overall, places where white students are far more likely to gain exposure to both students of color and cultures that differ from their own than most other regions and/or states in the country.

Table 2. *Percentage of schools with particular population levels and range of FRL percentage*

for each type of school (e.g. the elementary school with the lowest number has 3.8% FRL, while the elementary school with the highest number has 99.1% FRL).

Type of School	>50% White	<15% White	21%-41% White*	>85% Hispanic	FRL Range
Elementary Schools	20.9	39.5	19.8	26.7	3.8 – 99.1
Middle Schools	19.2	38.5	23.1	23.1	25.7 – 94.2
High Schools	23.1	23.1	15.4	15.4	7.0 – 85.9
Alternative Schools	12.5	50.0	25.0	12.5	22.0 – 95.8
ALL Schools	20.3	38.3	20.3	30.8	3.8 – 99.1

\*Within 10% (+/-) of the district total of 31%

In addition, 64% of the students in the district qualify for free or reduced lunch, 24.8% of all schools are at greater than 84% FRL and 19.5% are below 30% FRL. There are a few schools that fall below 15% FRL (7.5%) and two schools that did not have FRL information.

The schools that chose to participate in the case study have populations that vary considerably. Table 3 presents the demographics of each study school and, for comparison, the demographics of the district as a whole, and the state.

Table 3. *Student racial demographics for New Mexico, the focal district, and focal schools in percentages.*

State/District/School	AA/Black	Asian/PI	White	Hispanic	Native American
State of New Mexico	2.6	1.4	29.0	56.1	10.9
Focal District	4.0	2.4	31.1	57.1	5.4
Lone Star Elementary	1.9	0.5	5.1	87.1	5.4
King Elementary	--	--	--	--	--
Navajo Elementary	5.1	1.4	15.8	71.0	6.7
Phillips Middle School	10.8	1.4	18.8	58.3	10.8

The three elementary schools all offered Spanish/English dual language programs, and the middle school offered a limited but growing bilingual program, so the higher numbers of

students identified as Hispanic/Latin@ is understandable. Each of the three elementary schools structured their dual language program differently, and one of the three was identified by its principal as the only 'borderless' school in the district – meaning anyone in the district can enroll, but those who do must be able to provide their own transportation. This model is similar to magnet schools and some people in the district refer to the school in this way despite the fact that neither the district nor the school officially referred to it as a magnet school.<sup>7</sup> The other two elementary schools and the middle school have populations determined by a traditional districting system, where boundaries for each school are defined by the district to accommodate various needs and limitations, including common challenges such as transportation and school size. Each of the four schools and the two focal teachers who chose to participate at each location are described in greater detail in the following sections.

**Lone Star Elementary.** The first school to join the study was given the pseudonym Lone Star Elementary and is the oldest elementary school in the city. It is bordered by an historic area that houses many of the city's public institutions such as the zoo, botanic gardens, and various museums; and the surrounding neighborhood is beginning to experience increasing gentrification. The white population of the school is at an all-time low at less than 5% due to white flight that preceded the current gentrification trend and the principal indicated that she views this as a significant loss to the school. In addition, the principal indicated that the recent shifts in the neighborhood have not resulted in an increase in the school's Anglo population. The structure of the Spanish/English dual language program is a 50/50 split with instruction occurring in both languages, every day, for all participating students; each grade level has at least one dual language classroom, but the primary grades all have two. At Lone Star some grade levels have

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<sup>7</sup> Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year the district and school websites now refer to the school as a magnet.

two teachers for the dual language classrooms (one English and one Spanish) and other grade levels have one teacher who teaches in both languages. In grades with two teachers, the group is separated into L1 English speakers and L1 Spanish speakers, and each group spends half of their day with each teacher.

Lone Star is in need of major renovations and has been waitlisted by the district for several years while new schools are built and other issues are prioritized. Despite the aging building and physical plant issues, the school has a large, seemingly cohesive dual language team and experiences very little staff turnover from year to year. The principal also stated, however, that she believed if she were not there, the teachers would choose to abandon the dual language program and go back to a maintenance model of bilingual instruction. She stated that it is hard to find teachers with Spanish language skills strong enough to teach in the target language all day. Even though the school has a highly stable staff, the principal has had to hire recently (and therefore has experienced the difficulty in finding qualified bilingual teachers) because in the past two years three teachers who taught at the school for 30 years or more each have retired and left openings that had to be filled.

**King Elementary.** King is the “borderless” elementary school that chose to participate in the study and just as its different enrollment procedures create a unique student population, the school was created to house a unique, school-wide, Spanish/English dual language program. Because the school does not provide transportation and parents must make an effort to enroll their children somewhere other than where they are designated to attend, the school tends to have very high levels of parent involvement and fundraising. According to the school staff, the dual language program is frequently seen by the parents who enroll their children as enrichment or as an opportunity for their children to learn the heritage language that they did not - often not by

choice. Due, at least in part, to this characteristic of the student population, King's dual language program is structured to create strong Spanish skills early and move toward equal instructional time. Students enter kindergarten classrooms where 90% of instruction is in Spanish and, as they progress through the grades, the time in Spanish steps down by 10% each year until in fourth and fifth grade all students are receiving 50% of their instruction in Spanish and 50% in English. Because the program is school-wide, and structured in this way, the school generally doesn't admit new students into the later grades and depends, to a greater degree than most, on their population remaining relatively stable.

King Elementary is housed in an older, but recently renovated, historic building in the downtown section of the city. In addition to the renovations, newer buildings were added adjacent to either side of the original structure to house the gym/cafeteria and a library, as well as to create an enclosed area away from busy streets as a playground. Classrooms are large with 20 foot ceilings and large windows that run the length of the rooms on one side allowing for plenty of natural light and fresh air when the weather is nice. All of the classrooms for the upper grades are equipped with document cameras, smart boards and projectors, as well as several desktop computers for student use. The school is clean and bright, and the halls and common spaces are filled with student work and special projects they had created for Día de los Muertos in October and for their cultural festival and performance in December. In addition to the goal of producing a bilingual and biliterate student body, the school's mission includes service to the community as an important component of the curriculum, and students are expected to participate in various service learning activities over their years at King.

**Navajo Elementary.** The final elementary school participating was in a newer, suburban area of the district and had been completely rebuilt approximately ten years ago. As a newer

building in a newer area of town, Navajo Elementary was visually appealing, spacious, and designed to accommodate newer technologies. The classrooms were large and had plenty of natural light and all of the furnishings and other materials were in good repair. The dual language program at Navajo was similarly structured to that of Lone Star Elementary in that it was intended to provide 50% of all instruction in Spanish and 50% in English; however, at Navajo teachers had more flexibility. According to the dual language teachers, some had the freedom to stay in one language for a whole day and switch to the other language the following day - or even to opt for a full week in one language and the following week in the other. Finally, Navajo was the only participating school that operated on an alternative, year-round calendar – which effectively meant the classrooms in this school were not at the same point in the school year as the others. With respect to the study this meant it was important to acknowledge that Navajo teachers had been with their students longer – giving them more time to get to know and establish relationships with their students during the observational data collection.

During the time of the study, Navajo was experiencing difficulty in their dual language program as there had been significant turnover in the department when the new principal, Katrina, was appointed approximately five months earlier. Katrina had served as the assistant principal, and when she was hired permanently into the principalship (after serving briefly as interim), she stated there was an exodus from the department including the teacher who had run the program. Due to the turmoil and influx of new teachers, Katrina was in the process of trying to engage her dual language teachers in the task of redesigning the program *as a team* and she engaged facilitators from the district to help with this process due to conflicts that had already occurred between teachers. Navajo proved to be the school where it was most difficult to find teachers willing to participate, but I was fortunate to be invited to participate in a professional

development day at the beginning of the data collection process where they began the process of talking about the kind of program they would like to create.

**Phillips Middle School.** The middle school that agreed to participate in the study, Phillips, is located in a part of the district with a long history of diversity, partially due to a military presence in the neighborhood. While the neighborhood has always been diverse, the school has gone through many population shifts over the years. These population shifts were due to large influxes of new immigrant populations, a significant decrease in the African-American population related to changes in the number of military families in the area, and most recently a loss of the majority of their Native American students to a charter school (housed on the same campus) with the specific mission to serve the Native American student population. The descriptions of the continually shifting demographics in this neighborhood and school were particularly rich, as two of the faculty members who participated in the study had attended the school as middle school students and lived in the area ever since. The school building, like the neighborhood where it is located, is older but in relatively good repair despite the difficult socioeconomic circumstances of the residents. A unique feature of this school is its integrated health care and wellness programs, created and sustained through grant funding to address the issues related to the socioeconomic circumstances of the local families.

Phillips is a school that is struggling to improve in the metrics by which it is evaluated each year and maintains a large number of after school supplemental services for its students. The current administrators have worked hard to increase the parent participation and instituted the practice of always having a Spanish language translator with personal translation devices at all parent meetings. On more than one occasion during a visit for interviews or observations, police officers were present in the school and engaged in problem solving with staff regarding a

student, but there were no serious or dangerous situations relating to students during the course of the study. The administration was prompted, however, to move a table and sign-in book into the hall directly inside the main entrance and keep it staffed at all times after an incident where an adult stranger came into the school and wandered the halls being disruptive. The school's leaders work hard to find the balance between a welcoming atmosphere that encourages families to come in and use the on-site health and wellness programs while still maintaining student and staff safety.

**School leaders.** The four principals who agreed to participate in the study identified as follows: one was biracial (African American and white), two were Hispanic/Latina, and one stated that she was the daughter of a first generation immigrant from an eastern European country, but did not specifically identify herself by race. All four expressed the desire to know more about how the teachers at their schools would respond to this study and indicated their hope that many of their teachers would agree to interviews. None expressed concern that they would not have at least two teachers who would consent to both the interviews and classroom observations, and one even expressed concern that the response might be greater than what the researcher could accommodate. Each principal chose to encourage their teachers' participation in different ways. One chose to have her instructional support teacher act as my liaison and chose not to be involved directly beyond the 30 minute principal interview; one offered a half-day substitute to teachers who agreed to participate; and three of the four allowed me to attend staff meetings and trainings to talk to teachers about the purpose of the study and what participation would entail. In addition, one principal invited me to a parent-teacher association meeting in order to introduce me to parents and let them know why he felt the study was important and was encouraging his staff to participate.



Two of the four principals relayed that they had recently participated in a district level “cultural competency” training offered to principals and other district level employees including all district administrators, school psychologists, and social workers. One of the principals commented that very few principals participated in the training she attended and that she had to make a concerted effort to find and attend such trainings. Both principals stated that teachers in the district had not yet been offered the opportunity to attend this particular professional development and were under the impression that it might never be offered more widely. They also both stated that they felt it was their responsibility to try to pass on what they had learned to their teaching staff and that they thought this study might help them identify where the needs in their buildings might be greatest. While it is often the case with professional development that particular opportunities are only offered to certain groups, these two principals made it clear that they believed this was an area where more involvement from the district, not less, was necessary in order to get real commitment and full understanding from their teachers. The principals who had not participated in this professional development did not express the same belief that professional development in the area of cultural responsiveness was necessary for the teachers in their buildings.

**Participant Patterns.** There were a total of 25 interviews of teachers and other school staff members who chose to participate self-identified as persons of color (see Table 4 for more detail); however, there were a total of four participants who self-identified as white; two were bi or multilingual and taught in dual language programs, one taught special education (a category of “difference” often associated with multicultural education) and the other was a social studies teacher who grew up in the same diverse neighborhood where he now teaches. Finally, there were two participants who did not identify themselves racially during the course of the

interviews, including the principal of Navajo Elementary who was the daughter of a first generation immigrant.

Table 4. *Participant racial demographics by role in local education agency*

Educator Role	Total	AA/Black	Hispanic	Biracial	White	Native	Did not Identify
Administrators (7 School, 4 District)	11	2	6	1	1	--	1
Teachers (8 focal, 3 additional)	11	--	6	0	4	--	1
Support	3	--	--	--	1	2	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

The majority of those who agreed to be a part of the study were clearly outside the parameters of what would be considered the “average” American classroom teacher and the interview data revealed that many of them shared particular types of experiences that they believed had influenced their conceptions of culture and multicultural education. These patterns are addressed in detail in the following findings chapter, but as a brief introduction, several participants had significant and extended immersive experiences outside of both the cultural communities they grew up in and the larger, more general “American” culture. Others expressed that their experiences with discrimination and microaggressions had influenced their conceptions of culture and beliefs about multicultural education. Some of the immersive experiences participants related during interviews were teaching outside of the U.S., growing up as a non-native person on a Native American Reservation or in a country other than the U.S., studying in a foreign country, and traveling around the world in the armed services. Whether these experiences made these particular educators more willing to participate in the study is unknown, but it would not be surprising if it played some role.

### Summary

All of the methods of data collection and analysis used in this study helped to illuminate

educators' perceived influences on their conceptions of culture and multicultural education. In addition, the methods allowed both the observation of educators' practices with respect to multicultural education, as well as the opportunity for teachers to report practices that the researcher may not have had the opportunity to see. Any study even loosely associated with policy would be incomplete without an analysis of the relevant policy documents, and the use of CDA in this analysis offered a way to see the deficit-model language used. A more basic examination of policy revealed that, in this case, the district has not felt the need to further interpret the policy guidelines written by the state for school level personnel. This case study design, focusing intently on two schools within one district, allowed a detailed and nuanced look at how local level policies are produced from state level guidelines as well as how they are implemented and supported by the local education agency. Case studies are especially valuable when asking "how" and "why" questions about a complex, ongoing phenomenon over which the investigator has no control (Yin, 2008), and the proposed study fits this description. There are many interactions and variables that affect teacher beliefs and practices, and these cannot be discovered without talking directly to teachers and asking targeted questions, making interviews as an information source integral to this particular case study. The addition of a survey, even one without closed Likert-scale type questions, offers the opportunity to explore the issue of policy's influence on perspectives and practices with a wider range of respondents than would be possible using only interviews, and can potentially help to clarify or extend explanations of patterns found in other data sources.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Influences on Educators' Conceptions of Culture**

As discussed in the introduction, research has demonstrated that the student-teacher relationship is of great import to student learning, and has particular consequences for students from non-dominant backgrounds. This relationship depends on the teacher's ability and willingness to connect in a meaningful and genuine way with students and to value equally their various cultural backgrounds and experiences (Valenzuela, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004). Given the changing demographics of classrooms and the relatively static demographics of the teaching population, the differences between teachers' and students' backgrounds would appear to be a growing divide. This kind of divide has been shown to result in teachers who lack a deep and meaningful understanding of the worlds their students inhabit outside of school (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999) and the effects that those worlds can have on their classroom engagement and performance. Therefore, if this "cultural divide" between teachers and students is indeed getting wider, it is important to understand how teachers conceptualize culture and how they become culturally competent.

This study examined New Mexican educators' conceptions of culture, multiculturalism, and their relationship to learning. This chapter focuses more specifically on their conceptions of culture and the influences that they reported as having helped shape them. The interview data analyzed for this study demonstrated a pattern with respect to the kinds of experiences that influence educators' conceptions of culture and suggest that three distinct 'types' of life experiences correspond to particular conceptions of culture and multicultural education. Participants who described immersive experiences in cultures that differed from their own are termed "culturally sensitive educators," those who shared experiences of discrimination and microaggression are referred to as "equity oriented educators," and those who related more

normative, local experiences where discrimination was either not perceived or not identified explicitly by the participants as an influence on their conceptions of culture are termed “traditional multicultural educators.” The primary finding discussed in this chapter, therefore, is the relationship between these three types of experiences and the conceptions of culture that corresponded to them in the data.

While the usefulness of thinking about individuals in terms of categories is always limited and any attempt to delineate categories of diverse human attitudes and activities will be messy at best, understanding patterns is one way we make sense of information, and determining their usefulness is the purpose of most research. In addition, there are noteworthy limitations to the interview data related both to my position as a researcher, as well as logistical constraints that limited my time with these teachers and in the district. In addition to having limited experience with the participants, my teaching experience was in another New Mexico district; therefore I was not a part of *their* community or district and was not able to spend enough time with them to mediate these factors. I also understand the inherent contradiction in my argument; I understand that there is tension between any attempt to categorize and reduce teachers and students to a generalized description and tenets of sociocultural learning theories and the goals of multicultural education. However, I also believe that if we can acknowledge both the usefulness *and* limitations of patterns and any categorical descriptions that result alongside each other, they can offer some basic insight and suggest approaches to incorporating the personal stories and experiences of teachers into teacher preparation and professional development. Finally, I believe the personal nature of the stories the teachers shared with me, despite my positionality, indicate the level of importance these teachers attached to their experiences with respect to their understandings of culture, multiculturalism, and multicultural education. This importance

suggests that personal experiences may be powerful in helping educators (particularly those whose backgrounds are more rooted in dominant cultural practices) explore and understand difference and how it impacts their students. The personal stories and understandings articulated by the participants in the study are introduced in broad strokes in the remainder of this section and then in detail in the following sections.

In general, the educators who participated in this study articulated understandings of culture that were relatively complex when compared to traditional conceptions of culture often used in classroom instantiations of multicultural education – those that focus on food, holidays, and other broad nationalistic traditions. For example, these educators often referred to family, personal experience, and individuality or, in other words, the things that make them unique, in their definitions of culture, rather than focusing solely on typical ‘shared’ cultural markers such as traditions, celebrations, and customs; many described culture as *everything* that makes you who you are. Given that the majority of participants in the study were educators who identified as persons of color (Figure 3 in the following chapter provides more detail) and *all* participants self-selected into a study focused on multicultural education, this is perhaps not such a surprising outcome, however it was also not a foregone conclusion. A second commonality demonstrated by study participants was observed when they were asked to reflect on the relationship between culture and learning; virtually all of their responses focused on curriculum and educational or pedagogical practices rather than student *learning*.

Overall, interview data from the study indicate that educators who have had the experience of being immersed in another culture or have faced discrimination in their lives construct their understandings of culture and its relationship to learning by reflecting on, analyzing, and connecting various life experiences (including education), like puzzle pieces, into

a personal conceptual picture. Educators with more normative experiences seem to maintain a more typical understandings of the concepts and issues associated with culture and learning. While these three experience types and their connections to particular conceptions of culture are distinct, some participants shared experiences of more than one type and others were exposed, through academic pursuits, to new theoretical lenses and epistemologies that resulted in a shifting of their interpretations of these life events. An example of an academic experience that shifted someone's perspective on life events is John's story, shared at the very beginning of the introduction. There were also two educators who simply did not fit the pattern, despite sharing similar life experiences as other participants. In short, even though there were discernable patterns connecting educators' experiences and their conceptions of culture, there were also individuals in the study whose experiences and conceptions fell outside the 'boundaries' of the identified patterns. In other words, human experience is too complex to be permanently bounded and defined by any one 'type' of experience; so while a particular kind of experience may tend to have a more pronounced effect on our conceptions of culture, it is important to acknowledge the fluidity and complexity of forces that influence and interact with our conceptions of the world over time. This acknowledgement is important because it makes clear that educators' conceptions, at the time of the study, are the result of their of experiences up to that point, but that new experiences are capable of shifting these conceptions; in other words, their views will not remain static over the course of their careers and lives. Finally, I want to make clear that I am not suggesting causality and recognize that educators' changing conceptions of culture over time have likely influenced their life choices and what they reported as influential with respect to their current conceptions. I did not study participants' cumulative life experience and did not have the opportunity to get to know them well enough to accurately comment on the totality of

life experiences that helped shape their conceptions.

Educators who connected their current understandings of culture to their lived, and sometimes quite emotional experiences, fell into two distinct categories based on whether those experiences were immersive or discriminatory in nature. In addition, these educators were more likely than other participants to directly relate these life experiences to shifts in their thinking about culture and/or their pedagogical practices. The third group of educators was distinguished by the fact that they articulated either weak or no connections between their personal lived experiences and their views of culture and learning. Despite this apparent absence of connection between lived experience and understandings of culture, these educators, like the previous two groups, also shared similar personal histories. These educators did not relate the kind of emotionally charged or long term experience “types” shared by the previous two groups – but described their personal histories in terms that suggest what might be termed ‘normalcy’ and attachment to the local area. Finally, there were a small number of educators (2) interviewed who expressed conceptions of culture and multiculturalism that were often contradictory and stereotypical, in comparison to their peers or expressed beliefs that were monoculturalist or assimilationist in nature. These teachers, despite experiencing discrimination and significant exposure to cultures outside of their own, maintained a more conservative notion of multiculturalism and viewed the relationship between culture and learning differently than those in other categories, distinguishing them as potentially with respect to the identified patterns.

As was mentioned earlier, the data indicate that teachers and administrators at both the school and district level who shared similar ‘types’ of life experiences tended to share similar conceptions of culture and beliefs about the relationship between culture and learning. In the following sections I highlight educators whose interview responses demonstrate that certain



types of experiences seem to correspond to similar conceptions of culture and understandings of learning. Three categories of educators, delineated by type of experience shared, are constructed to make visible both the similarities and variances within the profiles. Rather than presenting one aggregate description, however, I have chosen to highlight particular educators (using pseudonyms) from each category whose rich descriptions were best suited to demonstrating the variance as well as the similarities of the educators who fit into each category. Figure 3 below gives an overview of some of the basic characteristics of all 25 interview participants.

Figure 3. *Basic characteristics for all 25 interview participants.*



The first two categories, culturally sensitive and equity oriented educators, identify types of personal experiences that yield more complex conceptions of culture but seem to produce differing ideas regarding the relationship between learning and culture, as well as different foci with respect to where attention should be placed in schools and multicultural education. As an example of these different foci, with the exception of equity oriented educators, there was a

complete avoidance of mentioning racial difference as a component of culture or student identity in educators' interview responses.

The third category is one that is likely the most typical – it is comprised primarily of educators who did not report personal or professional experiences that clearly 'moved' them toward deeper, more nuanced understandings of culture. These educators tended to engage with these concepts in less critical ways, often articulating understandings based on traditional categories of difference (such as food, language, and traditions), and focusing on curriculum and special events when reflecting on the relationship between learning and culture. Finally, there were a very small number of educators I describe as educators with multiple conceptions of culture – those who did not fit into one of the three previously defined categories. These educators demonstrated that no pattern of experiences guarantees that an individual educator will become more aware and engaged with the concept of culture. So, while the first three profiles suggest that certain experiences tend to produce certain conceptions of culture, the two educators with multiple, and sometimes contradictory conceptions, indicated that even those who have similar experiences do not always take the similar understandings away from those experiences. Additionally, while categorizations are generally seen as static, the groups described here are based on similar conceptions of culture and shared life experiences neither of which are static and uniformly experienced. Categories offer a way to give order to meaningful patterns; however, I hope to make clear that there is variance within those categories. Consider, for example, that all of the participants will continue to have new experiences and that those new experiences may influence and further shape their conceptions of culture. These categories function here to capture the ways educators' as individuals may align at this given moment more strongly with a particular conception of culture. I am mindful of the ways the study's context and

constraints have also played a role in their responses. Having offered this clarification, the groups of educators are now described in detail in the following sections.

