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# Towards World Citizenship: Ethnography of the World Culture Initiative and Multicultural Curricula

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# Towards World Citizenship: Ethnography of the World Culture Initiative and Multicultural Curricula

**Disciplines**  
Anthropology

TOWARDS WORLD CITIZENSHIP:  
ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE WORLD CULTURE INITIATIVE  
AND MULTICULTURAL CURRICULA

By

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In

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## Introduction

The World Culture Initiative (“WCI”) classroom at University City High School (“UCHS”) is an exercise in public interest anthropology and service learning (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:64). The project is in its fourth year of being team taught by Dr. Peggy Sanday from the University of Pennsylvania (“Penn”) and Dr. Karl Janowitz from UCHS. Each year new groups of students from Penn and UCHS join the professors; the Penn anthropology students take on the roles of teaching assistants for the anthropology students from UCHS in an effort to foster global citizenship in the both groups of students.

The mission of WCI, according to Dr. Sanday, is a means to “impart knowledge of world cultures to instill in both sets of students a sense of being world citizens.” (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:65). An important element of the WCI is that it is not pure volunteerism on the part of the Penn students. Rather, it utilizes a service learning approach that allows the students to grapple with the idea of multiculturalism and democracy in the real world. In the spirit of ethnography, it is the hope of the co-founders that the Penn students will understand the other and consequently themselves through this service-learning project (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:69). This Boasian cultural anthropological approach allows for meaningful engagement and reciprocity between all of the students and is important in movement towards understanding world citizenship. Furthermore, the reciprocity implies that it is also a goal that the high school students develop a strong sense of self through self-reflection, and an understanding of the other (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:78).

I engaged with the students for eight months, from September 2006 to April 2007, with the intention of addressing a macro-social goal of equality and quality in education, with a particular focus on fostering a worldly perspective in the students and myself. The goal of global citizenship is an important one in its own rite, but my research took me one step further. The analysis of my field work coupled with an intellectual framework of theories developed through previous research and scholarship on multicultural education and cultural plurality attempt to tackle a complex question. What effect will a class that promotes global citizenship through an anthropological and service learning approach have on the students? Will the WCI have a positive effect on the self-identity of the students, could it potentially improve the quality and equality of education for this group of inner city youth, or will there be other unexpected results? There are many factors to consider, including the minority and immigrant experience, which includes education and the realities versus the ideals of American life; understanding of one's identity in the midst of discrimination and segregation; and finally democracy and citizenship. The following ethnography is a study of the high school classroom at UCHS coupled with a comparative analysis to research completed on the topic of multicultural education for youth.

### **Methodology & Field Work**

#### *Culture at UCHS*

Culture is the basic unit of analysis for anthropological research. According to Stocking culture is, "pluralistic, holistic, non-hierarchical, relativistic, behaviorally determinist." (Stocking 1996:4). Sanday, founder of WCI suggests that this definition is derived from Boas' idea of unity in diversity, which implies that humans have the ability

to adapt to new situations but there are also a diversity of systems that exist from adaptation (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:66). The culture with which I engage at UCHS has aspects of unity in diversity. Within the walls of the school, there is a dominant attitude that students adopt despite their various personal backgrounds. This attitude is characterized by a high value placed on humor, apathy towards education, propensity towards peer conflict, and a certain “ghetto” style of dress. Dr. Janowitz notes that the potency of these trends is revealed most explicitly when an immigrant student feels that he or she needs to adopt those patterns. He has watched many transformations in student behavior, attitude, and style toward these norms. Eight months in the WCI classroom showed me that the aforementioned attitudes and behaviors are not the complete picture and merely the result of an incomplete glance at a public culture. There are certainly deeper layers that exist, an assortment of cultural traditions and personal experiences combine to make a culture that is more complex than the aforementioned behavioral trends.