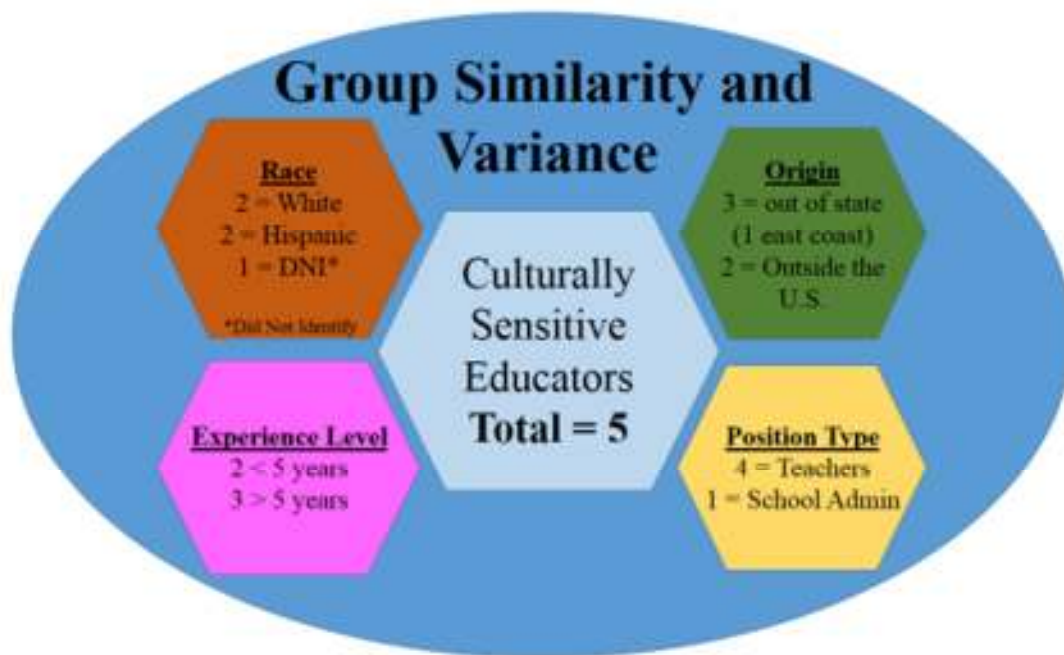
### **Culturally Sensitive Educators**

Five participants fit into a category I am referring to as culturally sensitive educators. These educators shared immersive experiences in cultures other than their own where they were required to negotiate difference from the perspective of a non-member participant. Extensive experiences participating in unfamiliar cultural communities have made understanding the concept of culture more salient to their everyday lives and their practices as educators. These educators related more complex and dynamic conceptions of culture than other study participants and conveyed a strongly held belief that culture is integral to how their students learn. In addition, these educators often focused their responses on the idea that the world is becoming smaller and students need to develop understandings of difference so that they can succeed in a more global economy and social world. While this was not the only group to talk about the need for tolerance and developing the skills needed to succeed in a multicultural world, this group of educators tended to express more specific, and more personal opinions on the subject than other groups.

All of the teachers who fit this profile provided descriptions of various experiences they felt had shaped their conceptions of culture and learning but, as was stated previously, the experience they had in common was extended, immersive participation in a cultural community outside of the one in which they were raised, and where linguistic practices were significantly different. These immersive experiences seem to be the key to these participants' similar articulations of culture, and at least half stated directly that the experience had a profoundly affected their understandings of the world and led to shifts in their thinking with respect to

culture. As is apparent in Figure 4 below, this group consisted of a total of five educators that, while sharing similar experiences also demonstrated significant variance. I have chosen to highlight four of the participants here in order to provide the richest narrative descriptions and demonstrate both the similarities and variances typical in any categorical grouping of people.

Figure 4. *Group characteristics of culturally sensitive educators.*



The first two teachers, Isabelle and Patricia, were born and educated in (different) Spanish speaking countries<sup>8</sup>, and are now immersed in U.S. culture and schools. In addition to her home country and the U.S., Patricia also lived in an Asian nation while completing a graduate degree in the literature of that country, adding a second, very different, immersive experience to the one she is currently participating in here in the U.S. The other two teachers whose responses are being highlighted are Ann and Tyler. Both Ann and Tyler were born and

<sup>8</sup> One is from Puerto Rico, which is technically a commonwealth of the U.S. but retains its own cultural and linguistic practices that are significantly different from the lower 48, mainland states.

raised in the U.S. but lived and taught in (different) Spanish speaking countries for three years or more. All but two of the participants in the study who had the experience of complete immersion in another culture constructed similar conceptions of culture; the two educators who did not share similar conceptions had *also* experienced significant discrimination, and their conceptions were more consistent with the equity oriented group. Interview data will demonstrate that culturally sensitive educators understood culture as historically rooted and stable while, at the same time, recognizing it as dynamic, complex, and firmly connected to people's everyday lives, educational practices, habits of mind, and ways of thinking and interacting with the world.

Although similar in several ways, including the fact that they currently teach in similar programs in the same district in New Mexico, these four teachers are from three different countries and are racially and experientially heterogeneous. Neither of the teachers who were born in the U.S. is originally from New Mexico and neither started out wanting to teach. The teachers who were born and educated outside of the fifty U.S. states have traveled equally unique paths to their current classrooms. The following sections provide a more detailed picture of each teacher by providing a small amount of additional information about them and, following these brief descriptions, I use interview excerpts to illustrate their similar conceptions of culture and understandings of learning.

**Ann.**

Ann self-identifies as white and grew up in the eastern U.S, in a linguistically diverse environment and sees being multilingual and multiliterate as natural and beneficial. She stated "I think that being bilingual is a plus and it doesn't slow you down in learning English" (Interview 1/13). She also stated that if the policies that are in place today had been in place when she was growing up she would have been considered an English Language Learner simply because she

was exposed to more than one language, despite never needing those services. She substitute taught an English as a Second Language class as a favor to a friend while working abroad as a translator, and she found that she connected with the kids and really liked teaching. Ann stated that “in translation you have to go chasing after the money, it’s more of a freelance job” (Interview 1/13) so when the school offered her a job she accepted. In addition to teaching outside of the U.S., Ann also taught for thirteen years in a racially and culturally diverse school system in the eastern U.S. that is recognized as being one of the best in the country. She describes her longest term assignment in that district as being in a multilingual program where she taught students who had come from “43 or 44 different countries” (Interview 1/13) and had just arrived in the U.S. She also stated that moving to New Mexico has negatively affected her as a teacher. She states that in the district where she taught back east

They figured all of this out a long time ago and organized it for you - so the teacher just teaches. Here you’re expected to do everything. Here you’re expected to run the school and participate in all these things and in \_\_\_ you just teach, and it’s difficult. I find the whole experience of working here very difficult and if I weren’t here for personal reasons I wouldn’t have stayed, because it was like going backwards...it’s messed me up - I don’t have a sense of equilibrium anymore.

(Interview 1/13)

In addition to being unhappy in her current situation specifically, and with education in New Mexico more generally, she states that she was more motivated when she was able to “create curriculum with [her] students based on what they were interested in” (Interview 1/13) and that when she was able to teach like this, she could go deeper into a subject and bring in additional resources and experiences like field trips. Finally, she said that she has been teaching for 21

years now and she “would like to stop” but then rethought it and said “but I’m not sure I would like to stop if it weren’t for all of this stuff, maybe I wouldn’t” (Interview 1/13).

### Tyler

Tyler was also born and raised in the U.S., and while she never discussed how she identifies racially or ethnically, has an olive complexion, dark hair, and a surname that is Spanish in origin. Tyler, moved to New Mexico to pursue a graduate degree unrelated to education at a local university but after teaching in a Spanish speaking country for three years, she returned to complete a graduate program in elementary education at the same university. While talking about her views on culture and how they have changed, she describes her father as a

super conservative Republican guy and [he] totally doesn't believe in what I do for a living. He does **not**<sup>9</sup> believe in bilingual ed, um but also this multicultural education discussion would, like, totally disgust him, because he has this feeling of like, you know, 'pretty soon [in] this country, none of us are gonna relate to each other and we're all gonna be more different than alike' (Interview 12/12).

This demonstrates a qualitative difference between Tyler and Ann’s upbringing and suggests she may have made some difficult personal choices on her path to becoming a dual language teacher. Her educational background also suggests that despite any difficulties, she may also have had access to resources that afforded her life choices others may not have had due to differences in their economic situations or a lack of access to social or cultural capital. While she does not discuss why she decided to teach outside of the U.S. or what resources she may have needed to make that choice a viable one, she describes her experience teaching outside the U.S. as the beginning of a transformation in her understanding of culture and says

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<sup>9</sup> Bold is used to indicate emphasis on a word by the speaker.

I feel like my three years in \_\_\_ really, like, started to transform my ideas about culture because...there are like, subtleties in culture, you know what I mean, that like, I never started to understand until I was, like, somewhere totally different. And it even took me a while when I was there. But then that has totally affected the lens through which I view culture **here**, now that I've returned (Interview 12/12).

Tyler's comments indicate that culture is a concept she has been critically engaged with for several years and that this engagement began or, perhaps, deepened with her immersive experience living and teaching in another country.

### **Patricia**

Patricia was born and raised in a Spanish speaking country but, as stated above, she also studied literature in an Asian country at the graduate level before coming to the United States and pursuing teaching. She shared various experiences in schools both in New Mexico and Texas that have shaped her practice and understanding of student learning, and clearly indicated the importance she places on her experiences living outside of her own culture. She stated that she read an Octavio Pas quote that in essence said, cultures flourish with others and die in isolation; she then continues,

And I truly believe that, because when I experienced – in my life I can say that when I went from [her country] to [the Asian country where she studied] and then from the United States, I experienced **very** different cultures and, God, I appreciate them all together and I truly believe that my life with my husband, my family - it's richer because of this exchange I did (Interview 11/12)

In addition to her current immersion in U.S. culture, she shared how her teaching experiences in



Texas and New Mexico have influenced her thinking regarding language instruction. She described the differences in structure and implementation of two different dual language models and shared her opinions regarding which model was more effective for her students. She states that [quote here]. This statement indicates both an opinion regarding the effectiveness of different dual language models but also how the model being used at her current school negatively affects her feelings of efficacy as a teacher.

### **Isabelle**

Isabelle was born and educated in Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the U.S. that retains its own unique and multilingual culture. She learned both English and Spanish from birth, was regularly exposed to French by her father, and experienced more incidental but frequent exposure to several other languages spoken in her community. Isabelle began an undergraduate degree in a Midwestern state but changed majors from more traditional 'hard' science studies to education, and sometime after this shift she returned home to complete her degree. After attaining her degree and teaching at home for four years, she moved to a large, culturally and linguistically diverse, northeastern U.S. city where she taught for two years before moving to New Mexico. She explained in her interview that due to her very light skin tone and French last name (before she married) she was often assumed to be non-Hispanic white, including by fellow Spanish speakers in the U.S. She states that,

Being the way that I look, people don't perceive me as being Puerto Rico, so it's interesting to see how they view me once they find out that I'm Puerto Rican, because they [say I] don't sound Puerto Rican. I went to a bilingual school my whole life and a lot of people don't know that about Puerto Rico – that we have two languages both Spanish and English – and they just think it's Spanish. And they

have a certain view, this mindset, of what a Puerto Rican looks like based on stereotypes, obviously, and I don't fit that (Interview 1/13).

She shared that these experiences, as well as teaching in a large diverse U.S. city, taught her that it is never safe to make assumptions about individuals' backgrounds and heritage and that, consequently, she makes a concerted effort to convey respect in all of her interactions with her students and their families.

### **Culturally Sensitive Educators' Conceptions of Culture**

This group of educators conveyed conceptions of culture that were both historically rooted and dynamic and described them as inextricably linked to community. In general when these educators spoke about cultural communities it was in reference to smaller scale communities rather than the larger national idea of culture and "community" often privileged in K-12 multicultural education. Isabelle stated that "culture is family, it's community, it's what makes you, you" (Interview 1/13), and she shared that she teaches her son about where she was born because it is important that he understand his "heritage in regards to knowing where [he] comes from, where [his] family is from, and the different things that the past had to go through" (Interview 1/13). This statement suggests an understanding that our cultural past shapes our current cultural practice - and that there is value in understanding the historical roots of current beliefs and practices, including struggles that were a part of the formation of those beliefs and practices. Ann conveyed the dynamic and often hidden nature of cultural practices nicely; when asked to define culture she responded,

I would say they're the common agreements that people don't discuss. I think it's constantly being *negotiated* and it's being *changed* but how it's formed is mysterious because there are cultures, micro cultures, subcultures – in any one city

you observe the rings and rings of different culture. You know, everyone walking into this school is part of one culture, but then inside they have different cultures. So yeah I think it's *those things that are never discussed* but they are formed as part of this group process, the same way, as a teacher, you form a classroom culture. So you have to forge that somehow by negotiating it with them [students] (Interview 1/13).

This beginning to Ann's definition demonstrates a conception of culture as negotiated, a particularly nuanced description of what it means to say that culture is dynamic, and states directly that it is constantly being changed. In addition, she indicated that in her view of culture there are intersecting 'layers' of culture in her description of cities and schools as bounded spaces containing many different cultural communities, and reinforced the idea of negotiation as she identified each school and classroom as a cultural community forged by its members. A few minutes later while considering what the purpose of multicultural education is she offered even more detail regarding what 'defines' culture for her, she stated:

I think, here, by trying to put Anglo students through the dual language thing, and have them learn Spanish, they're kind of being exposed to that, but maybe not enough. To really feel and experience the other culture, I think it's somewhat painful...It's not going to be like eating a different food – it's got to be that you don't know how to relate to people at a dinner table or you don't know the right way to interact. Culture...it's a different set of rules for operating and when you move into another one you don't know those rules and very often no one can explain them to you because they've never thought about them. You just know that in Spain if you put your bread on the plates they're going to get scandalized because your

bread has to be on the table, whereas here we don't put bread on the table. These are little things but they're deep (Interview 1/13).

This rich description of the “hidden in plain sight” nature of culture – the idea that when you are a *member* of a cultural community (particularly the dominant one) you do not “see” the norms of that community – paints a picture that suggests Ann understands culture as practices that are negotiated and change, yet can also be relatively stable over time. Through this description, she indicated that if a community doesn't “see” their norms, then the negotiation and shifting of these norms is likely to be subtle and also unseen. Culture is, at least in part, a set of rules that define behavioral expectations (practices) without being visible and often is not explicitly taught to community members. This conception also helps demonstrate why some educators may view culture as a barrier – as when rules and behavioral expectations are not visible to someone from outside a given cultural community, missteps and miscalculations may occur that members of the community may not understand because they expect everyone to simply “know” the rules.

Tyler also acknowledged the historical nature of cultural practices. While discussing the importance of critically analyzing cultural practices, she stated that her time teaching in another country helped her see the importance of understanding where our collective beliefs and practices originate. She stated her belief that to move forward and improve the circumstances and quality of life for all members of a cultural community, these normalized practices must be examined and their influences on community members understood. She also described culture as layered and complex:

there are all these layers, it's just so complex, it's fascinating, right? Like all these layers in which these cultures interact, right? and how do those all fit together and how do they play off each other. I think of layers of power and how those affect

different communities at different levels (Interview 12/12).

She stated that culture is difficult to define but is ultimately defined within each cultural community and that we are all members of multiple cultural communities. Tyler also demonstrated understanding of the bidirectionality of influence – that while the community influences the individuals in it, the individual also has an effect on the community. She stated that “if you are part of a community, then you have a part in forming the community as well. However passive you may be, even your passiveness has an effect on that community’s dynamic.” Tyler’s understanding of cultural communities, how they intersect, and their relationships to power structures as well as her belief in the importance of recognizing where collective beliefs originate indicate a disposition that would be open to critical multicultural education and the constructs of sociocultural theories of learning.

### **Culture, Learning and Culturally Sensitive Educators**

While the relationship between conceptions of culture and classroom practices will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, it is useful to explore how the educators articulated their understandings of learning with respect to culture. The interview data collected in this study indicates that in addition to sharing similar conceptions of culture, this group, the equity oriented educators, and the traditional multicultural educators also articulated their understandings of the relationship between culture and learning in similar ways – indicating that the experiences that influenced their conceptions of culture may also contribute to their understandings of student learning. This section will focus on educators’ responses to the interview question “how would you describe the relationship between culture and learning,” as well as statements made elsewhere in the interview that were coded as being directly related to this conception. Therefore, the following discussion is meant to explore the ways teachers think about culture as it relates to

learning rather than what practices they chose to employ in their classrooms.

Educators who fit the culturally sensitive educator profile tended to identify the link between culture and learning as relatively concrete; as 'things' such as habits of mind, and the instructional and evaluative practices within schools (e.g. types of tasks assigned, and how learning is demonstrated). As an example, Tyler stated that

I think the approach that students take to their own learning, you know, like what kind of behaviors they come with and that they apply to their learning, I think that's totally culturally related...like when I think about, like, the way my kids react to challenge, for example, or the way they look at...effort in the classroom...you know, like I had one student who was just like practice, practice, practice... whereas other kids might be like 'I didn't get this, I just don't get it,' you know...and I think that's a cultural thing that comes from like what the dialogue is at home...but also probably instilled through years of being socialized at school....So cultures, I think, are kind of...that learning culture or those habits, and ways of thinking in the classroom

This view of culture as what shapes learning behaviors could be argued to suggest a view of culture as practice; however, it also ascribes value to particular attitudes and practices and infers that through home and school socialization these habits and ways of thinking are 'solidified' within the individual. In addition, there is little evidence in the data that this group of educators view out-of-school cultural influences as significant in mediating students' in-school learning. With respect to the relationship of culture to learning, these educators described culture as something that either provides students with background knowledge or shapes their study habits or resilience. In addition, two of the teachers who fit this profile suggested that the 'habits of

mind' and study learned in schools outside of the U.S. need to be 'unlearned' once students enter the school systems here. For example, Tyler talked about working with a student who has only been in the U.S. for a year and stated:

He struggles with...you know, that we expect to hear his voice and we expect, here, to know what his own thoughts are instead of just regurgitation of fact, which is...clearly from the work he does, is what he's used to, and having taught in central America, and having seen that, that's what those schools ask of their students...so, responding to open response kinds of questions, he doesn't know how to write. And so that's a challenge for me, like, culturally there's a clash going on, right?...And that is a challenge...and the only way I can wrap my brain around what I need to do is just be really explicit, you know, *'I want to know what **you** think. Do **not** copy down what it says in the book,'*...So, I'm trying to break those habits of learning, because culturally, in the culture of the schools where he came from, that's what he learned.

This statement seems to suggest a minor value judgment and infers that the cultural practices of schools where this student came from are inferior to those used here. Although relatively benign, it demonstrates the difficulty teachers can sometimes face in trying to do what they are required to do without making students feel that their cultural background is not valued in the context of their classroom. This view of the relationship between learning and culture while seemingly rooted, at least to some degree, in the idea of culture as practice (learning behaviors or habits of mind) is still somewhat narrow and does not address a key component articulated by those who fit the profile I refer to as equity oriented educators described in the following section.

### **Equity Oriented Educators**

The educators I am referring to as equity oriented represents the interview responses of ten study participants (see Figure 5 below) but, as in the last profile, I have chosen to highlight specific educators whose detailed and thick descriptions best demonstrate the similarities and variances of the larger group. These educators all described life experiences that included both overt and covert discrimination and repeated microaggression. Like the previous group, they often directly related these experiences to the development of, or shifts in, their conceptions of culture and its relationship to learning. The difference in 'type' of experience, when compared to the culturally sensitive group, appears to have resulted in both a more intense focus on educational inequity and an understanding of the relationship between culture and learning that is tied to their own identity development. Much like the previous group, the details of these educators' experiences are highly unique but the nature of the incidents they described seems to have resulted in similar understandings of culture and its relationship to learning.

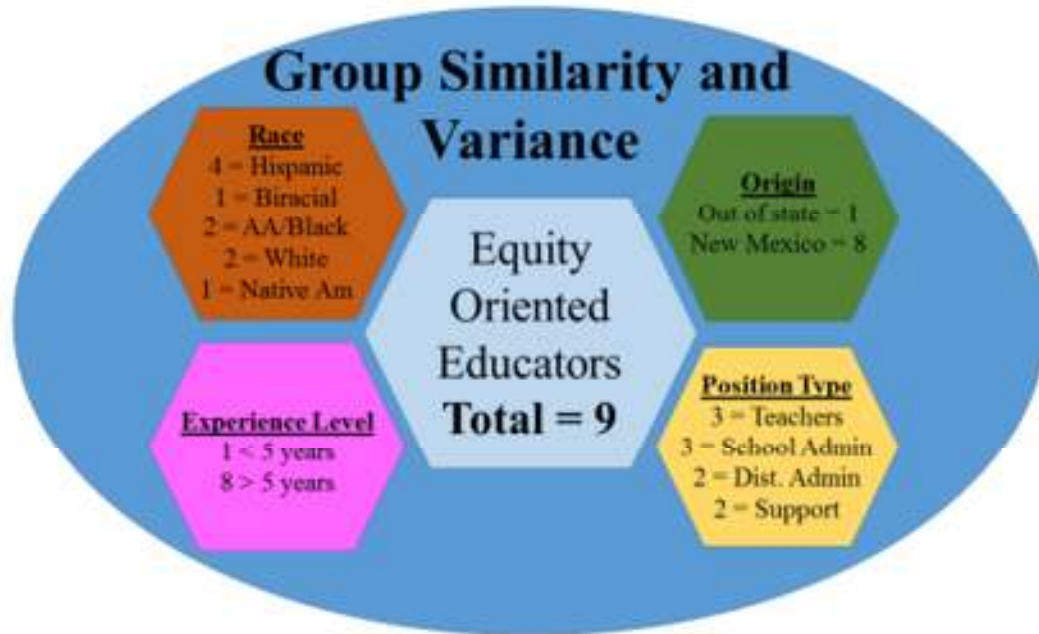
Equity oriented educators articulated relatively traditional conceptions of culture focused on large categories of difference (e.g. race, ethnicity, language, nationality, etc.) that sometimes lapsed into statements that treated culture as synonymous with race and ethnicity and at other times equated it with language. When examined within the context of the whole interview, this reduction of culture to race, ethnicity, or language seemed to stem from a personal focus on social justice and traditionally marginalized students rather than a belief that these categories were the sum total of what is meant by 'culture.' The primary differences between the conceptions this group articulated and those articulated by the culturally sensitive educators are that their views of culture are more static in nature and more singularly focused on issues of equity with respect to culture and multicultural education. The data suggest that this focus is directly related to these educators' personal lived experiences with discrimination and oppression



both outside of and within the public education system. I should make clear here that I am in no way suggesting that teachers described in other sections were unconcerned with equity in education; I have chosen to refer to these educators in this way because they forefronted issues of equity throughout their interview responses. For example, educators in this group were the only participants to directly address race and other 'marked' identities, and the ways in which discrimination is still present in the district and in their lives.

Two educators are highlighted to help create a picture of the types of experiences shared by this group which, as mentioned previously, included ten of the 25 participants at the local level, and Figure 5 below, illustrates some of the characteristics of the group as a whole. The first educator highlighted, Janet, self-identifies as African American/Black (she used both terms in the course of the interview), and has been with the district for more than 28 years. Janet described multiple situations, both personal and professional, in which she herself, other family members, and/or her students, have been the target of prejudice and discrimination. The second educator highlighted, Theresa, self-identifies as Hispanic and describes experiencing microaggressions throughout her childhood, related to her blended family and biracial sisters. Theresa also described a youthful rejection of her Hispanic heritage, because her father was absent from her life. The following section highlights the experiences of each educator and their statements regarding the impact of those experiences. Following the description of their lived experiences, I will address their similar conceptions of culture and understandings of learning.

FIGURE 5. *Group characteristics of equity oriented educators.*



### Janet

Janet shared detailed memories from her childhood that related to her early years living on Native American reservation lands with her teacher parents, as well as her first experiences with Jim Crow laws during visits with her grandparents in Texas. She stated that

I stayed summers with my grandmother in a small town called....TX, and it was about *this* big and it was one of the most **racist** towns that you ever can imagine. All of the, everything to do with black people was across the railroad tracks and ...and all of the white people lived waaaay out there...They had a dairy queen and there was a back door that said colored on it and you walked in and ordered what you wanted to order, and then they gave it to you out the door. So this started educating me. (Interview 10/24/12)

Janet also relayed a story that contrasted her experiences in New Mexico with the Jim Crow laws she experienced in Texas. The story also illustrates that, as a child, despite seeing discrimination

aimed at the Native American population where she lived, she struggled to understand the extreme legal segregation of black and white where her grandparents lived. She stated that the first time she spent the summer with her grandparents she wanted to go swimming and the town had "these big luxurious swimming pools," but no black swimming pools. She stated

I told my grandma 'we're all going swimming today' and my grandmother goes 'What? Where are you going swimming?' and I said grandma, why are you asking me that? They have a swimming pool right over there, and she said to me 'uh uh, you can't go,' and I said what you mean I can't go? and she said 'because, colored people - that's the word she used - colored people cannot go and swim in those pools, they're just for white people.' And I said, what are you talking about, we don't do that where I live, we don't really have a swimming pool on the reservation, but we can go to town and they have a swimming pool and everybody goes, and she said 'well it's not like that here.' (Interview 10/24/12)

These and other illustrations of her experiences with legal and overt discrimination in the Jim Crow south as a child are clearly powerful for Janet and she directly states that they were the beginning of her education with respect to injustice and inequity. When she talks about herself as a professional educator she states

I have a strong philosophy that you can't work with children and be successful if you don't understand the communities that they come from...and when you go into a community you feel, and you pick those things up. There isn't a community that I don't feel comfortable with. (Interview 10/24/12)

In her own words, she is stating her belief that understanding students' cultural communities is necessary if teachers are to work successfully with students from backgrounds different than

their own. Further, her statement that there isn't a community in which she is uncomfortable suggests that her personal background and experiences moving in and out of different cultural communities have helped her to become an educator who is comfortable with cultural boundary crossing and sees it as important in getting to know students and their families.

As a professional, Janet states that she regularly hears from people when they meet her face to face after phone conversations that they didn't know she was black because she "talks white," and that she often faces discrimination from the black community for this same characteristic. In addition to these judgments based on her linguistic style, others often don't believe she was born and raised in New Mexico because she is black. She related the following story as an example of what she described as a relatively common occurrence for her:

Just yesterday this guy said 'where are you from' and I said, I'm pretty much a native of New Mexico and they said 'WHAT? No way!' And I said yep, I said I grew up here in New Mexico on the reservation, and they said 'that's unbelievable 'cause we thought you were from back east, and maybe you experienced the ghetto.' I said I grew up in poverty, and I grew up in rural, and I grew up in a very monolithic environment - which was Navajo. And they were like "WHAT?" (Interview 10/12)

Janet also stated that she shared with this person her feeling that growing up this way was a "rich" experience and that it was very educational for her. She then clarified for me that she felt lucky because, even though she grew up outside of her own culture, both of her parents were educators, "so what I didn't know about my culture, I was taught about it." This statement indicates that she recognizes the importance of understanding your own historical roots and culture when immersed in another culture – even when that immersive experience is a positive one that promotes learning, individual growth, and a more expansive understanding of human

beings and the larger world.

Janet made another important comment regarding how she has been treated over time in her professional life. This statement helps to illustrate the common threads seen in this group of educators - the focus on equity (particularly within the system of education) and the importance of identity. In talking about work she has done in the area of communication over the years, Janet stated:

I get frustrated because, in education, people don't fight the way that they should fight, they go along with the system. And I sorta understand that because you gotta have a job. And I know that I haven't progressed the way that I should because of who I am, what I say, how I react, what I do. But they want me to react the way that you should react as a white person, and I'm not. [Intoning as an authority figure] *'But if you'd be just a little bit more white, and you'd just react a little bit more like this, or if you would be more in this culture than that culture then you'd be okay' -* but I wouldn't be okay, because I wouldn't feel good about me (Interview 10/12).

Janet's interview yielded a wealth of examples of both overt and more subtle forms of discrimination and microaggression, only a fraction of which have been conveyed here, and she draws on these experiences consistently when she talks about multicultural education, learning, and the local and state policies she works within.

### **Theresa**

Theresa is an ESL teacher who is not bilingual but says she has learned a lot of school related Spanish vocabulary from her students. While she identifies as Hispanic, she described experiences of overt discrimination and microaggression from her early life that were connected to the fact that she "grew up in a very blended family." While describing her family in greater

detail she said

My stepfather is black and he adopted me, and they have...my sisters are half black and they've adopted my brother, and my family is definitely multicultural. So I grew up, you know, having my sisters come home from school crying, saying 'this girl's pulling my hair and it's curly and it bounces,' their hair, and asking me, 'why is your dad black, why is your mom white?' And so I've grown up with that kind of in your face and it's...it's um...it's good. It's shaped me to be the person I am. So it's good. (Interview, 1/13)

Theresa explicitly identified both the microaggressions she and her biracial sisters experienced in school, described above, as well as her own youthful dis-identification with her Hispanic heritage as experiences that had shaped her view of culture and multicultural education. In answer to a question about how her views of culture have changed over time, she described how, when she was young, she rejected her Hispanic heritage and said:

There was a period of time where I was really disbelieving in the value of Hispanic culture because that was the other half of my family that had kind of shut me off and neglected me, and I just had this really negative image. I would dye my hair blonde, have all white friends, and kind of had this anti-identity. Which is funny because I've really flipped around and in college I had this ability to really be more aware of the value of Hispanic culture. There are smart, brilliant, wonderful Hispanic people, and I can identify with that – I don't have to identify with a scumbag. (Interview, 1/13)

In the first quote, she described other people's confusion and the questions she is asked when she introduces her father and sisters, and in the second she describes her own confusion and the

resulting rejection of part of who she is as a protective measure. In these quotes, it is evident that Theresa views these experiences as having significantly influenced her identity development as well as her understanding of what it meant for her family to be “multicultural.” Finally, Theresa relayed a more recent story of walking out of a store and having a stranger comment that her newborn baby was “so white;” in describing her reaction to the stranger’s comment she stated:

I’m like, *‘I don’t even know you, what does this have to do [with you]? Why are you judging my child? What does it matter?’* That really offended me because at that moment...that was a moment that stuck with me because, to me, an innocent child...a baby should have no labels in my opinion, and I didn’t realize that we are labeled and categorized the second that we are here. (Interview, 1/13)

Theresa relayed this story when asked about personal experiences that had shaped her thinking with respect to multicultural education. She stated that there have been many times like this when she has felt or observed inequalities and that people’s “natural ability to judge and categorize other people” have made her want to help her students feel that they have an even, fair chance. Theresa and Janet’s interview responses, while unique and very personal, are representative of the types of experiences relayed by all seven educators in this group. These experiences with discrimination viscerally and logically connect to their focus on equity in education and their understanding of identity as important to student learning and success. The conceptions of culture shared by the educators in this group tend to focus on identity markers that are viewed as ‘other’ and outside the norm, such as race/ethnicity and speaking a language other than English.

### **Equity Oriented Educators’ Conceptions of Culture**

Educators who fit this profile have developed conceptions of culture that seem to foster

focused attention on issues of equity, and the particular 'marked' cultural and racial identities that experience the greatest degrees of inequity. One educator in this group made the following statement:

I just see cultures in so many different ways but...the one that's hardest to ignore is ...when you talk about the culture that school is based on and it's 'up,' and when you're not in that culture you are 'down.' And the only way to survive, to - I don't even know if I want to say excel - but to achieve and make it, is to assimilate. And then what happens? You lose your culture. It's hard to look at culture without looking at the dominant culture and how they define everything, and how stigma is placed on everything...if you look at stigma from the dominant culture, what is stigma? first of all it's not being a man - being a woman is stigma; being black is stigma; being poor, being not pretty, not being healthy, being old - and then when you look at the opposite of that you've got young rich good looking healthy white man - and that's 100% american in this country and none of us fit it except them.

(Interview 12/12)

Conceptions that remain focused on larger categories of difference, especially those focused on one *particular* category of difference, such as a focus on race, could be argued to be too narrow – but all participants who articulated culture in this way also made it clear that equity, across all categories of difference, is an important goal. Janet talks about multicultural education in New Mexico and states that it is “looked at differently than it should be, um, it’s not real. It’s not what you call a multicultural education, um, I would say it is more a bi-cultural education. It’s not multi, it’s not many.” (Interview, 10/12) This recognition of inequity can sometimes result in more reductive and essentialized descriptions of large groups of people like this quote:



But this is what's happening, in my opinion, in the white culture - they're becoming more and more...wanting to tighten up. And they want to make sure they stay in power...and in your cultural groups, you have culture groups...that are extremely submissive, then you have your culture groups that are activist and they are aggressive...Every culture group has their expertise, you know, they have something to add to the pot, but what white society does is they play us all against each other, and they like that, you know what I mean? (Interview, 10/12).

While relatively reductionist statements like this one were more common in this group of educators, when considered within the context of their complete interviews it is clear that they do not necessarily reflect an understanding of culture that lacks complexity. Although the educators who fit this profile are less likely to describe culture as dynamic and more likely to generalize about large groups of people (usually groups identified by traditional markers of culture such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, etc.), these narrative markers often indicated frustration with what they viewed as a failure of the system to create equity for all students. It can also be argued that it is natural to focus on the groups being left behind and the groups who are benefitting most from the status quo in conversations about education – and that this can lead to generalizations about both groups, as well as language that narrows, rather than expands, notions of culture. Whether conceptions of culture that grow out of personal experiences of discrimination tend to be more consistently focused on large categories of difference than those shaped by other types of experiences is impossible to determine based on the data in this study; however, the data do seem to indicate that experiences of discrimination result in a focus on equity, which should by no means be considered a negative outcome simply because it *may* contribute to the likelihood that statements will be made that generalize groups of ‘others.’

### **Culture, Learning and Equity Oriented Educators**

Finally, as with the preceding group, educators in the study who share this type of experience and similar conceptions of culture also seem to develop a distinctive understanding of the relationship between learning and culture. The educators in this group see the connection as being directly related to student identity. While the conception of culture articulated by this group of teachers doesn't seem to indicate the notion of culture as practice, it privileges the idea that culture shapes students' identities as evidenced in the following quote.

Our largest group, which I don't think people realize and want to understand, are multi-ethnic kids. I work a lot with multi-ethnic kids, especially kids who um...don't understand who they are, you know, and they have some major, major issues...when kids are part African American and white, or Spanish and African American...but they're being raised by a white woman or a Hispanic woman...they don't have the connections they should with who they are (Interview 10/12).

This connection to identity is important because research has demonstrated that the identities students present in school – the identities that teachers interact with and react to – can have a significant impact on a student's learning (Nasir et al, 2008; Wortham, 2004). Much in the same way the culturally sensitive educators' conceptions of culture as complex, layered, and dynamic did not lead to the understanding of culture as practice, the ideas expressed regarding identity by equity oriented educators are also somewhat limited. While the basic idea of having multiple identities, some of which we can hide or deny (but not necessarily change), and the need to be able to code switch when crossing between cultural communities were discussed, neither culture nor identity were discussed as fluid or negotiated. Rather, culture was discussed as being a part of who you are, something essential that defines you permanently in some way, and was often

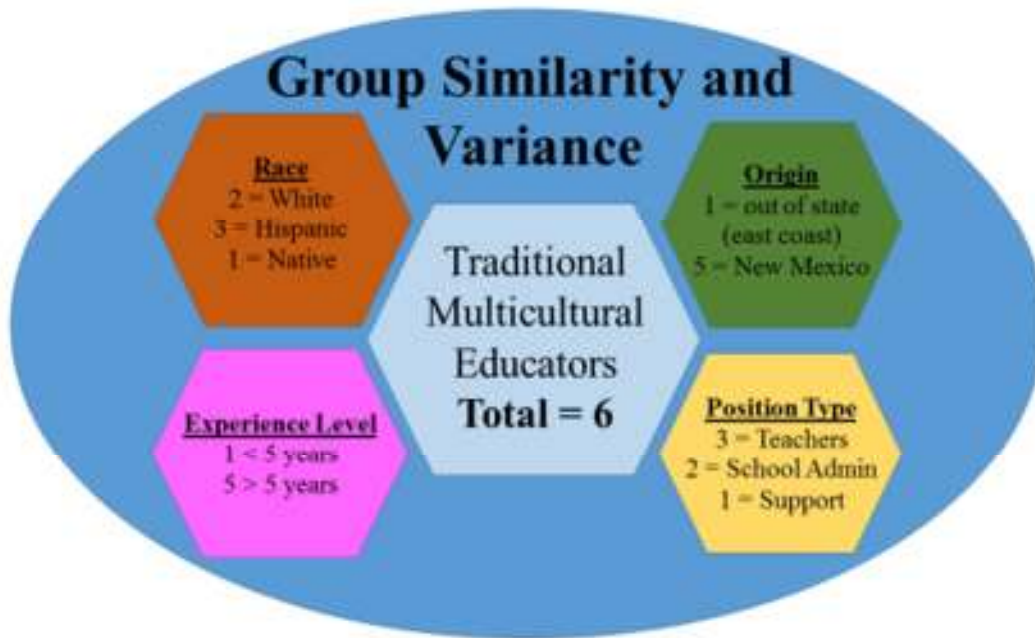
related most strongly to race and/or ethnicity. This more limited and rigid view of culture and identity is problematic for many reasons, but with respect to multicultural education it could potentially result in reinforced stereotypes and the idea that multicultural education is primarily about teaching tolerance for those who are 'other,' improving the self-esteem of the marginalized, and even more dismissive - being "politically correct."

### **Traditional Multicultural Educators**

There were a total of six educators who fit the profile of traditional multicultural educators (See Figure 6 for group characteristics). Educators who fit this profile were those who seem to have more limited personal experience with other cultures; that is, those who have remained, more or less, in traditional roles and local spaces that were familiar and safe. This group did not identify the kind of profound personal experiences that led those in the previous two groups to engage critically with the concept of culture and its relationship to learning, but it is important to note that many of these educators identified as Hispanic/Latin@ and therefore have experienced living outside of the dominant, white, middle class culture. Whether these educators' personal experiences have been limited by lack of opportunity and resources, or they have consciously chosen a familiar, comfortable path that has limited their exposure to cultures outside of their own, likely depends on the individual and wasn't always clear in the data. There were, however, times when a direct statement was made that clearly indicated personal choice, rather than a lack of opportunity, as the primary reason for the participant's choice to remain in culturally familiar spaces. Finally, it is important to consider that, for the educators of color in this group, a conscious decision to remain in a familiar setting or choose a path they believe will minimize experiences that devalue them as individuals may well have been significantly influenced by strong assimilative forces, like those described by John in the introductory chapter,

that these educators likely faced growing up.

Figure 6. *Group Characteristics of Traditional Multicultural Educators.*



Regardless of whether the personal and professional choices these educators have made so far have been materially or psychologically impacted by factors such as those just described, educators in this group articulate similar conceptions of culture and learning. The conceptions shared by these educators generally align with an understanding of culture as the traditions of a cultural community: country of origin, food, festivals, and artifacts. Despite this alignment to traditional conceptions, these educators also tended to see culture as personal and closely related to family, local community, and an individual's personal experiences. This group of educators talked about students needing to "see themselves" in their schools, classrooms, and curricular materials, and they focused on curricular and pedagogical approaches to multicultural education in their interview responses. Further, while they espoused the importance of valuing students' linguistic and cultural identities, they did not suggest anything other than curricular solutions

were necessary when identifying what they believe to be best practices in multicultural education.

Two educators were chosen to illustrate the conceptions of culture and learning held by this group and are highlighted in this section. The first is an administrator and the second an early career teacher; both are native New Mexicans but beyond that, they are quite dissimilar. The administrator, Laura, self-identifies as Hispanic, has been in her current position for seven years, and with the district for eleven. She stated that she had worked in five other districts, all within the state of New Mexico, before coming to this district and that she has learned over the years to take the 'pulse' of the school by asking students whether they feel supported and about how they view their school and classroom experiences. The teacher highlighted in this section, Brian, self-identifies as white and stated that he grew up in the same diverse neighborhood, and attended the same school, in which he currently teaches. He stated that, although his father was in the military and he spent half a year in western Europe as an elementary student, his parents were older and retired when he was young so, with the exception of the half year in England, he received his education in the local area where he now teaches. Brian was in his fourth year teaching at the time of data collection and stated that he transitioned to teaching when the plant he had worked in shut down, working as a classroom assistant while completing his degree. The following section focuses on each of the highlighted teachers, their experiences, and their statements regarding the impact of those experiences; however, because these educators did not directly relate their conceptions of culture to experience to the same extent as the previous two groups, these teachers tended to provide less detail about their personal experiences. I will address the traditional multicultural educators' shared conceptions of culture and understandings of learning following the descriptions of the highlighted educators.

**Laura**

As an educator with more than 17 years of experience in education, Laura stated that over the course of her career, the most she's 'stretched' herself was seeking out an assignment at a school that served a primarily Native American population. She stated

I tend to go to my comfort zones...I tend to go toward what's very familiar for me, which is very low income, Hispanic school populations. Even though I did reach out, I wanted to learn more about Native American populations so I took a job for three years as assistant principal at...high school, and so that's - I mean, I really wanted to know that culture, and so I went there. But that would be the most I have stretched (Interview 10/12).

Laura makes it clear that she has made a conscious choice to remain in a 'comfort zone,' while at the same time acknowledging that she has made at least one effort to stretch herself culturally. Although she worked in the school for an extended period of time, she did not describe this as an immersive experience. However, she was clear that she made the choice based on a personal desire to learn more about the Native American population, viewing this experience as an educational opportunity. She continued to talk about her choices to remain in her comfort zone and stated,

I never asked to be transferred to...where it's predominantly Anglo populations, I've never made a request that way. So, I just go to where I know I can be comfortable...and not that I couldn't have good ideas there, I just know that I have to be respected as well, because I am Hispanic so I would never want to put myself in a situation where I'd be working in an environment where people couldn't appreciate that (Interview 10/12).

This statement provides some context for her choice to stay in her “comfort zone” and helps to make clear that part of her reason for remaining in schools with a particular student population is to ensure her work environment will be one that supports and respects her own cultural heritage. At the same time, her statement suggests a personal belief that schools with larger Anglo populations within the district were more likely to be places where her heritage and cultural background would be devalued and where she might feel less than respected. Although Laura did not relate any specific experiences with discrimination, the following brief statement helps to illuminate why she has made the choices she has professionally. When asked what personal experiences had shaped her views of multicultural education Laura stated that

Growing up I think that I was in an environment where it wasn't appreciated, or maybe every opportunity to make us assimilate quickly was evident, I remember that as my personal experience. But then after that I did find that um, we could become more aware and make our own mind up about it, so as I took more and more course work I met like minded people (Interview 10/12).

Her experience of growing up in a context where she felt forced to assimilate quickly and where ‘other’ cultures weren’t appreciated illustrates one potential influence on her choice to stay in school communities where she feels confident that her cultural heritage will be an asset and will be appreciated because it is similar to that of the student population. It is also reasonable to think that other teachers from nondominant backgrounds may seek schools and professional situations that feel supportive and respectful of their heritage.

### **Brian**

Similar to Laura and the others in this group, Brian’s interview responses did not focus on or provide much detail about his personal experiences or their impact on his conceptions of

culture. Beyond his half a year in Europe, mentioned previously, his only comment on how his personal experiences shaped his understanding of culture was the following,

Coming up, especially in this neighborhood, it's pretty diverse so I ran into all sorts of different people and so that all sort of mixed in to my culture you know. Even though I was a white male, I was still, I still had all these other things you know - I had Native American friends, Black friends, Asian friends, and we all just kind of, you know, fed into each other's culture I think, you know, you got something from everybody (Interview 12/12).

The interesting thing about Brian's description of his life and upbringing is that his understanding of how his personal cultural identity was shaped is closely tied to his community and his interactions with others growing up. In addition, it suggests a view of culture as something that is easily replicated or transferred between individuals, which indicates fluidity and some level of choice or agency in the development of cultural identity. While Brian's may be a more dynamic view of culture than many who fit this profile, he is also explicitly stating that friends from other racial groups have influenced his cultural identity, although he doesn't believe culture is racial. He stated "So like, I guess some people tend to group it [culture] as like a race kind of a thing, and I don't see it as a racial kind of a thing" (Interview 1/13). Brian's descriptions of what has shaped his cultural identity, like the other educators in the traditional multicultural educator group, are minimal in comparison to educators in the culturally sensitive and equity oriented groups, presumably because these educators did not identify their life experiences as an important influence on their conceptions of culture.