### *The People and the Environment*

I first met the students and their teacher Dr. Janowitz, whom they refer to as “Doc”, at the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania. The WCI class was there for a field trip to explore the museum and to meet Dr. Sanday and their new teaching assistants (myself, Liz, and Dylan). At our first meeting the students were quiet and respectful of the museum and each other. As we introduced ourselves to each other, we said where we were from. I told the students that I was born and raised in Philadelphia and I learned that five of the students were also from Philadelphia. The remaining four students were from Bangladesh, Liberia by way of a

refugee camp in Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone. Doc informed me that the demographics of the class were a rough reflection of the population of UCHS.

Doc can usually be found between his office and his classroom, number 127, clutching his coffee cup and a binder full of papers. He wears many hats at UCHS. He is the English as a Second Language (“ESL”) coordinator and thus the foreign students often find their way to his office if they have a free period or any questions about school. He teaches the WCI class and an ESL geometry class, the latter he claims should not be taught by him, but no one else is available. At times he seems disillusioned in the prospect of improvement in UCHS as a whole. In regards to the three WCI students who are seniors, he worries that they will not get in to any colleges or fail out in the first semester. At other times, he praises his students for being the best in the school, often referring to them as “a good group”, and admires their persistence towards college. He treats them as equals; he talks about topics in a frank manner and does not try and protect students by withholding information from them. He consistently supports in the WCI because he believes teaching students about the world, each other, and themselves through the lens of anthropology is an effective method of education. He believes the benefits are strengthened with the help of reliable Penn service-learners. He wishes that the successes of the WCI program would be acknowledged by the school. Many students depend on him, either as a teacher or an advisor, and he is able to remember everyone’s names and their strengths and weaknesses. Students seek him out on a daily basis; we often had student visitors to the WCI classroom and his office is always occupied by at least one student. This tells me that he has respect from the students that know him. He describes his office as a “safe haven” for the foreign students, especially in their first

weeks of school. He occasionally complains about his hectic schedule and crowded office, but his actions tell a different story. He has the best interest of each student in mind, and I do not think he would have his job be any other way.

I work with three students very closely; “Jack” is a sophomore, African American who was born and raised in West Philadelphia; “Mary” is a senior, Liberian refugee who spent her formative years in refugee camps in Ghana; “Lena” is a junior from Bangladesh who has been in the United States for one year. Jack opened up a great deal over the course of the year and his assignments became more consistent. Mary remained a diligent student throughout the course of the year, as did Lena. Since graduation is closer for the girls, they often spoke about college and their preferred careers, which fluctuated between lawyer and different medical professions. Mary complimented Lena’s ability to communicate and tutor and suggests that Lena should pursue a career in teaching, but Lena does not see this as a possibility. She says that her parents remind her often that careers in law and medicine are desirable and imply success, whereas a career in teaching would be a waste of their efforts towards her education. Lena agrees with her parents. Mary does not agree with this point although she also hopes to become a doctor. Both girls cited their home countries poor health problems as an impetus for pursuing medicine in the future. The girls are motivated and competitive and they compare grades often. In the beginning of the year, Jack would nod off in class, and only offered an opinion when asked. Towards the end, he gave lengthier responses to articles he had read and wrote a poignant ethnic autobiography. He also interacted with classmates more towards the end of the term. I was impressed when he allowed Lena and Mary to read his very personal ethnic autobiography.



Beyond my observations I learned about the other students through Doc's descriptions. Of the Philadelphia born students, "Joe", is a senior and a second generation Cambodian refugee. Doc immediately informed me that Joe student is having problems at home; his father is deceased, his mother is an alcoholic, and Joe is often forced to take on the 'man of the house' role. In September, Doc said that although the school year had only just started, Joe was absent frequently and the administration had just learned that he was working illegally at the post office to help pay his family's bills. At our first meeting, Joe was very quiet and he lingered at pieces in the museum. He seemed interested in the pieces, but was always alone. Over the course of the academic year, Joe's attendance rose markedly. His participation in class has increased and Dylan said that he has become increasingly more inquisitive during the small group discussions of current events. Although Joe was born in the United States, he currently lives in a neighborhood with many of other Cambodians and he remains aware of his Cambodian heritage as well as the history of his family's experience of war and torture in Cambodia. He was absent on the day that a guest speaker presented on his personal experience with the war in Cambodia and being a refugee. Doc expected Joe's absence and believed it was intentional because of difficult family memories.