### **Traditional Multicultural Educators' Conceptions of Culture**

Educators in this category articulate relatively traditional conceptions of culture,



generally focused on the large categories of difference addressed by multicultural education. While the framework of multiculturalism identified by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) was generally insufficient to describe the participants of this study, because of its focus on large categories of difference this group comes the closest to accurately reflecting one of their categories. Educators in this group tend to view culture as more personal (closely tied to family and personal experiences) than the definition used in Kincheloe & Steinberg's framework, the descriptors they used to talk about culture tended to reflect the liberal multiculturalism frame in that they often focused on the importance of recognizing and emphasizing the ways in which groups and cultures are similar, and deemphasizing the ways they are different in multicultural education. One teacher in this group stated

culture I think is all the things that go into the people who you are around mostly I guess...it's just the norms and the music and the stories and the clothing and everything that kind of revolves around your, the group you hang out - your social group, your family, your friends in your neighborhood or...um that's how I would define it" (Interview 12/12).

This definition of culture, like those of the majority of the participants in the study, points to a view of culture that is more tightly tied to a personal cultural identity and local influences on culture than large categories of difference. Yet this notion is still relatively traditional in that it is focused on things such as norms, clothing, and music, things which can be seen as the products created by cultural practices. In other words, when culture is viewed in this way, the artifacts produced by a cultural community are themselves thought of as culture. Another educator in this group described culture simply as "what you bring to the classroom" (Interview 1/13). As a final illustration of the conceptions of culture common to this group, another educator told a story

about living in a bilingual, intergenerational home growing up and stated

I came from a bilingual home, so the multicultural is important, I mean, and within my own personal home, when my grandparents passed away, the culture stopped. And that's sad, because now, I as an adult, I have memories of what it was when I was a child, when my grandparents were alive because we lived in an extended family, there was my mom and dad's room, my grandparents room, and mine and my sister's room and we were together (Interview 1/13)

This quote is interesting because it clearly associates culture with the household's older generation, and expresses a belief that culture can 'just stop' when members of a cultural community or family pass away. This view suggests that culture is static, that it 'belongs to' or is contained within the individual, and that when the individuals who 'have' the culture are gone, it simply ceases to be. If *all* cultural practices relating to her grandparents' country of origin (Russia) did indeed cease with their death, as her quote indicates, it also suggests that, for whatever reason, she had not participated in cultural practices with her grandparents in a way that would have allowed her to learn and continue those practices after their deaths.

### **Culture, Learning and Traditional Multicultural Educators**

The educators in this group have very traditional conceptions of what multicultural education is and should be and when asked to consider how culture and learning are related they generally talked exclusively about curriculum, tolerance, and respect. Educators from this group who work in dual language programs often asserted that multicultural education was primarily about language, as one teacher stated about the purpose of multicultural education,

It's to make sure that the language at risk, does not die. Keep it alive, keep that language alive. That's it (laughs), that's my purpose, to keep it alive. Especially,

well, here we don't see it, but like on the reservations more, right, especially if it's not written (Interview 1/13).

In addition to equating language instruction to multicultural education in much the same way the state policy does, when asked to explain her understanding of the relationship between culture and learning she replied,

You have to have a respect for what they, you know...like the eye contact, some cultures don't have eye contact, so you can't get on after a kid 'why aren't you looking at me?' It's just, respect for cultures, like Native Americans you wouldn't have them, what is it, drawing snakes? You bring it through social studies, different cultures. So you bring it into the class - you teach it! Well you teach the beliefs, you bring in different beliefs and that you respect everybody, no matter what (Interview 1/13).

Further, the teacher described her current classroom practices with respect to multicultural education in way that was entirely focused on curricula; she stated,

I try to have some sort of activity that brings their culture in, that's how I bring it in, and I bring parents in. We did *Día de los Muertos*, we're gonna do Martin Luther King, I bring it through my curriculum - we just are sensitive to that (Interview 1/13).

Other teachers in this group shared similar views when asked about the relationship between learning and culture; they shared understandings that indicated they see culture as something 'brought in' to educational spaces and explicitly taught. In other words, they associate culture with education, discreet facts, and knowledge, not learning processes. As a final example, when asked to share her understanding of the relationship between culture and learning, another

educator in this group stated,

In any learning environment...you need to know your people, you need to know where they come from, you need to establish a family and appreciate them for who they are, with that comes your culture...So let's have the...day where we celebrate all the Native American cultures, let's have our Noche de Estrellas, let's have our International Day...I think we need to grasp on to who we are and who each individual is and make them come together as a family, and to me culture is so enriching and it's so exciting (Interview 1/13).

As is evidenced in these excerpts, all of the educators in this group focused their interview responses on curriculum, celebrations, and the idea of respecting others and embracing difference – the traditional approach to multicultural education. As has been stated previously, *none* of the educators in the study articulated an understanding of culture as practice or that those practices are central to, and mediate, *all* learning in the way that sociocultural theories of learning do, which is the crux of my argument. By providing more robust notions of culture and positioning culture at the center of learning, sociocultural theories offer insights to learning processes that, up to now, have remained outside the scope of multicultural education research and practice. While I believe that sociocultural learning theory should be central to the process of designing and implementing better teacher preparation, professional development, and pedagogical practices in multicultural education, coming to a better understanding of how educators develop their conceptions of culture and make sense of multicultural education as it currently exists is an important first step.

### **The**

The conceptions of culture expressed by two educators did not correspond to the life

experiences they described in the same way they did for the other participants in my sample. Nevertheless, they are important to discuss as they represent the ways in which similar experiences do not always produce similar views and understandings of the world. Those who fit this profile demonstrated multiple contradictions in their conceptions regarding culture and learning, and sometimes even a lack of awareness of the real world implications of difference. Because these educators shared similar experiences with those in other groups, but did not share similar conceptions of culture and because of the contradictions articulated within their conceptions, I refer to them as educators with multiple conceptions. These participants expressed both complex and more reductive ideas about culture and multiculturalism – seemingly without awareness of the contradiction – and their responses regarding conceptions of culture and learning do not reflect similar connections to personal, educational, and professional experiences as those who fit the previously described profiles. This does not mean that these educators never directly connected their experiences to their understandings of culture and learning, only that the types of experiences they have in common with other educators have not produced similar conceptions for them, and therefore they don't fit the patterns described in the previous three profiles. It is fair to say, however, that educators who fit this profile did not acknowledge culture as integral to learning and made statements that indicated an assimilationist, or nationalistic 'American' (monoculturalist) view of education and community.

The following description is based on the only two educators whose interviews revealed more consistently conflicting and reductive notions of culture and conservative views of multiculturalism, despite sharing the types of life experiences that produced more robust notions of culture and understandings of learning for other participants. Because there were so few educators who fit this profile, I have chosen to highlight a single participant; as with the previous

profiles, my choice to highlight this particular educator was based on the fact that his responses offered the richest and most detailed descriptions.

### **Juan**

Juan is a fifth grade regular education teacher whose students are predominantly Hispanic/Latin@ but are not enrolled in the school's dual language program. According to Juan, most of his students are living at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. Juan related some personal history as well as his path to teaching during the course of the interview, and his story contained many of the same types of experiences described in the first two profiles. When asked to define culture, his response was interrupted by a story from his childhood regarding language:

I don't know if I could define culture but I think there's things that help me define my culture like the languages I've spoken 'cause I mean, it's really weird, but I was actually Spanish first. But I really don't remember, like, turning over to when I was English, but I do remember they made me go to Head Start, and...they told my parents talking Spanish was gonna make me slow. And I remember thinking 'I'm not slow, I can run faster than everyone on the playground, they're stupid'...so I started there and it never bugged me, I didn't care...I do remember when the change was happening was right after that meeting. I couldn't be in the house when people were speaking Spanish, you know, all the kids were gone. I mean, it was weird because all of a sudden there was this new thing, 'oh you're gonna have dumb kids if they speak Spanish,' so you know I think my whole generation...with my cousins, almost none of us speak Spanish because we weren't allowed to (Interview 1/13).

This story describes an experience with discrimination from his childhood, similar to those told by teachers who fit the equity oriented profile; one that devalued his family's language and

literally frightened his family into allowing his whole generation to grow up as monolingual English speakers. This subtractive school practice (Valenzuela, 1999) may have had more far reaching effects as well, such as creating or reinforcing the belief that complete assimilation was important to their family's success. Interestingly, Juan clearly sees himself as psychologically uninjured by the statement that he might be slow because, as a preschooler, he misunderstood what the adults were talking about. It also seems, from his telling of the story, that he doesn't view this as a particularly negative life event, he simply stated that he and most of cousins do not speak Spanish – without any comment regarding how he feels about this outcome. This does not align with the way those in the equity oriented profile described the effects of this type of experience on their thinking, and may help to explain why Juan does not address the idea of equity in education, or the reality of its absence, in any way during his interviews.

### **Juan's Conceptions of Culture and Learning**

After relating the above story, Juan returned to his definition of culture without prompting and said:

Culture, okay things that define my culture, it's where I've come from, the places I've been, the people I'm around, and the things I do. Because all that contributes to what my culture is, you know, I'm Spanish, I'm French, I'm Mexican, I'm Indian...it all contributes to the culture that I have and that I bring to the class  
(Interview 1/13).

With the inclusion of the statement “the things I do,” he is indicating that culture is, at least to some degree, about practice. While he may not have used the word practice, by **not** using the more limiting language typically associated with culture – words such as ‘traditions,’ ‘celebrations,’ or ‘customs,’ – he may be inferring that culture is more than

those types of practices. Despite having similar experiences and his relatively broad view of culture as “things I do,” Juan did not share the more nuanced views of culture common to the culturally sensitive educators or the view of the equity oriented group that focuses on how culture materially affects student outcomes.

In addition to articulating this definition of culture, while considering the relationship between culture and learning Juan also described a life experience similar to those common to the participants who fit the culturally sensitive profile. He related that he was in the Navy for seven years between graduating from high school and his teacher education program, and that during that time he “circumferenced the globe three times” (Interview 1/13). He stated that this experience exposed him to many cultures that were different from his own, and while it may not have been an extended immersive experience with one country or culture, it certainly provided him with a much wider view of the world and how people in other countries and cultures live, work, and play. He stated that the travel and exposure to other cultures,

...only made me better, I was like, even the stuff I didn't like to see and the stuff I wouldn't want to talk about, it still makes you a better person because now when you come here you enjoy it more...I think that's the culture I wanna bring - it's not just about what we have here, it's about being global, it's about using your education to get somewhere else. Even if you come back, that's fine because you're gonna be better when you come back, I don't care what anyone says, any travel you do is gonna make you a better person (Interview 1/13).

This description of his travel experience and his view that even the things he didn't like and



wouldn't want to talk about, contributed to making him a better person is interesting because, on the surface, it seems to align well with the outlook of the culturally sensitive educators.

However, he did not directly connect his travel experiences to a deeper understanding of culture or to better recognizing its complexity in the same way as those in the culturally sensitive profile. In addition, his responses did not indicate a more critical understanding of either his own, or others', cultures as a result of his extensive travels – he only stated that you “enjoy” your own culture more after having these types of experiences. Finally, he also shared thoughts about culture and learning that are reductive in nature, employ stereotypical characterizations that essentialize whole groups, and suggest that he believes certain cultural characteristics may be inherent as evidenced in the following quote.

I think education in some cultures is more ingrained, and is sought for. Um, not to be stereotypical but a lot of the Asian people I know are very education driven, a lot of the Indian people, not Native American, Indian people are really, and it's not just them it's their families, their brothers. All of them are engineers, I mean, all doctors, whole families, you know - from the great-grandparents all the way through, they all have this, I don't know if it's an innate drive, but it seems to drive them people. Now, when you talk about Jewish people, I know a lot of Jewish people and they're in the banking industry. Why, I don't know why, but they tend to flourish there (Interview 1/13).

Juan also made reductive statements that suggest an assimilationist “American” view of culture. When asked what practices he uses to support non-dominant students his response was “I really haven't experienced a student **not** from, what I would consider to be, the dominant culture,” suggesting that he thinks of his Hispanic/Latin@ students as being from the dominant

'American' culture. These quotes demonstrate belief in particular stereotypes and essentialist thinking that point to a view of culture as something inherent or contained within the individual. While other participants, particularly those in the equity oriented group, may have made some generalizations about groups of people while explaining their views, none of these more extreme types of responses were articulated by teachers who fit into the previously described profiles. So, while Juan related experiences similar to those in other profiles, he does not seem to have developed similar conceptions of culture or understandings of learning as the others, and he does not make explicit connections between his conceptions and his experiences the way other participants did.

This difference is made even more intriguing by a third story he related while defining culture and talking about trying to "take what the kids bring" (Interview 1/13). Juan explained that during his second year teaching he "had a bunch of parents that were lesbian or gay" (Interview 1/13) and that, at the time, he believed he should treat everyone the same. He goes on to say that he was trying to take the approach of "what you bring from home stays at home," (Interview 1/13) but that this experience taught him this wasn't a viable approach. He stated that two boys in his class were "messaging around" (Interview 1/13) and after repeated warnings he told them there would be "a wicked bad consequence" (Interview 1/13) if they didn't stop. The boys continued, so Juan stated that he said to the boys, "all right, at recess – now you guys get to hold hands for lunch" (Interview 1/13) and then continued,

It didn't even dawn on me that one of the boys' parents was gay. So, they went to recess, and I guess they were so embarrassed that they sat in the corner and people were coming back and making fun of them - and then some of the kids knew his mom was gay so they were like 'oh, you're gay too now, you're gay too' and Mr.

Juan learned from a really bad situation... I learned something, I learned that I need to value everybody's individuality...and I learned it, like I said, in a really bad way - but it's something that I'll never forget (Interview 1/13).

This story, told as a part of his response to the interview question asking him to give his definition of culture, demonstrates that his view is tied closely to home, family, and individual life experiences. In addition, this story makes visible the contradictions or, more generously, the significant tensions, in some of his responses. An example of one of these tensions would be his assertion that he needs to value each person as an individual, while holding on to beliefs he acknowledges to be stereotypical – the antithesis of valuing the individual. Further, he stated as he first started to relate the incident “I realized...well, I didn’t realize, it was just a bad lesson,” indicating that a lack of awareness, or disconsciousness, had created the uncomfortable situation in which he found himself. Highlighting these tensions and his disconsciousness in this situation helps to illustrate why Juan doesn’t fit neatly into one of the three previously identified profiles, and reinforces the fact that everyone’s journey is distinctly their own. While he may not fit any of the patterns described by the profiles, his apparently accidental movement toward understanding the complexity of human difference (and hopefully its value) demonstrated by his “bad” learning experience, provides an example of how even experiences we do not seek or actively choose have the potential to lead us to new understandings. Understandings of how we all navigate our various, intersecting cultural worlds; understandings that can move us toward a more critical understanding of culture and more critical multicultural education practices.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that educators who share particular types of life experiences around diversity; racial, ethnic, linguistic, and geographic, tend to construct

similar conceptions of culture. Educators who have experienced immersion in a community significantly different from their own, and were required to navigate that new cultural space from the perspective of an outsider, tend to hold similar conceptions of culture. Likewise, educators who have experienced discrimination and those who share more normative experiences also articulate similar conceptions of culture. I have also argued that educators who had immersive experiences in a cultural community outside of their own constructed conceptions of culture that more readily align to views of culture as dynamic and complex, while more equity oriented stances of multicultural education were common to educators who had personal experience with discrimination and microaggression. Educators who did not report a connection between personal experience and their understandings of culture, or those who had not been reflective about culture for a variety of reasons saw culture as invisible and just there. In summary, capturing how educators view the notion of culture has implications for their instructional practices; I will discuss these practices in the subsequent chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Educators' Practices in Multicultural Education**

Educators' practices in this study, both reported and demonstrated, could be described as traditional, curriculum oriented approaches to multicultural education. Of note, however, was that some educators also reported practices and designed classroom spaces that were compatible with some of the constructs of sociocultural theories of learning. This could indicate that instantiations of multicultural education may lack coherence and a critical focus. While one might expect the educators who articulated the most dynamic understandings of culture to employ, more often or more consistently, practices that aligned with their views, the data did not support this expectation. This lack of alignment warranted further examination. As stated previously, the data indicate that educators across each of the categories described in the previous chapter employed traditional multicultural education practices, as well as some practices that seem to correspond to sociocultural approaches to learning. Thus, there were no discernable, overarching patterns between educators' conceptions of culture and classroom practices. There were, however, at least two smaller scale patterns discernable in the data that were of note; the first related to the shared beliefs and practices of the dual language team at a particular school, and the second related to identifying structural barriers to practice. With respect to barriers to robust multicultural education practices, it must be noted here that teachers rarely talked about their practices without also talking about the barriers they encounter. These connections between practices and barriers are important as they offer both a way to better understand how educators come to the practices they employ, as well as how we might better design teacher preparation and professional development in the area of critical multicultural education.

This chapter is organized to reflect the way educators responded to questions regarding

their multicultural education practices, however it also reflects the analytic genesis of the chapter. I begin with a description of the multicultural education practices educators reported using, and note both the traditional practices as well as those that are congruent with more dynamic notions of learning and culture, such as those of sociocultural learning theories. I take this approach because during analysis of the data, practices with the potential to encourage and support a sociocultural approach emerged in the absence of critical multicultural practices. Initially I coded the practices data for traditional and critical practices only, based on the research literature in multicultural education. Employing these codes resulted in the discovery that, while none of the practices described were similar to those found in the literature on critical multicultural education, there were a few practices that were something 'more' than the traditional curricular approach. Further analysis of the data excerpts that fell outside of my original coding categories resulted in the creation of descriptive codes such as 'classroom culture' and 'identity focus.' Following this round of coding, a detailed examination of the excerpts coded in this way revealed a few responses that used descriptive language that corresponded well to particular foundational ideas in sociocultural theories such as communities of practice and identity. While it was specific language in only a few responses that cued this connection, when other excerpts that were coded the same way were revisited with these concepts in mind, the practices described seemed to offer a glimmer of potential, the potential to connect some of the practices educators already employ with robust learning theory and the conceptual tools it makes available. Additionally, there was one response that described school-level support for teachers who made love the foundation of their classroom instruction, which connected well to Valenzuela's idea of genuine caring. As an emotion, caring is hard to 'see,' however, there were instances where participants' interview responses suggested that caring was

what provided the motivation and rationale for teachers' choices with respect to multicultural education. A graphic representation of the distribution of practices by educator group is presented in Figure 7 and shows the number of educators in each group that reported using a particular type of multicultural education practices.

Figure 7. *Distribution of multicultural education practices across educator groups. Each check mark represents one educator who reported using the practice (e.g. all four Traditional Multicultural Educators reported using at least one of the three identified traditional practices)*

**Distribution of Practices across Educator Groups**

Group/N	Language Instruction	Traditional Practices (exposure, curriculum, & curriculum +)	Communities of practice and distributed cognition	Identity and Authentic Caring
Culturally Sensitive Educators N=4		✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Equity Oriented Educators N=3		✓✓		✓✓✓
Traditional Multicultural Educators N=4	✓	✓✓✓✓		
Outliers N=1		✓	✓	✓

Following the description of the practices educators reported using, I move to a discussion of the types of barriers that inhibit or prevent the use of practices educators view as effective, or the critical multicultural education practices described in the literature. Specifically, the types of barriers to best practices identified and described by educators in this chapter are generally those that fall outside of official, written school and district policies. For example, those that are related to a general programmatic decision made by a school leader (e.g. daily schedule or student classroom assignments) or holiday policies that prevent teachers from decorating or using songs that have a religious orientation. Participants *were* explicitly asked to

identify policies that support and constrain best practices in multicultural education; however, the barriers addressed in this chapter are those they described during their discussions of practice, and often they did not relate directly to formal, written policies. The description of their practices is divided into two sections: the first deals with those practices typically associated with multicultural education (what I will term traditional practices), and the second section describes practices that are more compatible with expansive and dynamic views of culture and learning, and/or the more critical multicultural education practices identified as effective by previous research. A discussion of barriers follows the sections just described and completes the chapter.

### **Traditional Practices**

The practices described by teachers in this study that can be described as traditional instantiations of multicultural education fell into three related but distinct categories. The first category includes those practices that simply expose students to 'other' cultures, religions, languages, etc. and focus on the importance of exposure in producing tolerance, respect, and the ability to succeed in the larger world for all students. A second traditional approach could be described as a curricular approach, where teachers depend on curricular materials and formal classroom lessons to address issues of difference and focus on the importance of building background knowledge, as well as including the heroes and holidays of other cultures in classroom content. Finally, the traditional curricular approach was expanded by some teachers beyond the focus on background knowledge, to include the idea that multicultural education practices are more than adding content to particular lessons. These teachers described practices that, although curricular in nature, involved ways of developing and delivering said curricula through a more integrated approach; one that attempts to incorporate multicultural perspectives into instruction throughout the day and across all content areas. Because this approach is



something more than the most basic curricular approaches, in this discussion I refer to it as a “curriculum plus” approach. Each of these three categories is explained more fully and the data are discussed in this section.

### **Exposure**

Many teachers described multicultural education practices that focused on providing exposure to ‘others’ and indicated that they felt this exposure was an important factor in helping students develop tolerance for, and understanding of, the differences they perceive, as well as for creating safe and respectful learning environments. One participant who best fit into the culturally sensitive educator group described in the previous chapter, and is originally from Puerto Rico, described a classroom interaction that demonstrated at least a part of her approach to multicultural education like this:

When we were talking about international day here, we talked about Puerto Rico. And I talked to them about, a little bit about the different culture, and a little bit about the environment - how it's different, and how they dress and how they, you know. So it helps the student, whoever is learning, it helps them understand more about the world around them. (Interview 1/13)

This quote, describing how she shared some of her personal background with her students, in addition to the one below illustrate the primary difference between the exposure narrative and the following one that describes practices focused on curriculum. The difference is that when these educators talk about introducing students to the wider world and providing exposure to other cultures, they do so by sharing personal stories; stories of their experiences in or with cultures outside the U.S., as well as their own cultural background when it differs significantly from those of their students. Similarly, another teacher demonstrated this approach when he stated that he

shares his travel experiences in the military with his students and shows them pictures of the places he's been, as an approach to multicultural education and then said:

I think that's the culture I wanna bring...it's about being global, it's about using your education to get somewhere else. I don't care what anyone says, any travel you do is gonna make you a better person, even if it's just down the block. 'Cause what you realize is, a lot of these kids don't get out of this community, and it's important for them to see that, it's important. (Interview 1/13)

This approach is more personal than one that depends solely on curricula for information and perspectives on people and places that fall outside of the students' experience. The teachers who described this approach stated that they employ this approach because they feel their personal experiences have contributed positively to their own lives and want to pass on a better understanding of the world to their students. In the case of the second teacher quoted, his reason for sharing includes a recognition that the students he teaches may not have the opportunity to have the same opportunity and he believes it is important for them to have a wider view of the world. This more personal approach also has the potential to be more engaging for the students. Although teachers in the study did not mention greater student engagement when they shared their stories about other places and people with different cultural practices, it was certainly the response I received as a teacher when I shared my stories of travel and living in other regions and countries.