As frequent guests to University City High School, Dr. Sanday, Liz, Dylan, and I were permitted to bypass the metal detectors at the main entrance and enter the massive brick school through the side entrance. At this entrance we were consistently greeted by the big security guard, Bullock with a jovial "Hello!" Bullock monitors this door to ensure that students do not leave the building without permission. He is not the only security guard on duty at UCHS; there are also guards at the front entrance as well as

guards that are present in the halls during class changes. The noise in the hallways is occasionally punctured by the piercing whistle of the roaming security as he attempts to create order in an otherwise chaotic hallway. The crowds and noise of the hallway are overwhelming for the visitor, although the activity is usually boisterous and light-hearted rather than confrontational or threatening.

My short walk from the side entrance of UCHS to Dr. Janowitz's room quickly enlightens me to the fact that problems exist in the school. Even when classes are in session there are often groups of students in the hallways. Sometimes they are laughing, sometimes they are bickering. On at least two occasions I smelled marijuana wafting from locked bathroom doors. A peek into the classrooms reveals that the students who attend class yell to their friends across the room, or to the teacher. Other students roam the halls during class time. Dr. Janowitz reports that the rate of teacher absences is high and oftentimes there is not time to find a substitute teacher, leaving the students on their own with no authority figure to keep them in a class. On a particularly volatile afternoon I was told to stay in Dr. Janowitz's office with other students who had the period free because police officers were doing a sweep of the building due to that morning's "riot" and the previous days' arrest on school premises. The violence at UCHS is beyond my scope of research, but it is significant nonetheless. One of the African immigrants in the WCI class, "Chris", was hospitalized after he was attacked by American boys last year. Dr. Janowitz said that there is tension between some of the American students and some of the immigrant students which usually manifests itself in teasing but sometimes violence, as in Chris's case. There is a note of sadness and fear in Dr. Janowitz's eyes and tone when he informs me of these violent events. It is impossible for me to know the

instigators or their motives, but the obvious cultural difference between the students stands out to me. One of the benefits of world citizenship is to know how to interact with those who are perceived as different. Learning about the other and understanding one's identity with the concept of world citizenship can help to transform the school's trends from cultural clashes towards cultural pluralism.

The chaos of the halls and the constant din from surrounding classrooms is an acknowledged reality for the students in the WCI class, but they express frustration in this fact regularly. The most notable example of their frustration in their hectic surroundings occurred when a fellow student was sharing his personal experiences of war in his home country of Sierra Leone. Without hesitation, one of the more outspoken students stood from his chair, expressed disgust with the noise of the neighboring classroom, and dragged his desk closer to the storyteller. An informal interview with a group of WCI students confirmed my observations that the students are frustrated by what they encounter everyday at UCHS. There is an "out of control and wild" characteristic to the halls and to the classes. They also report that there is disrespect for the teachers and apathy towards the pursuit of learning. They simultaneously feel that they did not have the ability to change this custom on a large scale. This latter interpretation is taken from their desire to go with the flow at school, because "being an outcast is trouble" and "there is pressure to be the same". The pressure to be the same that the students feel is manifest in two ways. Primarily, all the students it placed them in an ongoing "crazy system" of disrespect for learning at UCHS. Secondly, the immigrant students feel the ethnocentric pull to "assimilate...because being different in this school is bad". Dr. Janowitz comments that within a few weeks foreign students adopt the

American “thug” variation of the school’s uniform even if they were still struggling to speak English.

There are nuances within this assimilation mindset, as Gibson (Gibson 1993:125 – 126) suggests. Lena values her own autonomy and believes that she can glean the positive aspects from her high school’s culture and disregard others in order to be the person she wishes to be. Many students agree with the view of personal agency even if altering the whole system was not feasible or desirable. Will offers an alternate interpretation, which implies his ongoing struggle to understand his place within the system. Will feels pressure; not only can he not change the system but he cannot alter his role within the framework. He is American born and lives with his grandmother and has limited interaction with his parents. He openly admits to distancing himself from his American friends to spend more time with his international friends. He said that he was not completely trapped in the “thug” culture, which was pervasive at least in attire amongst his peers. Finally, he reflects on the fact that he had not thought about the idea of race and ethnicity in terms of difference before this year in school. Despite his conscious decisions, he sees himself as part of the collective and felt that concluded that other people had more influence over his life and behavior than he did. Although he is unsure of his own agency, he is beginning to reflect on his choices and more importantly his role in the system and with his peers.

It usually takes about five minutes after the 11:27 start time for all of the students to arrive and get settled in the WCI class. There is often informal conversation between students and Doc during this time. Doc can be heard joking with the students, and sometimes he will have to reprimand students for bickering with each other or request

that the students stop talking amongst themselves. The classroom itself is large, considering the small number of students in the class, and the students choose to spread out throughout the room. The desks in room 127 are a mixture of different styles and in no particular order, but they all face the front blackboard and Doc's desk. The blackboard usually has geometry written on it from the previous class that Doc teaches, and it is not often used in the WCI classroom because the class focuses on discussion. The room is covered in maps of the different regions in the world, each with a theme such as rates of child soldiers in Africa, oil production in the Middle East, or Native American tribes in pre-European exploration North America. There is also a poster board which features the Bengali alphabet that was completed by one of the students from Bangladesh. The back wall of the class is a temporary partition rather than a permanent wall, and it allows the noise from the adjacent classroom to carry into the WCI room. Maybe because of the smaller number of students or maybe it is because the students are the best in their classes, but for whatever reason, the WCI classroom is significantly quieter than the adjacent room. The main color scheme in the room is beige which makes everything in the room look worn out; the furniture looks old and there are out of date textbooks stored in piles on the edges of the room.

### *Methodology*

I attended the WCI classroom, which is called simply "anthropology class" by the students, twice a week on average. I spent around one hour with the students in class. My main method was participant observation, followed by note-taking off of the school premises. Occasionally, I stayed longer to speak with Dr. Janowitz or the students. These post-class time discussions involved informal conversations about the state of the school

or the state of his individual students and classes. It was during these discussions that I learned about the state of school beyond the WCI classroom. All of the students were required to write ethnic autobiographies and three of the students wrote responses to the course; these writing samples served as additional insight into the UCHS students' reaction to the course.

My time in the classroom was spent in a variety of ways, but I was always active with the students rather than a passive observer. I experimented with taking notes during the class, but realized the students became inquisitive about my note taking and I could sense that they did not appreciate feeling like an object of my study. The UCHS students from the WCI's pilot year also voiced the concern of being considered "lab rats" (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:73) so I made an effort to avoid giving them the wrong impression. I reserved note-taking time for after WCI sessions. It was initially a challenge to earn the trust of the UCHS students, because they questioned my motives for being there since I was also receiving credit for my attendance at WCI. By December 2006, this issue was forgotten and the Penn and UCHS students became comfortable with the mutual relationship that had been established. There was mutual consent between myself and the students at UCHS that we were both able to benefit from our meetings.

My role in the classroom was officially referred to as a teaching assistant. I gave two informal presentations on topics on which I had significant knowledge. On most days we worked in small groups to discuss current events based on articles from *Newsweek* and the anthropological content of the course. During the sessions the students would relate the discussion topics to their own lives, almost instinctively. From September to December, the course was team taught by Dr. Janowitz and Dr. Sanday and focused

heavily on anthropological concepts from their university level textbook, *Cultural Anthropology* by Conrad Phillip Kottack. There were also occasional presentations on specific cultures and their practices. The focus and structure of the course shifted between semesters. Primarily, the second semester was only taught by Dr. Janowitz, the composition of ethnic autobiographies and the *Newsweek* discussions dominated the first two months of 2007. The ethnic autobiography writing assignment and the discussions surrounding it were crucial for the students because it required that they reflect on their own lives and apply the anthropological concepts that they learned. It was also a significant writing assignment that proved to be both challenging and rewarding for the students. This assignment also provided the teaching assistants with a deeper insight to the lives of the UCHS students.