It is important to note here that teachers who employ the exposure approach to multicultural education are generally doing so as an addition to what they already do as part of their curriculum, as opposed to it being a singular approach. Therefore, exposure might be best thought of as an enrichment strategy – one that adds to whatever multicultural education

curriculum or program is already in place at any given school. Even when educators' personal experiences were more limited (with respect to travel, etc.), educators across all orientations described practices that would be considered to be providing exposure. In addition, they all expressed the belief that exposure to difference and 'others' is necessary to students' development and ability to function in a more global society. Not all educators who shared a belief in the necessity of exposing students to different cultures, or employed exposure as a practice shared common understandings of culture or the role of culture in learning processes. Some stated a belief that culture and learning are inextricably linked and ubiquitous in schools, and others understood culture to be something separate that can be taught or used as a tool in the classroom. Because nearly all participants indicated that exposure is important and most employed the practice, it can be seen as a relatively common approach to multicultural education that teachers are generally comfortable employing in their classrooms.

### **Curriculum**

As has been discussed in detail, the field of multicultural education has its roots in curricular theory and ethnic studies. Partly due to this historically tight connection, curriculum is often what teachers discussed when asked about how they approach multicultural education and what practices they use to support nondominant students. They often described multicultural education as something that must be addressed *in addition to*, and separate from, their regular content instruction. Practices described by teachers whose primary approach to multicultural education was curricular often focused on things like building background knowledge or including content instruction or an activity that addressed a cultural holiday or hero. Educator responses that demonstrated a curricular approach to multicultural education, like those in the exposure category, came from all educator groups described in the previous chapter, however,

they were the *only* practices described by participants who fit the traditional multicultural educator profile.

One teacher who fit the culturally sensitive profile stated that her primary practice with respect to supporting students from nondominant backgrounds was to, “try to explain as many things as I can that are cultural landmarks...what I try to do is just pile up these types of things by building background knowledge constantly” (Interview 1/13). Her statement illustrates the common association of providing background knowledge with multicultural education practices. The majority of educators (78%) in the study who described curricular approaches to practice mentioned activities they used to address holidays such as *Día de los Muertos* and Thanksgiving, or a school-wide celebration of some kind that highlighted different countries or cultures. As in the following quote, two of the four traditional multicultural educators (both teachers) also specifically mentioned bringing lessons into the classroom about Martin Luther King Jr. when asked about their multicultural practices. One teacher stated:

One of the things I always try and reinforce is that I try not to push any culture really. I try and stick to the curriculum, which I know has its own bias anyway, but then I kinda try and bring in...like during Halloween time, I do a lot of *Día de los Muertos* stuff. I try and be relevant, you know, we do MLK things at that time, even though it doesn't fit into the curriculum. It's just kinda saying 'look, you know, we're learning about all this stuff and it's important that we know about each other just as much as, you know, the ancient civilizations stuff.' So I try and be a little, you know, respectful of everybody's cultural holidays and important things like that. I'd like, I mean, it'd be nice if we could just come in and have a class that was literally just 'okay where are you from? Okay, we'll learn about that. Where are you

guys from? Okay we'll learn about that.' So I try to at least bring in a little bit  
(Interview 1/13).

This teacher's reported practices demonstrate the common 'heroes and holidays' instantiation of multicultural education that three district administrators and other school level participants commented was still the prevalent model in the district. However, it also indicates that he makes an effort to be aware and include culturally relevant topics even when it does not fit into the curriculum he is required to teach, which is a positive practice that, because it falls outside of the approved curriculum, others teachers may be wary of implementing.

One administrator included in the traditional multicultural group shared concerns regarding the curriculum being used in the district, but did not suggest that anything beyond a curricular approach was necessary to improve multicultural education. She explained that she saw a lack of cultural proficiency within the curricular materials chosen during district adoption, and that many of the texts use what she would consider to be culturally questionable scenarios, such as 'Rosa and Miguel went home to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich' when bread may not be a staple food in some households. She then said "I mean, there are some attempts - at least they said Rosa and Miguel, you know, but..." and followed up this observation by explaining that she encourages her teachers to use their students' names when creating word problems "in order to make it more relevant for them" (Interview 10/12). In addition to these reflections on curriculum, this principal related that she insists her teachers have posters and room decorations that reflect their student population, stating that "every student should be able to see themselves in their classroom." While the curricular approach to multicultural education has forced some important and relatively stable content changes over the years and the importance of students seeing themselves reflected in their classrooms and texts should not be

minimized, it is widely argued that multicultural education has not achieved its goals because classroom practices rarely move beyond these curricular fixes to more critical approaches (Sleeter & Bernal, 2003; Nieto, 2004; Lee, 2009).

### **Curriculum Plus**

The set of educator responses I am categorizing as curriculum plus describe practices that are focused on curricula, but go beyond the typical, previously described responses. They articulate the belief that culture and multicultural education practices must be employed throughout the curricula and should be used in all content areas. This set of responses all came from the dual language teachers at one elementary school during a dual language team meeting in which I was allowed to ask a few questions of the entire team. This team reflected a shared perception of their school as special and consistently responsive to the culture of their students and the community. Several of these teachers stated that they had taught in other places and that they felt their ability to bring culture into the classroom had been restricted by the leadership in other districts and at other school sites. As one teacher put it,

It depends, too, on what region of your state you're in, you know, what they value as culture. And it's funny how in New Mexico we have a state, in our state constitution says that our children will be taught and valued in both language and cultures, and yet certain parts of the state are like, almost like Texas, you know, 'you cannot and you will not,' or Arizona too (Dual language team meeting, 1/13)

Teachers in other schools also indicated that district and school leadership influenced whether and how culture was addressed in classrooms. Given what these teachers shared regarding their experiences with varied levels of support at both the district and school levels, it is understandable that the use of critical multicultural education practices might not be evident in

any given district, school, or classroom, even among well trained teachers with a strong desire to use effective practices.

Teachers who reported using a curriculum plus approach talked extensively about what they considered to be best practices, from storytelling, the use of folk tales, or *cuentos populares*, with students at all grade levels, to holistic research units that emphasize the similarities in cultures. They provided examples of local stories with similar themes and practices that honor the dead to help their students make connections to the stories from other cultures that contained similar themes. They used the term 'intertwining' repeatedly to describe the ways in which they bring the concept of culture into every content area and talk about how "every culture" is studied at their school. One of the teachers described a recent conversation with her students that demonstrated their growing understanding of a key concept she teaches about culture and truth using the *cuentos* with which her students are familiar. She stated that her students engaged in the following conversation with her during a lesson using a *cuento*:

They said, 'so, Miss A, we can't say this isn't true, right? Because it belongs to a culture of people,' and I said 'exactly,' and they [her students] said 'and it's not right to tell people it's not true, because they believe it's true,' and I said 'exactly.' You cannot go anywhere and tell people that this is not true and it doesn't really happen, because they believe it to be true, it's part of their culture. And we don't have the right to do that. Just like, and I said 'you don't want anybody to come and tell you that *Llorona* is not true, 'cause you believe that it's true...because it makes a liar out of your grandmother and everybody that's told you that.' (Dual language team meeting, 1/9/13)

This reported classroom exchange on culture is instructive as it demonstrates that this teacher

places importance on helping students understand that some of the stories they are told by their families and communities are unique to their cultural heritage. At the same time she was able to help her students understand that other communities have similar stories that they believe to be true and, most importantly, that no one has the right to dismiss the beliefs and stories that are a part of another community's history and practices.

Despite the relatively narrow focus on curriculum, the teachers at this school spoke passionately about the importance of culture to their students' identities and successes in school, and have developed classroom activities and instructional units that they believe validate and value their students' cultures, while also teaching them to respect and learn from others' cultures. This team of teachers articulated a focus on their students as social and cultural beings that can be argued to demonstrate what Valenzuela termed authentic caring (1999). While the practices themselves were curricular in nature, just like the previously described practices, the dual language teachers and leadership at this school took up the notion of multicultural education differently than other schools in the study. None of the other schools' dual language teams demonstrated the same kind of commitment to valuing culture as something more than language practices in a similar way. However, it is also important to note that this attitude and commitment was specific to the dual language teachers; teachers from the same school but outside of the dual language program who were interviewed did not demonstrate the same attitudes and commitments.

### **Practices Compatible with Sociocultural Learning Theories**

In addition to the traditional practices described above, a few participants also described some multicultural education practices that were congruent with a sociocultural learning theory approach. During the coding process, some of the foundational constructs of sociocultural



theory, as well as Valenzuela's (1999) conception of authentic caring, offered a way to consider the potential of teachers' reported multicultural education practices to support or work in conjunction with a sociocultural learning theory approach. Three educators described intentionally using practices they believed would create a supportive community or positive classroom 'culture' (idioculture), an idea similar to, or consistent with, that of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Because communities of practice often employ the thoughtful distribution of expertise, these practices can also be seen as complementary to the construct of distributed cognition. While only one participant used language that suggested the construct of distributed cognition when describing a classroom practice, five of the eight focal teachers reported using a cooperative learning model that encourages students to 'think together' and share expertise. Although the teachers were not familiar with either of these theoretical concepts, they used language that reflected the more 'common sense' notions underlying these ideas when describing their practices. Finally, there were six educators who described practices that placed emphasis on genuinely caring for students and/or acknowledging and valuing their identities. While none of the educators employed the terms 'genuine caring' or 'identity' when describing their practices, they did refer to a focus on validating (and valuing) their students as individuals and the importance of creating relationships with their students. Again, these practices are seen as congruent because, at a basic level, they share sensibilities or characteristics with the theoretical constructs and, as such, hold the potential to connect to or work in support of more expansive notions of culture and learning.

### **Communities of Practice and Distributed Cognition**

Practices consistent with the idea of communities of practice were described by two of the focal teachers in the study, and observations confirmed the teachers' use of these practices.

The teachers who described these practices articulated disparate conceptions of culture and while one fit into the culturally sensitive profile the other was one of the teachers described as an educator with multiple conceptions in the previous chapter. In addition to the construct of communities of practice, one teacher described an established classroom practice and connected view of learning that were *suggestive* of the construct of distributed cognition. While most teachers group students for various activities throughout the school day, simply assigning students to work in groups was not identified as a practice that was consistent with the construct of communities of practice. In this discussion, only the two teachers who described their classroom practices and expectations as intentionally designed to distribute student expertise; create a community or classroom culture of cooperation, mutual support, and learning; or included students' home life, families and the larger community, as a part of their students' learning were considered to be using practices that had the potential to create a community of learners.

The first example is from a teacher who thought deeply about culture, and stated that she understands her classroom as a 'culture'<sup>10</sup> that intersects with the school culture and the culture of the larger community. In addition, this teacher was one of the few who did not reference exposure or curricular approaches at all when describing her practices. She stated "in here, I really ask that everybody help each other; it's my expectation that everybody succeed and that everybody has a part in making that happen" (Interview 1/12). In addition to the expectations she shares with her students, she also stated that she thinks carefully about how she pairs and groups students so that their various levels of language expertise are utilized as effectively as possible. She said:

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<sup>10</sup> Again, educators did not differentiate between culture and idioculture.

During Spanish, you know, you're watching our Spanish literacy, which students really struggle in Spanish, and what would be the appropriate partnerships for those students, I'm not going to have the blind leading the blind, right? I don't want my totally English dominant kids to be working together to read in Spanish, it doesn't make sense. (Interview 1/12)

This teacher also indicated that she felt she was successful in creating a supportive 'classroom culture' and shared a story about a student in her room who was a recent immigrant from Puerto Rico. She stated that his Spanish was very different from her own and the other students' in the class, and that he was timid and hesitant to participate in class. She stated:

Like I can't even hardly get him to speak in Spanish, you know, so when he speaks in Spanish, the whole class is like 'YAY, Santiago!' Like, we're all there for him, you know...it speaks to that mutual respect, that everybody in the classroom is supporting him...and everybody wants to see him succeed. Like, the class, even though they know he struggles they're here to help him. Which is pretty cool. (Interview 12/12)

In addition to consciously working to create a positive community or 'culture' in her own classroom, this teacher made multiple observations about the lack of access to and support from the more experienced educators in the professional school community. Throughout her interviews, this teacher demonstrated a basic understanding of the idea of communities of practice, without using the terminology or having direct exposure to the theoretical construct. In other words, this teacher seemed to share the kind of sensibilities you would find in a community of practice.

The second teacher to report the use of classroom practices consistent with the construct

of communities of practice is the teacher highlighted as an example of an educator with multiple conceptions in the previous chapter. This teacher was also the only participant in the study who reported a classroom practice and connected view of learning that was *suggestive* of the construct of distributed cognition. This teacher stated that when he recognized the importance of acknowledging and incorporating each person's uniqueness, he incorporated a new practice into his class. He stated:

That's why I go through the news in the morning...if you get what's on your heart off your heart, you're ready to work. 'Cause everybody usually has something to say, not all the time, but sometimes when you have something to say, you want to get it off your heart. [So] let's talk about it, let's get the news out, and then let's get focused, and that way we get that conversation done as a group...and make sure that they feel important (Interview 1/13).

Here the teacher discusses a daily practice that he facilitates with the intent to create a space or community that is supportive of all of his students as learners; I was also able to witness this practice during a classroom observation. In addition, this teacher shared that his students are often surprised at the beginning of the year that he has tables rather than desks in his classroom and he stated that “you don't want to put people in a corner, you need to collaborate and work together and that's what we always do either as a class or as a table” (Interview 1/18/13).

The same teacher then made an additional comment about why he chooses to use tables rather than desks, he stated “why would you want to work as an individual when you have four supercomputers around you? That's why you notice everyone is facing each other, you have to create that kind of community and get them talking – on topic talking” (Interview 1/13). Despite the fact that the teacher is unfamiliar with the formal theoretical constructs I am using as an

analytic tool, the language he used was suggestive of the idea of distributed cognition. That he encouraged the practice of students, or 'supercomputers,' working together on all classroom tasks calls to mind the idea of thinking together (like networked computers), or cognition and expertise that are distributed and shared among the students at the table. While I am not suggesting that this teacher is making connections or links to learning theory constructs, as there is no way to know one way or the other, I am simply pointing out that his expressed notions of learning and the classroom practices he has implemented as a result of those notions, are compatible with these theoretical constructs.

The two teachers highlighted here as examples of how some practices, though chosen and implemented idiosyncratically, are consistent with the ideas of communities of practice and distributed cognition. Because these two teachers articulated divergent notions of culture and were not associated with the same profile in the previous chapter, they also provide an illustration of how those profiles, constructed in the previous chapter, do not necessarily work as accurate predictors of the practices educators are likely to employ. In other words, if one were to predict that teachers with immersive experiences who fit into the culturally sensitive educator group were more likely to employ multicultural education practices consistent with sociocultural approaches, the data would not support the hypothesis.

### **Identity**

The emphasis on identity is central to a critical multicultural educational approach. From a sociocultural view learning is influenced by who the learner perceives herself to be (Nasir, 2008; Wortham, 2004) and from a situated perspective learning involves the construction of identities (Lave & Wenger, 1991 p. 53). The learner's perceptions are related to her race, ethnicity, culture, ability, gender, intelligence, worthiness, and all of the other ways she sees and

defines herself, as well as how she chooses to interact within and across the various cultural communities of which she is a member. The construct of identity helps us to see the interaction between the self and cultural communities; it helps make visible the fact that how others see us, and how they position us in interaction, is incorporated into our understanding of self and our place within a cultural community (including school). Being aware of this interaction is especially important for educators, because who students believe themselves to be as learners (e.g., competent, capable, lazy, inept, brilliant, etc.) is constructed in interaction with others, and prominently included in these 'others' are teachers. Teachers are the recognized authorities on learning and learners in the officially designated space for learning, the classroom, and therefore, have a great deal of influence on how the learner perceives herself, her ability to learn, and her potential success and contribution to the world. Sociocultural learning theories forefront the social and cultural as central to understanding identity as a co-construction, involving both the individual and those she interacts with in her social and cultural worlds and as an important part of understanding learning.

Educators in this study did not report practices that were specifically designed to engage with the concept of identity, use the term identity, or explicitly discuss its importance to learning in the way I have. However, participants did report multicultural education practices that served to acknowledge and value their students' (or in the case of school and district administrators, their co-workers or peers) identities and personal experiences. Educators who reported such practices were generally those who fit the culturally sensitive and equity oriented profiles, and there were examples of both administrator and teacher practices that acknowledged and supported identity, and both are discussed below. Practices consistent with the idea of identity and sociocultural learning theory approaches are of particular interest to this study because

identity research offers insights into how nondominant students are affected by dominant social and cultural influences, both in and out of school. As the primary goal of multicultural education is to work toward equity for nondominant students, these insights are inherently valuable to designing and implementing appropriate and effective programs and policies.

A district level administrator, who fit the equity oriented profile and worked within the department that addressed issues of language and culture in the district, described the practices she uses when she goes into schools to help problem solve or facilitate a difficult meeting or conversation around issues of multiculturalism or race. She stated that everything is a process so she starts at the beginning. She continued:

One of the things I do, even though it takes a lot of time, is that everyone has to tell their story. A lot of times when you do things from a book and they don't really understand the field [of multicultural education]; *that it's about the conversation* – that's how you learn about people, that's how they learn about themselves.

Teachers are very isolated and don't have time to interact (Interview 10/12).

The practice she described is designed to create awareness within a working group of each member's unique story; it allows each member the opportunity to share experiences that have shaped their identities, or who they are. Her statement indicates that she employs this practice because she believes that conversation and communication is the primary way people learn about others *and* themselves. Several times during her interview, this educator talked about the importance of knowing yourself when you deal with issues of race and multiculturalism as well as the difficulties students face when they don't know who they are. Similar to educators who employed practices that corresponded to the idea of communities of practice, although she did not use the term identity and did not indicate any familiarity with learning theories, she

articulated a stance with respect to multicultural education that corresponds to the idea of identity in sociocultural approaches to learning. She indicated her belief that students struggle when they “don't know who they are” (Interview 10/12) and stated that when she works with people, particularly around issues of difference, not only does she need to know herself but allowing others to tell their story is important to the learning process. Another teacher who also fit the equity oriented profile conveyed a related thought when talking about the difficulty in increasing teachers' cultural proficiency. She stated “if you are talking to staff you can present information but you can't shift thinking without study groups or in depth *really personal sharing*” (Interview 12/12). This teacher's statement demonstrates that she shares the belief that personal sharing is necessary when engaging in discussions of difference.

The second teacher mentioned above also discussed a practice she uses with her students that allows them to explore and share their cultural identities in the context of the classroom, but stated that she doesn't get to do this with all of her students due to the structure of the school day. She stated that she tries to “bring in the students' funds of knowledge” (Interview. 12/12), indicating she has had some exposure to research based on sociocultural theories of learning (Moll, 1993), and then stated that she has her students create an ABC culture book in which:

The students went through the ABCs and picked out a word representing the letter and they could use anything from their family or food or tradition, and that was very individualized. So a kid from Vietnam could include things that he couldn't always talk about. So I think that is good, to let the kids have their own voice, so, assignments that are open for the kid to put in their own background into it.  
(Interview 12/12)

This assignment, while relatively basic, encourages students to think about who they are and



what has shaped their identities up to that point; it also allows them to share those influences with others – creating an entry point for the development of a positive student-teacher relationship. It is important to note that, while this could be described as a curricular practice if it were associated with a content standard, the teacher was clear that this assignment is not connected to her curriculum in any way, and that she is only able to use it during a part of the day focused on advising, not instruction.

There were also teachers who brought up ideas related to identity and their practices in slightly different ways. A kindergarten dual language teacher, while explaining her instructional practices talked extensively about students whose limited academic success creates a negative learner identity. She stated:

A lot of kids...don't feel, especially as they get older, that they're good at anything, or that since they're not doing good in this particular [academic] box, where everyone says 'oh you have to succeed here to be successful out here' and they're not in that box and they feel that they've failed, that they're not productive, they don't know anything, that 'I'm not good at anything'" (Interview 1/13).

In stating her belief that a lack of academic success can have a profound influence on a student's learner identity, she was also suggesting that this negative learner identity can become about more than learning and impact self-worth more globally. The teacher then explains her approach to practice and introduces the idea of language as an important identity marker. She said,

So in kindergarten, at this age, it's all about building confidence - especially for the kids who are learning Spanish as a new language. Once they feel the confidence, you see their understanding, and they know what they need to do. Unfortunately as they get older they often lose that confidence (Interview 1/13).

This quote demonstrates her belief in the important role that language proficiency plays in students' identity construction and also suggests that this can shift over time and potentially go from being an element of identity that the student feels positively about to one that engenders negative conceptions of self. The student-teacher relationship and educators' influences on students' negative or positive feelings regarding racial identity are of great importance as well. Another participant in the study discussed the effects of coming from mixed racial heritage for the students she has worked with over the years. She stated,

I work a lot with multi-ethnic kids, especially kids who um...don't understand who they are, you know, and they have some major, major issues...when kids are part African American and white, or Spanish and African American...but they're being raised by a white woman or a Hispanic woman...they don't have the connections they should with who they are. But they've been raised in white culture...the issues that kids that are multicultural face...especially those that have light skin and good hair...they're not accepted by white society and they're not accepted by black society (Interview 10/12).

These examples of teachers who demonstrate awareness of identity, those who know who their students are as whole people, while perhaps not fully aligned with sociocultural learning theories, indicate that some teachers are implementing practices that are congruent to them. The notion that we all have multiple identities, that we are shaped by the language(s) we speak, our racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage, our gender expression and sexual orientation, and a multitude of experiences and interactions is key to truly *seeing* students' lives beyond the classroom and demonstrating the kind of authentic caring Valenzuela (1999) argues is essential to students from nondominant, marginalized backgrounds. Recognizing that identities are co-

constructed in relationship and interaction with others helps us see how, as educators, we often wield more influence than we realize - and that to be effective we must be conscious of how we are positioning and defining students. The fact that all identities are constructed within and through culture and cultural practices makes understanding the construct of identity particularly integral to effective, critical multicultural education practices. The practices discussed next are those that seemed to demonstrate Valenzuela's (1999) conception of authentic caring, which a more nuanced understanding of students' identities may help create.