Many factors need to be addressed to fully tackle the problem of underprivileged and poor performance schools. The variable which I tackle is multiculturalism. Diversity exists at UCHS on various levels such as the immediate socio-cultural backgrounds of the students, and there is both an obsession and suppression of difference. This is not as paradoxical as it would initially appear. There is tension that surrounds assimilation of immigrants, and there is a suppression of difference in the halls and in the curriculum in favor of efforts to create a unified student body. The students acknowledge the dominant process of ethno-centrism at UCHS; in the halls with peers it is the public culture previously discussed, and in the classroom there was an emphasis on Afro-centric history and cultural studies. The efforts in the WCI classroom were meant to utilize the variable of multiculturalism in a more productive way. The reversal of the current process of suppression of multiculturalism can occur through the individuals' self-reflections so that

they would feel comfortable as a world citizen, which will in turn lead to more positive interactions between peers. Finally, I wondered if this endeavor would cultivate greater educational performance.

As I observed the unique patterns that developed within the WCI classroom, I supplemented my field work with more generalized academic research on the topics of education and in particular multicultural and immigrant education. The field work allowed me to draw conclusions about the effects of WCI, and the academic research allowed me to conclude the potential effects of a program should it be implemented across the board. There are many steps on the way to world citizenship that need to be considered in a multicultural curriculum. While world citizenship is still the ultimate goal for the students, I am also interested in the study on how a multicultural curriculum can be used to reveal the “mosaic of cultures” (Baptiste 1983:296) within the WCI classroom and possibly beyond the classroom.

## **Discussion**

### *Immigrant Experience and World Citizenship*

Globalization has brought students from many social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds together in the WCI classroom and the halls UCHS and yet there can be a tendency for immigrant students to be pressured to assimilate, or reject practices.

Research suggests that in the school environment immigrant students often deny or abandon behavior which labels them as culturally different. It is unclear if the students ascribe to the idea that “we are all American” (Torres 1998:215) by choice or if it is an institutional idea that pervades UCHS. To return to the Boas idea of unity in diversity, WCI chooses to reverse this documented trend towards assimilation and allow the



following idea of diversity to pervade: “diversity refers to the plurality of identities, and it is seen as a condition of human existence rather than as the effect of an enunciation of differences that constitute hierarchies and asymmetries of power” (Scott 1992:14).

The experience for the immigrant students in the classroom goes beyond academics. Lena, the student from Bangladesh, says that she was initially very nervous about going to school everyday because American students would laugh at her accent or her poor English and she felt that she could not confront them or stand up to them. Her English has improved but she still feels reserved in confronting the so-called bullies. Instead, she avoids them, but she struggles with this decision too. On the one hand, her safety and best interest are protected by avoiding those students, but the reality has become that she fears and avoids most American students, and so she felt her decision perpetuates the separation of cultural and ethnic groups. Initially she viewed most American students as “bad”, but she has found admirable qualities of America that she wishes to adopt because if it would aid in realizing her goals of graduating and going to a good college and having a successful career. Her final outlook on this situation was akin to Gibson’s concept of the immigrant minority’s multidimensional approach to education and acculturation (Gibson 1993:125 – 126). Immigrants, or voluntary, minorities are more comfortable with the idea that the acculturation at school that takes place in a “multidimensional fashion whereby new skills and values are incorporated into the old culture, transforming but not replacing it” (Gibson 1993:126). Gibson (1993:125 – 126) suggests that the immigrants understanding of schooling is often different from “involuntary” minorities’ understanding of schooling. Involuntary minorities see school as an institution that is in stark contrast to their culture. To succeed in school they must

assimilate fully to the school's mainstream culture. In an attempt to instill the concept of world citizenship, it will be important to reinforce Gibson's latter multidimensional approach to evolve students' identity through education. Lena is not the only one in the WCI class whom is attempting to navigate her way through two seemingly different cultures, Bengali and American.

Mary is from Liberia by way of a refugee camp in Ghana and she consistently says that she is lucky because of the opportunity she has in America. She seems deeply entrenched in the American dream as she spoke about the wealth of opportunity compared to Ghana (where she did most of her schooling). It is interesting to me that both girls see a rough reality around them every day, one of poverty and the threat of bullying and even more dangerous violence, and yet they are so hopeful in the promises of American opportunity. They are able to selectively choose which parts of America they believe were real rather than ideal hopes (college and illustrious careers) and which they believed to be avoidable (poverty and ignorance). Torres speaks of the need to recognize the limits of American ideals and the need to teach the realities which challenge the individual and groups from reaching those ideals. It must be realized that America has a rather unique problem; new and old citizens believe in American ideals and the ability for individuals succeed against all odds. This hope can sometimes bring results, but oftentimes the reality of American lives is very different. According to Torres 1998:, "in a democratic curriculum, students need to be taught about and have opportunities to acquire American democratic values while at the same time learning about American realities that challenge these ideals, such as discrimination based on race, gender, and social class." (Torres 1998:182). He suggests that an open dialogue on the

aforementioned issues and personal and group reflection can bridge the gaps between ideals and realities and lead to his form of multicultural education's ultimate goal, which is social reform and engagement between cultures. In the WCI classroom it is important to ensure that foreign students did not merely assimilate to the ideals of American culture, because the realities are often very different. The realities persist every day, but it seems that the foreign students felt that the harsh realities did not always apply to them. The status of immigrant allows them to feel distanced from what they do not see as helpful on the road to their dreams.

An unconstructive effect of assimilation that the WCI attempts to reverse is the potential for immigrants to feel pressured to lose their old identity and assimilate to an unfamiliar and perhaps negative culture. Some potentially detrimental cultures described before were the public culture of urban high schools or the "culture of truancy" (Furlong 2005:379 – 389). Both of these are transient cultures, which would not affirm the identity of the immigrant or any student for that matter, because eventually they would feel unsatisfied with the lack of self-knowledge and the insularity. The forced idea of America as a melting pot, as described by Baptiste (Baptiste 1983:296), is another ideal that is set forth that is undesirable and also unattainable. Realities of identity must be accepted and perpetuated and in dialogue with different identities. The aforementioned ephemeral cultures are confining and insufficient in affirming one's true identity. It is not a reality to be able to be a productive citizen if you assimilate to a truant's culture and it is extremely difficult to assimilate to ideal of the American dream. Therefore, a curriculum that focuses on reality is more effective, and the reality that persists in WCI is multiculturalism. It is my hypothesis that the promotion and acceptance of the multitude

of cultures and ideas in an open forum would not spread degenerative assimilation; rather it will foster identity formation and world citizenship to all students.

Globalization has certainly brought changes to the world, but it does not change the fact that historically, the American educational system has always included immigrants. At the turn of the century there were great numbers of immigrants from European nations and the practice was assimilation; students would learn American customs, values and English within schools (Torres 1998:179). As new waves of immigrants arrived in the United States from even more nations throughout the twentieth century there was a paradigm shift (Gibson 1993:114). No longer was the educational tactic pure assimilation. Educators began to bring cultural literacy into the classrooms. There was also an effort to challenge prejudices and ensure that each student had proficient in basic skills (Torres 1998:181). These methods are problematic for a variety of reasons. The mission and structure of the WCI implicitly critiques these previous methods from a long tradition of immigrant education.

Torres (Torres 1998:181) also offers a significant critique. He suggests that merely teaching about other cultures for students to gain literacy on different cultures is not enough. Students need to be taught to feel personal cultural pride as well as have substantive knowledge about the cultures both around them and cultures that are seemingly foreign. Next, it is impossible to breakdown barriers and challenge prejudice unless students are taught how to interact with other cultures so that students will not become citizens who only mingle with those who are similar to them (Torres 1998:181). Additionally, there should not merely be an effort to make students proficient in basic

skills; rather educators must strive towards equity between students and excellence rather than proficiency (Torres 1998:181).