### **Authentic Caring**

While authentic caring is not a construct of sociocultural learning theories and could, arguably, be presented as a relatively natural result of deeply understanding the three constructs highlighted in this study, it is also something that can exist with no exposure to sociocultural theories of learning whatsoever. It is an attitude and approach to classroom interaction that puts students first and treats each student as a whole person, not just as a learner of prescribed content – an outcome or product to be evaluated. Although it might seem like an attitude of caring would be easily identified in teachers' practices, caring is personal and will therefore look different in each individual. Therefore, defining caring with externalized behaviors is a difficult task. Despite the difficulty, there were some instances of reported and observed practices and descriptions of attitudes that were suggestive of the idea of authentic caring. Educators from all profiles demonstrate authentic caring for their students but, as it is intangible, it can be difficult to demonstrate empirically. In addition, other than general statements like "I love the kids," most teachers do not point to pedagogical practices, even in multicultural education, as intentionally chosen to demonstrate caring. However, at least four of the eight focal teachers either reported or demonstrated non-pedagogical practices that I would argue demonstrated genuine caring,

including spending evenings sewing costumes, prioritizing the teacher-student relationship, and making sure students had food when they were hungry. All of the focal participants in this study seemed to genuinely care about their students and all twelve of them conveyed real passion when talking about education and learning.

The first interview response I want to highlight comes from a teacher who fits the culturally sensitive profile, is struggling with district and school policies, and is having difficulty adjusting to a new school, a new dual language team, and a qualitatively different student population. She has taught in several different places but is having adjustment issues in her newest situation, at least in part, due to what she feels was a lack of communication regarding expectations. This context is important because she clearly isn't enjoying teaching in the same way she used to but reported a basic approach, or practice, that demonstrates authentic caring despite personal dissatisfaction with her present circumstances. She stated

I think I used to be much more motivated, you know, but then, I mean even - I feel like in the other school I had pretty much free reign over whatever I did, you know, like I kind of did create my own curriculum until they bought one last year for the Spanish which was a disaster, but before that...what I always used to do was kind of create curriculum with the students, you know, like go off what they were interested in and then just try to go deeper into that...I try to work with the situation, work with what they have, what they're interested in, you know, try to...try to create a *relationship* with them, and I just sort of ignore everything else. (Interview 1/13)

While she was not particularly happy in her job during the time of the interview, she continued to prioritize her relationships with students. Throughout her interviews and observations, it was clear that she has high expectations of her students and that one of the difficulties she is having

this year is that the student population in the dual language program at this school is less proficient in Spanish than the population at her previous school, so it is more difficult to keep students engaged and in the target language. She also admitted to struggling with policy issues and other team members, but she continued to demonstrate caring in the classroom despite these difficulties, by engaging students on a personal level.

Another participant described the 'culture' of her entire school in a way that indicated authentic caring for students is prioritized by the school's administration. King Elementary, as was described previously, is the only 'borderless' school in the district and, as such, requires parents to seek out and enroll their children in a school other than the one they are zoned to if they wish their children to attend. Teachers at this school often described high levels of parent involvement and adequate funding, and one teacher indicated that half of the school's kindergarteners were reading midway through the year. While these factors may not always influence teachers' caring attitudes toward their students, it is important to note that the teachers at this school feel adequately supported by both their students' parents and their principal, and this likely makes their day-to-day experience as teachers more satisfying. The teacher who described the school culture made the following statement:

The way these teachers treat their students, they treat them...they make them feel so special. They really give them a strong sense of who they are. That part we do really well I think. And some people [teachers] just already had that automatically in them, and they feel affirmed in having that emphasis in that, kind of, love being the focus of their classroom (Interview 12/18).

As I stated previously, it was unusual to hear teachers refer to practices in a way that demonstrated authentic caring and this teacher is stating that the teachers who come into the

classroom with love 'automatically in them' felt affirmed in making love the focus of their classrooms. This is a strong statement about the importance placed on caring by this particular school that was not evident in the interviews conducted at other participating schools.

Valenzuela's (1999) argument regarding the importance of authentic caring in no way suggested that all it would take for all students to achieve academic success is for them to feel genuinely cared for by their teachers. She argued strongly that subtractive policies, those that devalued students' linguistic and cultural practices, contributed to students' feeling uncared for, and to teachers' difficulty, in providing a caring learning environment. While practices that demonstrate authentic caring are clearly important, studies have also demonstrated that equitable, fluid student-teacher relationships that extend beyond the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009), approaching learning and knowledge production from a critical standpoint that examines the role of power and privilege (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004), and creating and maintaining a community of collaborative learners (Ladson-Billings, 2009) have all proven effective with students from traditionally marginalized groups. Recognizing that these practices may be difficult to implement, it was not surprising to see in the data that, as teachers talked about their practices in multicultural education, they naturally talked about the barriers they encountered that made implementation of what they believed to be best practices difficult. The final section of this chapter describes both personal and structural barriers to more critical multicultural education practices identified by the teachers, sometimes without conscious recognition.

### **Barriers to Robust Multicultural Practices**

In identifying and describing barriers to practice, teachers revealed both personal barriers, which were often not consciously perceived as barriers, such as fear and disengagement; barriers that can be either personal or structural, such as the denial or lack of recognition that

multicultural education practices are needed and attachment to ineffective practices; and finally, barriers that are strictly structural in nature, such as school level program designs. Each of these barrier types is described and then demonstrated using interview data in the following sections. In addition, any patterns that were found with respect to the profiles constructed in chapter four or other relevant educator characteristics (such as number of years teaching, etc.) will also be discussed. The three sections that follow focus on the barriers of fear and disengagement, the perception that these practices are not needed and teachers' attachment to ineffective practices, and the truly structural barriers created by the district and schools.

### **Personal Barriers**

In their interview responses, teachers described situations where they either chose to avoid contentious topics altogether, or found themselves in uncomfortable circumstances that they felt required a cautious, non-critical approach. Some responses suggested a fear of not following "unwritten" policies and the repercussions it might cause, and some indicated either a fear of not being adequately prepared, or a lack of confidence in their ability to mediate critical discussions of difficult topics. Several teachers identified religion as the one 'taboo' subject they felt compelled to avoid or handle with extreme care, while others mentioned LGBTQ and racial issues as problematic classroom topics. It is important to reiterate here that the only participants who mentioned race explicitly were those who shared personal experiences of racially-based discrimination and microaggressions during their interviews. In all other interviews, race was absent, or stumbled over, unless I asked a question that directly addressed the issue. For example, one teacher was talking about bullying being a problem at her current school and when I asked what kinds of things kids were bullying each other about she answered "how can I say this without sounding...socio-economic maybe? I think that might be..." (Interview 11/12), so I

asked directly if the students ever used racial epithets and she answered “yes, quite a bit actually.” This exchange, as well as several others, indicated that, even when race was explicitly an issue, educators actively avoided bringing race into the discussion unless they fit the equity oriented educator profile and had shared personal experiences of racial discrimination that influenced their views on multicultural education and/or their classroom practices with nondominant students.

Statements that indicated fear based decisions with respect to cultural topics came from all types of teachers but were more prevalent in teachers who were in their first five years of teaching. One of these responses came from a teacher who stated that she was trying to follow an unwritten policy regarding holiday dos and don'ts to avoid getting in trouble, despite the fact that she disagreed with it. The teacher was in her first year at her current school and related a story about what she had been told regarding the upcoming holidays,

we can't put a christmas tree, that's a no no. Um no carols or anything that has to do with Jesus or Christianity or any, none of that. Probably only like winter is cute, songs about winter and about, uh...the winter (laughs), and snowballs and stuff like that...but none of the rest is okay. And the reason they told us that was because they don't want to exclude any students from...which I totally understand, but I um, I don't know if this, uh lack - because I really see it as a lack of cultural enrichment  
(Interview 11/12)

This same teacher later stated that she feels the non-discrimination policy is often misunderstood to mean “don't refer to the student that comes from a minority” (Interview. 1/13). She had some difficulty finding the words she wanted to explain what she meant further so I asked a clarifying question and she was able to articulate that she believes the non-discrimination policy



discourages any conversation about difference in the classroom “because if you point difference out, then you could be in the discrimination field. And so I think, I think that, my experience with policy in the classroom is that - no, don't get into that territory, because you can get in trouble” (Interview 1/13).

In the same vein, another early career teacher expressed that when having conversations regarding cultural differences that can be uncomfortable (he used the example of discussing Native American tribes that are poly-theistic as a subject that may create discomfort) he feels that he has to be “very careful” and that “it's about getting to know the class and the way they interact with each other and knowing which classes will be able to dig in and handle the discussion and which won't and backing off if things aren't going well” (Interview 1/13). After he stated that he generally sticks to the curriculum to avoid the appearance of bias, he acknowledged that the curriculum itself contains biases so I asked if he ever used those curricular biases to engage his students in a critical discussion. His response was that he's “tried on occasion” and when he taught older students it “made an impact” but at his current grade level he finds it difficult. He stated,

In some classes that works, but most of the time it's really difficult to have a discussion with them about things like that - they just can't interpret it and they either take it wrong or they just don't listen at all, so I've tried to go there but it's really hard to do most of the time. They're so overwhelmed by everything going on around them. Anyway, I try to get into that but it's difficult. (Interview 1/13)

This teacher likely does not categorize this difficulty (and possibly the resulting discomfort) as ‘fear,’ and he does not share the previous teacher's fear getting “in trouble.” Taking into consideration this teacher's quiet demeanor and statements throughout his interview regarding

being a new teacher, his tendency to 'back-off' when things aren't going well, and his hesitancy to engage his younger (by one grade level) students in discussion about bias in the curriculum, it seems reasonable to suggest that he lacks confidence in his ability to adequately navigate the conversation. While lack of confidence may not equate to fear, it is certainly a related experience when in a leadership role, like that of a classroom teacher. It is also possible that if a lack of confidence exists, the discomfort he feels may be compounded by the fact that this teacher is white and the vast majority of his students are not.

The final situation I want to present is with the teacher who did not present as critically engaged in issues relating to culture and was considered an educator with multiple conceptions in the previous chapter. Toward the end of his final interview, this teacher stated that if policies were different he would not be so afraid of religion and then he said:

Everyone is so afraid to talk about it – if it's biased, if you're only teaching one perspective, I think that's where we lose it. If you're only going to do Christian that doesn't make sense. There are so many other different types of beliefs even within the United States - look at all the different Native American tribes...At least listen to every aspect, don't be so biased just because you might not like it or because you might not think it's right – just teach them, let them make up their own mind (Interview 1/13).

He continued to elaborate on that sentiment and relayed a story that indicated his military service had led him to avoid a school level practice in his classroom regarding the pledge of allegiance. Saying the pledge daily is generally a classroom practice based on school or district level policy, and at his school it is recited over the PA system, so he is clearly making a decision not to implement a policy made at either the school or district level. He stated that

One thing we don't do in here is that I don't make them stand up and pledge to the flag – unless there's a teacher or Mrs. \_\_\_\_ (the principal) or somebody's in here - because they get mad if I don't – but I'm not gonna make my kids pledge to a country that they don't fully understand yet. This isn't Nazis, I'm not forming little Americans, I'm forming people who will make up their own minds ... but I'm not gonna have them stand and do a pledge every morning – I served in the military, I understand what giving your time and giving part of your life means and I'm not gonna take it away from kids. (Interview 1/13)

The statement that he only makes his students say the pledge if another teacher or the principal is in the room “because they get mad if I don't,” doesn't necessarily indicate anything other than avoidance of conflict, and his decision to concede and say the pledge when others are present is probably not fear driven. His concession does demonstrate, however, that teachers may selectively implement policy based on personal convictions, but also sometimes make decisions based on the desire to avoid ‘rocking the boat’ and getting into trouble. My suggestion regarding this scenario is that his thoughts regarding the teaching of religion, and his rationale for not making the students do the pledge, both provide a ‘way in’ to useful, critical conversations but he chooses not to use them as such. The lack of critical engagement demonstrated by this teacher in other parts of the interview suggests he is not necessarily avoiding these conversations out of fear or discomfort, but that he simply doesn't see them as an opening to a useful academic exercise.

### **Personal or Structural Barriers**

Another type of barrier to robust practices demonstrated by a few participants across profiles is the perception that multicultural education and practices that support non-dominant

students are not necessary. This can be a strictly personal barrier if it prevents an individual teacher from implementing critical practices, or a structural one if the perception is held by a school leader and results in school level rejection of, or resistance to, these practices. At least one teacher in the culturally sensitive group seemed to see multicultural education and practices that support nondominant students as different things; while she stated clearly her support for multicultural education, and her belief that its purpose is to create equity, when asked what practices she uses to support non-dominant students her response was:

There's not a whole lot of that here. I mean students are at this school because families chose to send them here so there is already something going on at home where they're like being proactive and they're looking for alternatives and they chose this school for a reason...So in this classroom most of my students have been socialized in a similar kind of American public school environment (Interview 1/13).

Despite this teacher's critical engagement and the relatively complex conceptions of culture she articulated in other parts of the interview, this statement seems to indicate a narrow, nationalistic view of culture – at least with respect to schools. While she referred to the 'culture' of her classroom and school throughout both interviews and stated that "we all have different ways of speaking and listening in the home that we bring to school with us" (Interview 1/13), in the initial quote she seems to be stating that as long as one has been socialized in an American public school, there is no need to consider or incorporate students' cultural practices when they originate at home or in the community. This seems to be a relatively large contradiction, but one that may prove instructive. Because this teacher taught outside the U.S. in a Spanish speaking country and experienced the differences in the cultural practices of schools first hand, she may be

minimizing the effects that differences in cultural practices learned and used *outside* of school can have on students *in* school if their only school experiences have been culturally equivalent.

Another example of the perception that multicultural practices are not necessary comes from the same teacher that expressed views about religion and the pledge of allegiance in the previous section. When asked what practices he uses to support students from nondominant backgrounds, his response was, "I really haven't experienced a student **not** from, what I would consider to be, the dominant culture" (Interview 1/13). This same quote was used in the previous chapter to demonstrate that this teacher's interview responses suggested a view of American culture that was assimilationist, or monoculturalist in nature; however, with respect to pedagogical practices, it indicates a different view from the just-discussed teacher. While the first teacher seemed to be focused on her students' socialization in the culture of American public schools as her rationale, Juan's statement suggests a more generalized notion that none of the students he's worked with experience the world through a nondominant identity. To clarify this I asked about the nondominant students he had described from his second year teaching who were being raised by same gender parents and his response was,

Actually, in that circumstance I had three or four gay parents, and some gay grandparents, in that same class. So in that particular class, it was really odd, I had never experienced it before. And I'm not sure if it was just that school, but there just seemed to be a lot of really unorthodox families, alternative style families, so at that school the context was really different, so I mean even in that one class I had more than one family (Interview 1/13).

With this answer, he seemed to be suggesting that the students, due to the number of LGBT parents and grandparents in the community, were still entirely 'of' the dominant culture and were

not experiencing life from within a nondominant community. What makes this statement seem somewhat contradictory, however, is his acknowledgement that the “it was really odd” and that he had not experienced that situation before – indicating clearly that he did not view it as a common or ‘dominant’ way to experience the world.

A less extreme form of this type of barrier is one that would more accurately be called “minimization of need” rather than a perception that the need simply doesn’t exist. One teacher from the culturally sensitive group explained her perspective this way

What I’ve learned over time is that if you have a teacher in the classroom who understands how children learn and, um, can see all this other stuff that’s coming at them and just sort of keep that at arms-length and go ‘what I need to do is make sure this child is learning, you know, and making progress, you know, based on where they are now, what I have, and using the curriculum kind of as a resource,’ um you’re going to be fine (Interview, 1/13)

While not ignoring that there might be a need, she seems to be suggesting that as long as teachers are focused on student learning and are adequately filtering out all the ‘other stuff that’s coming at them’ everything will be fine. While it could be argued that her statement was not just possible but reasonable, it definitely assumes that the teacher being focused on student learning is all that is needed for students to succeed. Another statement from later in the interview displays this same ‘if the teacher is good, it will all work out’ kind of mentality. After talking about the fact that schools and the new common core standards do not “make space” for cultural expression, she said “I’m hoping that when teachers get comfortable [with the common core] that they make the space. Using whatever the kids are talking about as a bridge into the second language” (Interview 12/12). The primary issue here is that rather than proactively thinking about what the

school might do, as a community, to better support cultural expression, she is counting on the teacher to “make space,” after acknowledging that in order to do so, she has to ignore a great many things. She also limits the role of the ‘space’ for cultural expression to creating “a bridge to into the second language” – which is not atypical and could potentially be related to the way language and culture are addressed at both the state and district level.

The other barrier in this category, which can also be personal or structural, is attachment to ineffective practices. Several teachers demonstrated an attachment to both practices that have been demonstrated by research to be ineffective, as well as antiquated “ways of being” in a classroom. Many teachers talked a great deal about ability grouping and the difficulty of dealing with large class sizes when students’ levels of performance vary widely. One teacher described the reading program at another school in the district and the school-wide policy they are using this way

I think often of this friend of mine that works at [school name] where they do small reading groups. They do guided reading for reading; for their literacy block every day and they hire all these literacy coaches. And so all the students, every day, get divided into ability leveled groups to do reading, how awesome is that? (Interview 1/13)

The idea of grouping students with similar abilities or achievement levels, even among teachers like this who use and value heterogeneous grouping practices, never seems to completely leave the conversation. The fact that this particular teacher called a practice she doesn’t use, and recognizes (based on other interview responses) to be ineffectual, ‘awesome’ demonstrates that teachers (as well as schools and larger systems such as districts) become attached to particular ways of doing things and can have a difficult time letting go of these practices – even after they

are proven ineffective. To reinforce this idea, the same teacher stated that she feels it is her “responsibility to teach students how to be better students instead of just teaching them the stuff of fifth grade” (Interview 1/13), following this statement she expounded on what she meant by teaching them to be better students and says she’s “preparing them to go into more structured environments where they will be asked to sit in a desk, and sit up straight, and keep [their] eyes on the front of the room” (Interview 1/13). Although most classrooms definitely still hold to these standards, our “ways of being” in classrooms are beginning to broaden and challenge the idea that more and better learning happen in these regimented settings. Teachers who are particularly attached to standardized classroom practices may be slow to recognize that these practices can also be barriers to positive change.

### **School and District Structural Barriers**

The final barriers to aligned practices identified in the data can be described as school and district structures. One interesting pattern with respect to this category is that the only participants who identified these structural barriers were those who fit into the culturally sensitive and equity oriented profiles. One principal who fit the traditional multicultural profile stated that “schools are systems that know how to do things one way, and nothing ever propels them to move beyond” (10/12). This statement implies there are structural barriers within schools, but this principal did not identify what any of them might be or indicate how they interfere with multicultural education practices. At one school, a teacher described the dual language program design at her grade level as a barrier to best practices. The design of the dual language program at her school results in two dual language classrooms at her grade level, each with a mix of native Spanish and native English speakers. Rather than keeping a mixed group, the teacher explained that all of her native English speakers go to the other classroom for the first



block of instruction (and the other teacher's native Spanish speakers come to her) and at mid-day, they switch. She stated that

After the first block, we switch, so she sends me the English speakers so I can teach them Spanish. But I don't teach - since I don't have Spanish support here with the students, I just teach songs and 'la rana, look at la rana,' you know, very very basic stuff. (Interview 11/12)

She elaborated that the program design of placing all native English speakers in one group and all native Spanish speakers in the other not only results in very lopsided numbers (her afternoon group with all L1 English speakers is much larger than her morning group) but also leaves her without any Spanish speaking peers to model for the native English speakers. An interesting note about this situation is that the principal mentioned in her interview a native Spanish speaker teaching in the program that was having difficulty staying in the target language. What is interesting is that the principal didn't seem to recognize that the reason the teacher had difficulty staying in Spanish was that for half of every day she has a room full of students who don't understand her when she speaks Spanish, and no Spanish speaking peers to help mediate their learning.

Perhaps the most common barrier described by educators is time, and for teachers with less than five years of experience lack of clear information was also a barrier. These relatively universal barriers are well understood but one teacher described how these issues are particularly pertinent for her with respect to best practices in multicultural education.

You have to find a way to teach what you have to teach, but if you can find a way to draw on what kids come with then they're gonna connect to it better, and you're gonna relate to them better, and they're going to relate to each other better because

they're in a space where they can express themselves. Am I good at doing that? I don't know. It's in the back of my mind as something I want to do. I think sometimes I get caught up in what I *have* to be doing and I'm not always in that place where I can be thinking about these things that I want to think about and be doing...[there are] so many things to balance that I don't know that I do it well (Interview 1/13).

What is particularly telling about this quote is that this teacher isn't thinking about multicultural education as something she has to add to the curriculum; she is talking about finding a way to draw on the resources students bring to the classroom, yet it still feels like something that 'crowds' the cognitive attention she is attempting to focus on her students and the things she "has" to do. She recognized and articulated the benefits of a critical multicultural approach and clearly has the desire to implement these practices, but time continues to feel like an insurmountable barrier to this teacher.

A third structural barrier described was related to pull-out programs such as gifted education and the negative effects they can have on teachers' attempts to build a community of practice. From the teachers' perspective, when students are in and out of the room several times a week and are given messages that they are special, they become less engaged in their classrooms and are often more resistant to being members of the classroom community. In addition to time outside the classroom, teachers describe push-back from gifted teachers when they expect their gifted students to work *with* non-gifted students. The gifted teachers see this as taking advantage and using students as "everybody's little tutor" when, in actuality, it is a classroom level expectation that ALL students work together and help each other when they can. For one teacher there is another structural issue with the gifted program at her school – despite the fact the whole

school uses the dual language model, the gifted teacher does not speak Spanish. The teacher describes the effects of this on her three gifted students who are native Spanish speakers like this: “not only are they gone almost the equivalent of an entire day every week, but when they come back they don't really want to speak Spanish. Even in Spanish time, I have a hard time getting my Spanish dominant kids to speak Spanish” (Interview 12/12). The problem that this teacher brings up is related to the final barrier that can be seen as a school (or even a district or state policy) structure – that of the inherent privileging of English.

All of the dual language schools dealt with this issue to some degree, but King Elementary, where the whole school was dual language, seemed to struggle with it the most. Administrators interviewed for this study indicated repeatedly that dual language and bilingual programs across the district often struggle to find and hire teachers whose Spanish skills are strong enough to allow them to teach effectively in Spanish, but because King is trying to build a model that puts English and Spanish on equal footing the fact that several of their ‘specials’ teachers don't speak Spanish is particularly frustrating for some. In addition, educators identified testing policies as a contributing factor in the privileging of English. This inherent privileging of English makes it difficult, if not impossible, for dual language programs to create truly bilingual and biliterate students because the only high stakes test(s) they take are in English. As one teacher put it:

It's not always in agreement with the vision of the school because so much of it, especially in the later grades, it's all about 'well they're gonna test in English, so we're gonna give them their interventions in English.' You know, which on some level I understand because it is high-stakes for the kids, but at the same time we're 'demoting' Spanish, every time we do that. (Interview 12/12)

This devaluing of Spanish occurs despite these programs' best efforts to put Spanish on equal footing because when students are only tested in English (for high stakes) it is impossible to ignore the inherent message that English is the language that matters. This is also the message the gifted students are receiving when their only gifted instruction is in English. They are receiving an inherent message that English is the language of serious academics, making the mission of any dual language program more difficult to fulfill.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I attempted to demonstrate that educators' practices do not necessarily align to their conceptions of culture, and that most teachers employ traditional multicultural education practices. I also attempted to demonstrate that there are teachers who are idiosyncratically employing practices that share characteristics with particular constructs of sociocultural learning theories. The data clearly demonstrated that the only practices reported by educators in the traditional multicultural educators group were traditional, curricular practices; whereas educators in the culturally sensitive and equity oriented groups, as well as the teacher who did not fit the cultural conception pattern, reported practices that were consistent in some way with sociocultural learning theory and its constructs. Finally, educators who are equity oriented tended to report practices that most closely related to the sociocultural construct of identity and the idea of recognizing and valuing students for who they are. The discussion of barriers to robust practices in this chapter demonstrated that educators who are engaged with issues of equity and/or have more complex and dynamic views of culture are more likely to identify structural barriers to practices and that there are often personal influences on educators' practices that are often less visible or are not recognized as barriers to practice. The findings regarding the influences on educators' conceptions of culture and their reported practices from

this study can be leveraged in several ways with respect to multicultural education policies and practices. These possible avenues for improvement to practice as well as additional research directions are explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: Discussion and Implications

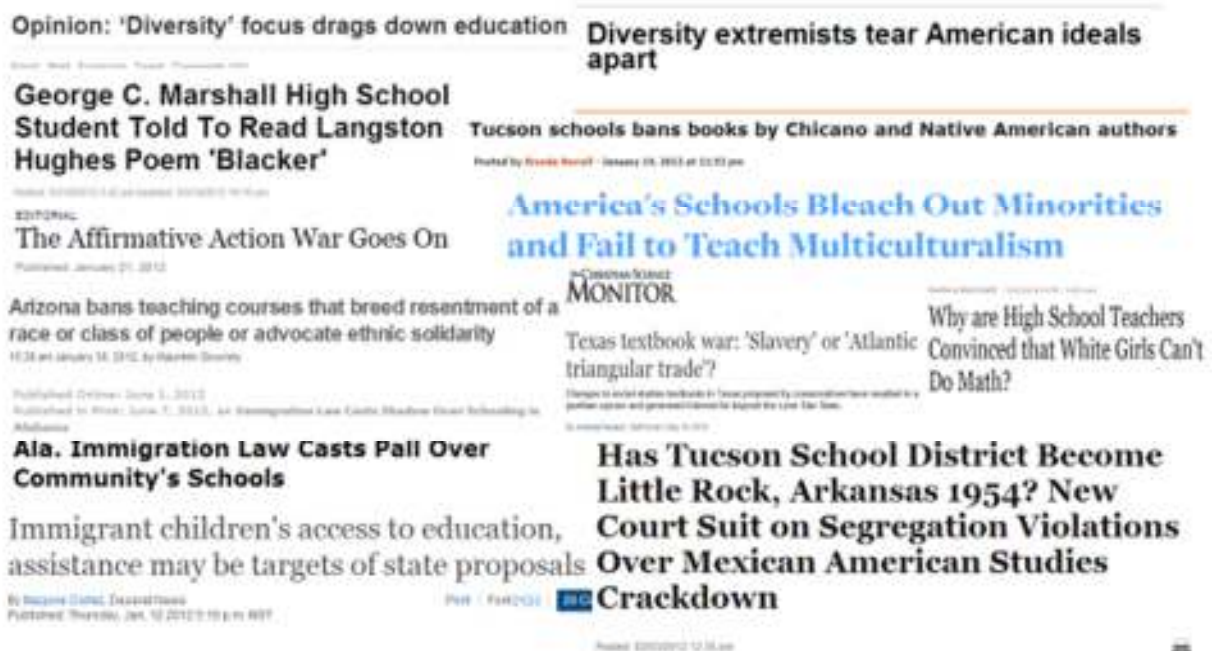
For the past four years, I've been thinking about and studying the relationships, both theoretical and practical, between multicultural education, learning theory, and the policies that support and/or constrain the implementation of effective, critical practices. As discussed in previous chapters, educational research has shown teachers' beliefs and practices can have a profound influence on students' engagement and learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). In addition, studies have shown that unconscious teacher biases can lead to differential treatment and decreased opportunities to succeed in classrooms for students from non-dominant populations (Ladson-Billings, 2002). Again, this study focused on documenting what conceptions educators' hold about culture and how those understandings are shaped, as an important first step to understanding how teachers make sense of their own practice, the notion of culture in multicultural education, and eventually the policies that support or limit those practices. The discussion in this chapter will focus on what the study findings suggest about the potential benefits of linking multicultural education to sociocultural learning theories as well as what they may indicate for more local efforts at improvement. I will first briefly expound on the hostile nature of some public discourse with respect to issues of diversity and multicultural education and explore how it relates to the data collected in the study. Following this brief look at public discourse, I discuss in more detail the benefits of understanding culture as practice and how it relates to multicultural education and the study findings; next I focus on what the data suggest with respect to multicultural education and the potential of more explicitly tying it to sociocultural theories of learning; and finally I will explore whether the practices teachers employed and the sociocultural constructs they were most similar to can be used to demonstrate the potential improvements to multicultural education if approached from or supported by a

sociocultural perspective.

### Public Discourse and Multicultural Education

Despite research that demonstrates the vast inequities in opportunity and outcome that continue to be reproduced within education, and research on pedagogical practice that has identified effective multicultural education practices, the current sociopolitical context is challenging. If not explicitly hostile to the goals of multicultural education, the current national narrative is often dismissive of the research and some state and local contexts have openly embraced anti-immigrant laws and rhetoric, attacked successful and popular educational diversity policies, and introduced legislation aimed at insuring the word “gay” is never spoken in a classroom. The current context is illustrated here (see Figure 8 below) using a sampling of headlines that have appeared in newspapers and online over approximately the past 18 months.

Figure 8. *Sample of headlines focused on diversity and multicultural issues in schools.*



This small sampling of headlines demonstrates that the national sociopolitical climate in which

this study was conducted was, perhaps, the most openly hostile it had been in decades. Additionally, the current market-based reforms and push toward testing may have increased this hostility and dismissiveness as the focus on basic skills and core knowledge has intensified. Evidence of this intensity could be seen in the data in the pervasive nature of educator talk related to implementation of the common core standards. The only participants who did not mention the movement to common core standards in their interviews were a counselor, a social worker, and the special education teachers.

Though the accomplishments in the field of multicultural education are significant, including creating a large degree of acceptance, in teacher preparation and K-12 education, the following quotes from the media demonstrate that significant resistance and misconceptions continue to pervade the larger narrative around multicultural education. More disturbing is that much of it comes from educators. The first quote was taken from a letter, written by a teacher, to the editor of the Times-Ledger, Queens, NY on September 29, 2013:

There are many reasons why our education system is in crisis. Prospective educators are subjected to a trendy oppression-obsessed, feel-good and esteem-ridden curriculum with little emphasis on mastery of subject matter. Note some college courses offered to prospective educators: Social Diversity in Education, Oppression of the Disabled, Diversity and Change, Lesbian/Gay Oppression and Multicultural Education.

His quote demonstrates typical conceptions of multicultural education as being about feeling good and self-esteem rather than “mastery” of subject matter. The next quote, clearly from another teacher, was posted in response to the letter to the editor quoted above – it reiterates the common belief that better self-esteem is the singular goal of multicultural education. It also



demonstrates a simplistic view of classroom interaction, one that suggests that as long as someone stands in front of a classroom and in some way attempts to convey knowledge that the only students who won't learn are those who are lazy or *actively* trying not to learn.

Thank you! Thank You! THANK YOU! I am a NYC school teacher--dead smack in the middle of my career -- I have too many years behind me to give up and too many ahead of me to retire. I'm stuck. Stuck with the crap that supposedly "educating" children has become...We need to toss the "hippy dippy" bullshit and get back to teaching reading, writing, math, cold hard, undeniable facts and stop coddling the kids of today. We're doing them no favors by all this "supposed" self esteem building nonsense. My self esteem came from a job well done and knowing what the hell I was taught. I didn't EXPECT a teacher to entertain me. It never OCCURRED to me that a TEACHER had to engage me. I was taught that I had to find a way to internalize the knowledge that was being taught. The onus was on ME and it damned well should have been! And I turned out fine! Times-Ledger, Queens, NY, September 29, 2013

And finally the following quote from well-known columnist George Will, from an opinion piece titled "Diversity Focus Drags Down Education" dated April 5, 2013 and published in the Lawrence Journal-World, demonstrates utter contempt for anything in education that might attempt to address racism, structural inequity, or any of the economic conditions or institutionalized practices that continually reproduce these insidious barriers to equity.

The real vocation of some people entrusted with delivering primary and secondary education is to validate this proposition: The three R's — formerly reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic — now are racism, reproduction and recycling.

Especially racism. Consider Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction. It evidently considers "instruction" synonymous with "propaganda," which in the patois of progressivism is called "consciousness-raising."

Such distractions from the study of calculus and literature are encouraged by CREATE Wisconsin (the acronym stands for Culturally Responsive Education for All: Training and Enhancement), which is funded with federal tax dollars from IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The disability being rectified here is, presumably, the handicap of insufficient guilt — arising from false consciousness — about white privilege.

His use of quotation marks around the words instruction, propaganda, and consciousness-raising, as well as his use of the word "patois" to describe the language of progressivism, are particularly telling, as they clearly insinuate illegitimacy without explicitly calling it such. Finally, he is dismissive of the fact that people with disabilities experience marginalization and the validity of white privilege, and insinuates that diversity professionals believe white guilt is desirable and an insufficient amount equates to a handicap, all of which is mean-spirited. Unfortunately, it is all too common to see opinions such as these expressed in the media and indicates that we have a long way to go if we are to move beyond tacit acceptance to a true understanding of how cultural practices shape knowledge, educational institutions, teachers, and learners.

### **Culture as Practice: The Benefits to Multicultural Education**

As discussed in chapter one, a primary contribution of sociocultural theories to understanding learning and the central role of culture is the conception of culture as dynamic practices. Sociocultural learning theories have helped produce a shift in how culture is conceptualized. Culture has been re-theorized within sociocultural learning theory by Gutiérrez

and Rogoff (2003) as daily practice. This theorization is particularly useful in multicultural education as it allows us to see culture as:

- Dynamic and negotiated within the situated context of community
- What we do rather than what we are
- Something *everyone* engages in rather than something the “other” *embodies*
- Something we contribute to rather than something static we are given and
- As influenced by its own history

A definition of culture as practices that are co-constructed in interaction with others and vary based on the social context in which they are performed is useful to multicultural education in several ways. Embracing a definition of culture that is inherently dynamic and negotiated makes visible the various ways people engage with multiple cultural communities every day, and adopt different practices that allow them to be a participant in each community. This difference in theoretical approach helps foster greater understanding of the complexities of student identity, resist deficit learning perspectives, and reduce stereotypical representations and understandings of ‘others,’ all of which directly relate to multicultural education. A definition of culture as practice makes visible the tensions and similarities between the multiple cultural communities in which students participate. Understanding that nondominant students in particular negotiate border crossings between cultural communities every day and often adopt different practices within each community helps make clear exactly *how* culture can be defined as practice. A sociocultural approach can help us to make sense of and effectively navigate the heterogeneity of human activity and learning, and resist reductive conceptions of culture and the stereotypes they perpetuate; all goals aligned with multicultural education.

Sociocultural theories of learning, beyond just the definition of culture as practice, as a foundation for multicultural education, encourage an integrated and critical approach to classroom practice as opposed to the curriculum integration (Banks, 2004) model. Because

learning is understood to occur within and through social interaction and cultural mediation in sociocultural approaches, they necessarily encourage the use of pedagogical practices that value the cultural and linguistic practices students bring to all learning contexts and content areas. Additionally, an approach to multicultural education grounded in expansive theories of learning encourages the examination of the dominant culture alongside all other cultures and practices. When culture is seen as something *everyone* practices, it opens the door to critical examination of all practices side by side; it allows for questions about why we choose to participate in any given practice, what is meant when a particular practice is referred to as “normal,” how practices change over time, and who influences those changes and why. Because this conception avoids the traditional definitions of culture as static characteristics that ‘belong to’ groups of persons, it differs significantly from the ways in which culture has been approached within the field of multicultural education to date. This was repeatedly demonstrated in the data, as even teachers with more dynamic notions of culture tended to describe traditional practices, those based on more essentialized, static notions.

Approaches to learning grounded in sociocultural theories compliment multicultural education as they naturally support the critical curricular and pedagogical practices endorsed by critical multicultural education research, while keeping the focus on learning (rather than content or teaching). Finally, creating an explicit connection between multicultural education and sociocultural theories of learning has the potential to improve educators’ understanding of the negotiated nature of our positions in the world and students’ multiple social identities. This improved understanding may offer educators insights they need to better demonstrate authentic caring toward students from different backgrounds.

### **Major Findings and Potential of Alignment**

As the first findings chapter (chapter 4) demonstrated, the interview data in this study suggest that teachers' conceptions of culture and multicultural education are often, at least initially, more profoundly affected by personal experiences than they are by more academic exposure. However, John's story, which was used to open the introduction of this dissertation, demonstrated clearly that academic engagement may also be necessary to fully understand all of the ways that dominant cultural practices are at play in educational environments, and to see the role of the school and educators in reproducing inequity; a necessary step if the goal is to produce equity within a system that currently does not. The examination of dominant culture and recognition of its influence is a stated goal of critical multicultural education that is in line with sociocultural theories, however there is a significant tension with respect to the understanding of dominant culture. A sociocultural approach would make a distinction between 'dominant culture' and 'dominant cultural practices,' where critical multicultural education does not. If multicultural education were to embrace a sociocultural learning theory approach, this tension would be dissolved. The data also suggest that, while educators who have experienced being the racial or cultural 'other' have more dynamic views of culture, and/or are more keenly focused on issues of educational equity than their peers, they do not understand culture as practice or its central role in mediating learning in the way it is understood in sociocultural approaches to learning. This finding suggests another way that engagement in academic or professional development activities based on sociocultural approaches may be useful. As, based on the data in this study, teachers do not seem to come to robust understandings of culture and its role in learning on their own, academic or professional development opportunities may provide the necessary introduction to the conceptual tools of sociocultural theory. Tools that could help educators design instruction and focus their energies in directions that will help create more equitable

outcomes (e.g. creating and maintaining supportive teacher-student relationships); the goal at the heart of multicultural education as it was originally envisioned.

Participants in the study often described situations in which they shared their own personal experiences in other countries and cultures with their students as a way to expose them to things they otherwise would not know anything about. While this is a very traditional multicultural education practice, when informed by a dynamic conception of culture as practice, this personal approach may offer additional ways to make exposure more meaningful for students. The more humanist understanding of difference that stems from extensive personal experience outside of one's own culture has the potential to add complexity to discussions of difference if the educator has come to understand culture as practice. When someone has significant experience interacting outside of their own cultural practices, they are likely to be more cognizant of the differences that exist *within* as well as between cultures. If they also understand culture as practice, they have tools to facilitate a more nuanced discussion of the similarities and differences in peoples' practices and constructively challenge reductive notions of culture when necessary by pointing to the ways that reducing culture to race, ethnicity, or nationality does not adequately account for within group diversity. While some teachers in the study expressed the belief that focusing on cultural similarities in multicultural education was a primary goal, I would suggest that understanding within group difference is just as important to students' understandings of their own cultural identities. I believe that teachers with experiences in multiple cultures are more able to offer this perspective, even if they do not understand culture as practice. However, a conception of culture as practice allows for the illustration of the heterogeneity of groups that, from the outside, appear homogeneous by demonstrating the variety of practices these large groups employ. Thus, if teachers were exposed to learning theory and

developed an understanding of culture as practice, it may prompt them to go beyond sharing their own experiences and invite students to share their practices as well – potentially creating a more productive discussion and providing the teacher with valuable insights regarding her students' lived experiences.

When we consider the study findings regarding educators' practices, it reinforces the idea introduced previously that academic or professional development activities based on a sociocultural approach would be beneficial to most educators. The findings related to educator practices indicated that most teachers chose and implemented multicultural education strategies idiosyncratically and without adequate knowledge of effective practices or theoretical tools that could improve their understanding of learning processes. Perhaps more importantly, however, is the finding that some teachers adopt practices congruent with sociocultural approaches without knowledge of effective practices or theoretical tools. This finding suggests that some educators may be 'primed' to take up the conception of culture as practice and the constructs of sociocultural learning theory in useful ways if provided with well-designed guidance and support. Because I believe the conceptions of culture and the constructs associated with sociocultural theories offer powerful conceptual tools that can effectively mediate educators' understandings of learning, I argue that multicultural education could benefit greatly from embracing these theories of learning. In the following sections, I attempt to use the findings discussed in earlier chapters to support my argument regarding sociocultural learning theory and the tools it can offer educators implementing multicultural education. In addition, when appropriate to the discussion, I will make suggestions regarding how I think the study's findings might be used more locally and immediately to support and improve multicultural education policies and practices.

At this point, it might be useful to consider two counterintuitive findings of the study. The first is this: if, as the data suggest, similar types of experiences lead to particular views of culture and its relationship to student learning, a reasonable hypothesis was that educators' with similar conceptions would employ similar approaches to multicultural education, but this outcome was not consistently observed in the data. The second finding was that educators who held more complex and dynamic understandings of culture *did not* use practices compatible with a sociocultural approach more often, or more consistently than others. While these two findings might seem counterintuitive, I believe they both point to the fact that people in general, and educators specifically, are not often asked to think critically about our own or others' cultural practices, or explore the ways in which they mediate who we are, what we learn, and how we think by influencing our perception of everything we experience. Without considering how cultural practices have mediated our own experiences, it is highly unlikely we will consider their influence on students. Because so many teachers, like myself, come from backgrounds where dominant cultural practices are employed without conscious recognition, the ways in which they influence our perceptions and value judgments, particularly of those who have been socialized into and through different cultural practices, often remain invisible to us. This lack of awareness will only become more problematic as the demographics of classrooms continue to shift toward students socialized through nondominant cultural practices while the demographics of the teaching population remain relatively stagnant and heavily tilted toward those who come from backgrounds where dominant cultural practices are the only practices considered acceptable.

Multicultural education has been critiqued for being ineffectual in improving achievement because its instantiations in classrooms remain focused on curricula and increasing the self-esteem of students from nondominant backgrounds. While this is an incomplete, and



therefore unfair, picture of the field, it remains a common viewpoint, and has acted as a political flashpoint in the public narrative. With the use of sociocultural learning theories as a foundation, multicultural education could demonstrate an approach to learning and pedagogical practice and learning that more effectively addresses educational inequity. This argument for using sociocultural learning theory as a foundation is *not* an argument that the more traditional practices of exploring the history and culture of particular communities should not be continued or that educators should pay less attention to the critical practices that multicultural education research has identified as effective. The argument is that reframing and contextualizing the ideas and rich practices of multicultural education - in ways that are grounded in and linked explicitly to expansive theories of learning – will strengthen the position of multicultural education in the larger educational narrative. By tying multicultural education explicitly to expansive, sociocultural theories of learning, we are able to more effectively challenge the common idea that the sum total of the purpose and effects of multicultural education is political correctness and/or increasing the self-esteem of traditionally marginalized student populations, and position multicultural education as important to the learning of all students. In other words, by explicitly aligning with sociocultural learning theories multicultural education can be repositioned in the narrative as an approach to learning rather than content or pedagogical practice.

### **The Constructs, Multicultural Education, and Related Study Findings**

There are three closely related constructs that are extremely important to sociocultural learning theory that I believe also strongly support the argument for re/visioning multicultural education through these theories 1) distributed cognition, 2) communities of practice, and 3) identity. In the following section, I will provide an overview of each construct and talk about how each can be employed to demonstrate the cultural nature of learning, address issues of

access, and how each might be useful in reframing multicultural education.

**Distributed cognition, multicultural education, and related study data.** The first construct that directly supports critical multicultural education practices is distributed cognition. This conception of cognition is one that directly challenges the assumption that knowledge and the ability to construct that knowledge resides within the minds of individuals (Cole & Engeström, 1993). This view of sense-making (the essence of cognition) situates knowledge as something that is constructed, reconstructed, and transformed socially within cultural contexts. This is important for at least two reasons. First, the idea that knowledge is co-constructed rather than discovered allows what is generally viewed as “factual” knowledge to be understood as a cultural production. This helps to explicate differences in conceptual understandings across cultures and demonstrates how these multiple, divergent understandings can be equally valid. The importance of this lies in the understanding that often problem solving or the construction of new knowledge requires both creative and logical ways of thinking, demonstrating the need to encourage these multiple perspectives. Second, if cognition and knowledge are recognized as shared cultural productions, we must address access to resources as a factor that materially changes the potential trajectories of learning for both individuals and whole communities. The latter is particularly important to multicultural education because the common view of cognitive potential and intelligence, as well as the predominant pedagogical practices being used in schools, are directly related to more individualistic views of cognition and knowledge production; this makes the failure of individuals and communities appear to be the result of a lack of ability or effort rather than a substantive difference in their access to resources. Moll et al (1999) were able to demonstrate that, for students from non-dominant backgrounds in particular, the use of this learning theory construct to broaden understandings of knowledge production,

cognition, and access to resources can have valuable results with respect to equitable outcomes.

Up to now, the vast majority of the literature on multicultural education has addressed access to resources and the devaluing of “out of school” learning and knowledge, but has not taken up the idea of distributed cognition as a legitimate model of thinking and learning that supports the use of effective multicultural education practices. Distributed cognition inherently values difference as a resource, or as expertise that is distributed across communities. The notable exception in the literature is Moll, however, he does not necessarily connect himself specifically to multicultural education as a field of study. Traditional conceptions of cognition as ‘occurring in the head’ have produced pedagogical approaches that privilege thinking alone and individual performance or demonstrations of understanding rather than encouraging students to think with others. These practices are therefore inherently concerned with education as competition and each individual student’s ability to produce a singular ‘correct’ answer, rather than their ability to articulate nuanced conceptual understandings, or the willingness to challenge the legitimacy of previously constructed knowledge and traditional ways of thinking. Distributed cognition provides the theoretical foundations for pedagogical practices that encourage these more critical and cooperative ways of thinking and learning by offering an approach in which members of a community are participants in creating knowledge. The process of ‘thinking together’ is what brings about consensus and the belief that knowledge has meaning, and demonstrating its basis in established theories of learning. Finally, this construct can help illustrate the idea that expertise is distributed within any given community – which can be seen as highly aligned with effective multicultural education practices as it allows for shifts in the division of labor and participation within a community so they are more symmetrical and equitable.

**Communities of practice, multicultural education, and related study data.** The construct of communities of practice is closely connected to the construct of distributed cognition. Both challenge the more traditional beliefs about knowledge and how it is produced and transmitted and communities of practice also offers a conceptual tool with which to think about *how* cognitions are distributed. Finally, within the concept of communities of practice, issues of access to resources and how this access affords or constrains learning opportunities is directly addressed. With this focus on access, communities of practice can be used in conjunction with the construct of distributed cognition to further both research and policy discussions in the field of multicultural education by providing a configuration for educational practice that distributes resources and learning opportunities more equitably and encourages a conception of learning and knowledge as cooperative rather than competitive. The findings in chapter five demonstrated that there were teachers in the focal district and schools employing instructional approaches consistent with this construct despite not recognizing its value from a theoretical standpoint, as a practice based on well-established theories of learning. Finally, given the basic sensibilities associated with communities of practice, there are educational practices and strategies already embedded in schools and teacher education, such as cooperative learning, that could potentially be improved by increasing educators' theoretical knowledge of distributed cognition and communities of practice so they better understand the learning processes at work within these constructs. Understanding these constructs will allow for a better, more conscious design for learning.

One of the most intriguing findings with respect to the barriers that educators identified was that when local educators comment on their practices, and the primary influences on those practices, they often describe the 'culture' (idioculture) of their district and school as spaces that

lack the markers of an effective community of practice for them professionally. I find this intriguing because they seem to be demonstrating an understanding of the efficacy of a communities of practice approach with respect to their own learning and advocating for its use within a profession that has not, until very recently, supported or encouraged collaboration at the institutional level. They articulated that they find this lack of a community of practice problematic for many reasons, including that it leads to frustration, disconnection, and inconsistency in their interactions with, and decisions regarding, their students. While educators did not use the terminology of 'communities of practice' or explicitly indicate knowledge or understanding of this learning theory construct, their narratives discussed the (lack of) sharing, and access to, resources - including expertise (oldtimers), materials, and structures that support collaborative processes within their district and school communities. They expressed feeling isolated and unsupported and felt that there were community resources that would improve the situation but that access was often blocked for reasons they did not understand or believe were valid. Because this dissertation was more narrowly focused on the multicultural education practices educators reported using *with students*, and this finding is related to the professional communities of practice in which educators work it was not addressed in the practices chapter, it was included here however because it suggests a future direction for research and policy changes. As the educators clearly communicated frustration with a lack of access to meaningful supports, and an understanding that a more intentional approach to creating communities of practice (again, without using this terminology or explicitly mentioning the theoretical construct) would benefit them in their professional spaces, it is a reasonable assumption that a line of research addressing this construct as a way to support teachers, may prove fruitful.

**Identity, multicultural education, and related study data.** The final construct I will

discuss is that of identity - a complex construct that is directly connected to communities of practice through the assertion that participation and learning within a community of practice involves the construction of identities, or becoming a 'new kind of person'. Wortham (2004) and Nasir et al (2008) have both demonstrated how social identities are developed through academic activity and in educational settings. As Wortham (2004, pg. 731) puts it, "learners become different kinds of people as they learn." Nasir's studies also make the crucial point that students' identities do not develop in a decontextualized setting and are therefore reflective of "the types of learning experiences they **have access to** and the opportunities they are afforded," (2008, p. 101) again highlighting the theme of access. Because identity is, at its core, an understanding of who we are and how we fit in the world that is influenced by interaction with others, it is necessarily an important component of learning theory. However, while identity is often considered in multicultural education research, it has not yet been explicitly tied to learning theory within that body of literature. By highlighting identity as a construct of learning theory and thereby underscoring its importance to learning processes, multicultural education can more directly forward and support the argument that effective practices related to student identity should be supported for reasons that go well beyond boosting self-esteem.

All cultural practices, especially language, are closely tied to identity development and, as such, need to be addressed explicitly within the discussion. Students who speak languages other than English in United States schools are often made to feel that their language is inferior and of no value to them or their communities. It can even go beyond the idea of languages other than English not being valued and can lead students to a belief that their language is an impediment to achieving success within the larger, nationalistic American culture. This hierarchical ideology of language has resulted in students disassociating themselves from their

families, communities, and cultures in an attempt to insure success in a system which actively devalues their cultural and linguistic heritage, skill, and knowledge (Valenzuela, 1999). This same phenomena can be seen in African American communities in which children grow up speaking “non-standard” forms of English and learn to separate themselves from the language and culture of their communities (assimilate) while in school in order to demonstrate their ability to be academically successful (Tatum, 1997). This requirement to “check yourself at the door” of a classroom affects how students’ identities develop and influences how they feel about their linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as whether or not they will continue to access it to facilitate their learning in the dominant language and culture. John’s story, shared at the opening of the first chapter, included the information that while his older sister learned to speak Spanish growing up, he and the rest of his siblings were discouraged from doing so and that he views this as a significant personal loss, brought about by the forces of assimilation, or the dominant cultural practices. At least three other teachers expressed their concerns about the inherent privileging of English, even within bilingual and dual language programs, through testing policies and hiring practices and the affects it has on students’ perceptions of their own linguistic identities.

While there are a multitude of difficult issues faced by students from non-dominant backgrounds and their teachers, I have focused my dissertation work on understanding how the beliefs and understandings of local educators, with respect to culture and multicultural education, influence their approach to pedagogy and their interactions with students who differ from them socially, racially, culturally, and linguistically. These perceptions and practices are the product of a complex web of influences, however, this study suggested that one of the most influential was personal experience. With respect to their pedagogical practices, that web is undergirded and

influenced, though perhaps in less obvious ways, by the dictates of policy (Spillane, 2002). So, educators' conceptions of culture and multicultural education are affected by their personal experiences with difference and their interpretations of these experiences. Additionally, their approach to multicultural education practices, while less related to their conceptions of culture than one might expect, are also impacted by their experiences and beliefs, some of which support practices that are consistent with sociocultural learning theories and some of which act as barriers to robust practice.

### **Conclusion**

My more holistic, overarching argument, then, is that an approach to multicultural education that is explicitly informed by and through expansive theories of learning has the potential to influence multicultural education in three important ways; 1) shift the focus of multicultural education within teacher preparation and professional development toward robust, dynamic conceptions of culture as practice, and an understanding of the central role of those practices to learning and knowledge production; 2) provide educators, particularly those who already have a critical, social justice focus (the equity oriented educators in this study), with theoretical and practical tools to support them in challenging the status quo and designing for deeper learning; and 3) position multicultural education as a useful approach to student learning rather than simple content integration. The data gathered and analyzed in this study help to demonstrate the theoretical disconnects and idiosyncratic implementation of practices common in current instantiations of multicultural education, despite New Mexico's long-established policies intended to support these programs. While the analysis of policy demonstrated that language, not multicultural education, is the priority, there are other important influences to consider. I have suggested that the theoretical disconnects and inconsistent implementations in



multicultural education are, at least in part, the result of maintaining a relatively narrow focus on curriculum and pedagogical practice. Additionally, I have suggested that a more productive approach might be to pursue an interdisciplinary approach that includes and incorporates theories of learning that align well with all of the great work that has been done in multicultural education over the past 40 to 50 years. In short, recognizing learning processes as mediated by cultural practices, in the way sociocultural learning theories do, would allow proponents of multicultural education to argue that the related practices and policies are grounded in established learning theory and are primarily focused on learning and success as opposed to the current narrative of multicultural education as a divisive distraction or ineffectual attempt at boosting the self-esteem of a particular group of students. To date, multicultural education has, understandably, focused on opportunity and achievement rather than learning as central to creating equity and fulfilling its purpose; a focus on learning, however, would allow proponents of multicultural education to more effectively counter common misconceptions, and support its academic validity.

My belief that multicultural education, if reframed using sociocultural theories of learning as a foundation, could become a more forceful tool in shifting the narrative and creating equity, has been strengthened through this research. I believe it has demonstrated that teachers' personal experiences with difference and their chosen practices may provide openings through which to introduce the concepts and theoretical tools of sociocultural learning theory. In theory, teachers' understandings could then be nurtured and expanded with the proper support and eventually lead to increased student learning through improved instructional design and classroom practice. As I have argued throughout this chapter, through sociocultural learning theory, I believe multicultural education can more effectively address the common misconceptions and substantive critiques by concretely demonstrating culture's inherent

connection to all learning processes. Sociocultural learning theory provides a solid rationale, focused on student learning, for the critical pedagogical practices identified in the multicultural education literature. In addition, I believe it has the potential to improve teacher education and practice by providing a coherent theoretical understanding of learning that acknowledges and adequately explains both the similarities and variances in cultural practices within groups of students from nondominant backgrounds. It can also make visible the role of dominant cultural practices already embedded in schools, which is particularly important given the demographics of the teaching force in the foreseeable future (National Center for Education Statistics). Sociocultural theories of learning offer robust, humanizing, and non-reductive ways of understanding the cultural practices of students from different backgrounds and the role of those practices in their learning. As was just mentioned, this is especially important for the predominantly white, female, middle class, teaching population as increasingly large numbers of their students will have backgrounds significantly different from their own. Finally, a foundation of sociocultural learning theory could help encourage carefully crafted multicultural education policies that explicitly support the types of critical practices shown to help create more equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.

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## Appendix A

### Teacher Interview Questions

Have teacher give a brief history of their education, career history, and history of teaching (how long teaching, how long at this school, etc.)

1. Tell me about your students.
2. Over the years, what is the most challenging thing about teaching for you?
3. What do you love about teaching?
4. How has the student population changed over time?
5. How have your classroom practices changed over time?
6. How do policies influence what you do in the classroom?
7. How would you define culture?
8. In your opinion, what is the purpose of multicultural education?
  - a. What are the benefits?
  - b. What are its shortcomings?

### Final Interview

1. Tell me about any formal educational or professional training you have received in multicultural education?
2. Tell me about any personal experiences that have influenced your views regarding multicultural education. (this can include experiences with individual students or their families)
3. How have your views changed over time?
4. Tell me about your multicultural education practices.
5. How have these practices changed over time?
6. Tell me about the multicultural education policies you are expected to implement?
7. How do these policies support your practices?
8. How do they constrain your practices?
9. Choose a part of the state or local policy and ask the teacher to talk about...(listen to Kevin's question again)



### Principal Interview Questions

1. How long have you been principal here?
2. How long have you been with this district?
3. Have you worked in any other school districts? Where?
4. Tell me about your school.
5. Tell me about successful programs you've implemented.
6. How were those programs designed?
7. Over the years, what have been the most challenging things about leading a school?
8. What do you love about being a principal?
9. How have your leadership practices changed over time?
10. How do policies influence your practices (how you run your school)
11. In your opinion, what is the purpose of multicultural education?
12. What are the benefits?
13. What are its shortcomings?
14. Do you have any kind of educational training in multicultural education? (if yes, follow with can you tell me about it)
15. What personal experiences have influenced your views of multicultural education?
16. How have these experiences/trainings changed your views (if they have) over time?
17. Tell me about the multicultural education practices at your school.
18. How have these practices changed over time?
19. How do state and/or local multicultural education policies support your practices?
20. How do state and/or local multicultural education policies constrain your practices

## Appendix B

### Email and Letter of Consent

Dear Teachers:

I am writing to ask you to complete a survey on multicultural education to assist me in my research at the University of Colorado, Boulder. I am including a link at the bottom of this email that you can follow to complete the survey. This survey is completely anonymous and should only take *about* 15 minutes. I would also appreciate anyone who is comfortable doing so, passing on the link to other teachers they think would be willing to share their views on multicultural education.

The following is the letter of consent indicating that by taking the survey you are consenting to have your answers included in the study, and gives you some basic information on the purpose of the study. There is also a pdf of this letter attached to the email for your records if you should want a copy (no signature is necessary). You will see the letter of consent again at the beginning of the survey and be asked to confirm that you have read it and agree to have your answers used in the study.

Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Education, Policies, and Practice  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Drummond

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Please read the following material that explains this research study. You are being asked to complete an online survey on Multicultural Education. Following the online survey link contained in this email and completing the survey indicates that you have been informed about the study and that you want to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study.

#### ***Project Description:***

This research study is intended to increase understanding of teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and any related policies. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are teaching in either the state of Colorado or New Mexico and these states are the focus of this study. It is entirely your choice whether or not to participate in this study. Approximately 500 teacher participants will be invited to complete the survey over the course of the study. This survey addresses teachers' perceptions of multicultural education in general.

#### ***Procedures:***

If you choose to follow the link and complete the survey, participation should take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. Your responses to the survey will not be connected to your email address or name **in any way**, so the survey is completely anonymous.

#### ***Risks and Discomforts:***

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study

***Benefits:***

There are no identifiable benefits of participating in this study

***Ending Your Participation:***

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. No partially completed surveys will be included in the data analysis, so simply not completing the survey will serve as withdrawal of consent. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s). Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

***Questions?***

If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before signing this form. If you should have questions or concerns during or after your participation, please contact Michelle Drummond at 303-492-8175

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them -- confidentially, if you wish -- to the Executive Secretary, Human Research Committee, 26 UCB, Regent Administrative Center 308, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO 80309-0026, (303) 735-3702.

***Authorization:***

I have read this letter about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received a copy of this document as an attachment to the email as well as within the email that contains the survey link. By following the link and completing the survey I am giving my consent for my answers to be used in this study. I understand that my answers are anonymous and not connected to my name in any way.

Survey Link: [http://ucbedu.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV\\_8HMDkBSv1rjtKWU&SVID=Prod](http://ucbedu.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_8HMDkBSv1rjtKWU&SVID=Prod)

Thank you all for your time, I greatly appreciate your input and value all of your opinions.  
Michelle

.....  
Michelle Drummond  
Doctoral Student/Graduate Research Assistant  
University of Colorado, Boulder  
School of Education, Rm 353  
(303) 492-8175

Exploring How New Mexico Educators' Conceptions of Multicultural Education are Shaped through Historical, Social, Political, and Local Contexts

Principal Investigator, Michelle J. Drummond

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

October, 2012

Please read the following material that explains this research study. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you agree to participate. I want you to understand what I am asking you to do and what risks and benefits –if any– are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether or not you want to participate.

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Michelle J. Drummond, M.A.T. and Ph.D. Candidate in the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Education, 249 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0249. Michelle can be reached through email at [michelle.drummond@colorado.edu](mailto:michelle.drummond@colorado.edu) or by phone at 303-492-2566 (office) or 303-859-9287 (cell)

**Project Description:**

This research study is designed to help improve understanding of how policies and other factors - such as location, history, and social context - affect educators and their practices with respect to multicultural education. Previous research has demonstrated that policies can influence educators' practices and that educators can, in fact, be co-constructors of policy. With these concepts as a starting point, I am interested in finding out how local multicultural education practices are supported or constrained by policies, how the other factors mentioned above affect educators' understandings and practices, and how educators may be contributing to the policy process through co-construction. As a foundation for this research it is important to understand how educators define multicultural education and how they view its benefits and limitations. The portion of the study being conducted in your school consists of interviews, focus groups, and observations and offers the possibility to participate in just interviews, just a focus group, interviews and observations, and other possible combinations.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in two short (approximately 30 minute) interviews and/or one focus group (approximately 1 hour). I am seeking as many teachers for interviews and focus groups as are willing to participate. In addition, I am seeking a minimum of two teachers who would be willing to allow me to observe their teaching practices (related to multicultural education) during the course of the study. You will be able to indicate which parts of the study you are willing to participate in at the end of this form. The initial interview will take place before the focus groups and observations and the second interview will be conducted when all focus groups and observations have been completed.

**Risks and Discomforts:**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to participating in this study aside from any mild discomfort one may feel due to being interviewed and/or observed.

**Benefits:**

There are likely no direct benefits of participating in this study.

**Ending your participation:**

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or refuse to participate in any part of the research for any reason. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Initials** \_\_\_\_\_

**Confidentiality:**

I will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your data. To protect your anonymity, I will assign you a pseudonym. I will also create pseudonyms for the specific location of the school and district. I will use these pseudonyms when taking fieldnotes and on any papers or presentations I prepare based on this research.

I will assign the digital audio files of the interviews and focus groups a code number so there are no identifying markers indicating either the study site or the individual(s) on the recording. Any documents (transcripts or summaries) I create of the content recorded on the tapes during the analysis will use the same code number so as to ensure your privacy. All digital recordings will be stored in a password protected format on any computers and/or other storage devices (such as a CD or external storage device) used during the study.

Other than the Primary Investigator, only regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections and the University of Colorado Institutional Review Board may see your individual data as part of routine audits.

**Questions?**

If you have any questions about your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before signing this form. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research study participant you can call the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is independent from the research team. You can contact the IRB if you have concerns or complaints that you do not wish to discuss with the primary investigator. The IRB phone number is 303-735-3702.

**Authorization:**

I have read the description of this study and I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I know I can withdraw at any time.

I have marked (with an "X") below how I wish to participate and how the researcher may use audiotapes of me in her teaching and at professional conferences.

\_\_\_ I am willing to participate in two approximately 30 minute interviews and I understand that the interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder.

\_\_\_ I am willing to participate in one focus group of approximately 1 hour and I understand that the group will be recorded using a digital audio recorder.

\_\_\_ I am willing to be observed in my classroom 2-5 times during the semester

***If you checked any of the above please initial the statement below and sign (also - please initial all previous pages of the consent form)***

\_\_\_ I understand that the content of all recordings will be used for research that will likely result in published material and/or educational conference presentations, but that my identity will be protected in these publications and presentations.

I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Participant Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

District	Asian/PI	Black	White	Hisp	Am. Ind.	HI/OPI
Albuquerque	2.4	4.1	30	58	5.5	<0.5
Bernalillo	0.4	0.2	1	49	41	0
Bloomfield	0.4	0.7	31.8	34.3	32.8	0
Central						
Consolidated	<0.1	0.5	8.3	2.4	88.6	0.1
Espanola	0.6	0.4	2.4	90	7	0
Farmington						
Municipal	0.6	1.3	41	27	30	<0.1
Gallup-McKinley	0.9	0.3	5.9	12	81	0
Las Cruces	1.3	2.7	23.4	72	0.8	0
Las Vegas	1.1	0.7	9	87.9	1.4	0
Los Lunas						
(immigrant)	0.6	1.5	24	66.9	6.9	0.1
Moriarty	0.8	1.6	57.2	38.2	2.1	0
Rio Rancho	3	4.8	46.3	41.9	4.1	0
Santa Fe	1.5	1.1	20.1	74.8	2.3	0
Taos	1.2	0.6	18.7	72.2	7.3	0
West Las Vegas	0	0.8	6.3	92.6	0.3	0
STATE of NM	1.4	2.7	28.5	56.7	10.7	<0.1

## Appendix D

**IF YOU HAVE ALREADY READ THE LETTER OF CONSENT** and are ready to complete the survey, please scroll down to the end and click on YES.

Please read the following material that explains this research study. You are being asked to complete a short online survey on Multicultural Education. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether or not you want to participate.

### **Project Description:**

This research study is intended to increase understanding of teachers' conceptions of multicultural education and related policies. All teachers and principals in Albuquerque Public Schools District are being asked to participate in this study because the district has agreed to a research partnership on this project. It is hoped that the district will benefit from the information gathered in this survey. It is entirely your choice whether or not to participate in this study.

### **Procedures:**

Participation should take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. Your responses to the survey will not be connected to your email address, your computer's ip address, or your name in any way, so they are completely anonymous. There are 10 relatively quick to answer demographic questions and 5 open ended questions about how you view culture and multicultural education. Some questions require an answer and some can be skipped if you choose not to answer.

### **Risks and Discomforts:**

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

### **Benefits:**

There are no identifiable benefits of participating in this study, however it is hoped that the district will gain valuable knowledge that will eventually result in improved planning and professional development in this area.

### **Ending Your Participation:**

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. The final question on the survey will ask you to indicate whether you consent to have your answers included in the research – answering no to this question will indicate that you wish to withdraw any answers given previously. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Questions?**

If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before taking the survey. You can reach the primary investigator with questions at michelle.drummond@colorado.edu. If you should have questions or concerns during or after your participation, please contact Michelle Drummond at the above email or 303-492-2566.

If you have questions about your rights as a research study participant, you can call the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is independent from the research team. You can contact the IRB if you have concerns or complaints that you do not want to talk to the study team about. The IRB phone number is (303) 735-3702.

### **Authorization:**

I have read this letter about the study, I know the possible risks and benefits, I know that being in this study is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time. I understand that my answers are anonymous and not connected to my name or computer in any way. *I am giving my consent for my answers to be used in this study and I understand that I will be asked to confirm my consent at the end of the survey.*

YES

NO



I am...



- a Regular Educator Teacher
- a Specialty Teacher or other school personnel (Special Education, Reading Interventionist, School Counselor, etc.)
- a Principal or Assistant Principal

I have been a full-time educator for \_\_\_\_\_ years

In addition to this district, I have worked as an educator in the following places (Please list other states and/or other districts in New Mexico where you have worked)

I have been in this district for \_\_\_\_\_ years

I currently work at...

- an Elementary school
- a Middle School or Jr High (please include content area below if appropriate)
- a High School (please include content area below if appropriate)

I choose to identify racially/ethnically as:

- Multi-racial
- Hispanic or Latino(a)
- Native American/Indian
- African American/Black
- Asian American
- White
- I choose to identify as
  
- I choose not to identify my race/ethnicity

Please use percentages to give the approximate racial/ethnic make-up of your class(es)

- if you are a secondary teacher or a specialty teacher please estimate percentages for all classes combined
- if you are an administrator please provide school level percentages

Multi-racial	0
Hispanic or Latino(a)	0
Native American/Indian	
African American/Black	0
White	0
All other races/ethnicities	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>

What is the approximate percentage of students in your class(es) with these special designations (ignore the total at the bottom)

- if you are an administrator please provide school level percentages

Special Education	0
ELL/ESL	0
Eligible for free or reduced lunch	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>

My understanding of Multicultural Education comes primarily from:

- A required university course (or courses)
- An elective university course (or courses)
- State level professional development
- District level professional development
- Personal experience/interest and/or self-directed learning
- Other

How do you define culture?

---

How would you describe the relationship between learning and culture?

---

What role do you believe culture should play in the classroom?

---

How do policies (state, district, or school) support best practices in multicultural education?

---

How do policies (state, district, or school) constrain best practices? (Last question!!)

---

THANK YOU SO MUCH!!

You have completed the survey. Please click yes below to confirm that you understand your answers are anonymous and that you agree to have your answers included in the research study.

If you have decided you do not want your answers included click no.

---

- Yes
- No