### *Understanding Identity and World Citizenship*

The current body of work on multicultural education focuses on allowing students to realize their many levels of identity. In practice, the WCI students were asked to write and ethnic autobiography so that they could come closer to an understanding of themselves. Paulo Freire offers the suggestion that, “men relate to their world in a critical way. They apprehend the objective data of their reality through reflection, not by reflex – as do animals.” (Freire 1973:3). This idea underpins the assignment to make the students write such an autobiography. I believe that it is crucial that they relate to their actual reality because it may be different from their perceived reality.

In theory, teaching pluralism to students at the high school level will make them secure with their own identity, but also allow them to navigate their way through life and be able to interact with other cultures and function within various dominant culture groups. The final step in the identity process is the perception of oneself as a world citizen, and this can be the ultimate goal of a curriculum which focuses on cultural pluralism (Torres 1998 see also Baptiste 1983: 296 – 302). Adolescence is an impressionable time and often a time when people search for their identity; these feelings are exaggerated when the student is an immigrant or feels like a minority in any situation. A curriculum that is critically developed towards plurality will facilitate the acceptance of ones identity as well as foster a sense of empowerment that is rooted not only in ones own cultural identity or national identity, but also in their “interculturality and potential world citizenship” (Golz 2005:8). The quest for understanding ones identity is especially

important in a high school setting where many of the students are immigrants. “We know that the immigrants’ loss of status, identity, confusion, generational conflict, language difficulties, poverty, prejudice, and hostility in the United States work as alien pressures on the immigrant refugees’ state of mind, already beset by the problems of war, hunger, chaos, danger of escape, and separation from family that they brought to the United States.” (Flaxman 1983:347)

The majority of the student body at UCHS is of African extraction, but within this general category are students from different neighborhoods in Philadelphia and students from different nations in Africa. Amongst the African immigrant population there are many nations, languages, and cultural groups represented, as well as a variety of reasons for migration to America. The same is true for the immigrants from Southeast Asia descent or South and Central America. There are students with different religious backgrounds; Christians and Catholics, Southeast Asian Muslims and African American Muslims. There are students with different skin tones, students who speak different languages, and students with different familial situations. One of my perceptions about the UCHS students was that as minorities in the United States they would be hypersensitive to the idea of their race as an identity and a source of pride. However, this was a generalized misconception that I had about the students; in fact many had already admitted to not labeling themselves to any race. One student was proud to say that on his college applications he describes himself as “Other – Human”. And when asked if she felt that she had a particular identity, one student said “I’m a person, no different from anyone else.” These quotes reflect the dominant view in the class; rejection of race coupled with an assertion of global unity. This was affirmed towards the end of the class

when a handful of students confirmed that they would label themselves as world citizens. However, this was not the only view in the class even at the end. Lena admits that she is not a world citizen, she will always be Asian and that is her way of understanding her identity.

Initially I thought that there was disconnect between the students' tendency for global and school-wide assimilation and their tendency to disregard the label of race. However the fact that they desire to be understood at their most general level of existence, their qualification as a human being, shows a reflection of the Boasian belief of "unity in diversity – unity the human ability to adapt to environmental and historical contingencies; diversity as represented by the variety of cultural systems that evolved in the adaptive process" (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:3). Furthermore, in the microcosm of UCHS, I believe that for some students the acceptance of assimilation is their way of exerting a desire for school-wide equality. They want their school to be equal to others, because they recognize it has weaknesses; "I could have gone to another school, and now I am paying the price", or "we have a disadvantage for college". The students also reflected that they are not challenged but instead excel without much effort. They fear that they will face great adversity in the future due to the standards of the world beyond UCHS. Finally, the students also desire to have equality within the school; for all students to be recognized as equal human beings. The students recognize that they have a variety of communities and thus a variety of needs within the school, but ultimately all the students deserve the same equality in education and justice because they are all human needs.

Adolph Reed suggested that there are no natural alliances between people, based on skin color or otherwise; a continuum of debate exists on inequalities from which movements and social change can occur (Reed 1999:50 – 51). At its best, WCI is a place to debate inequalities and bring about social change within the classroom and within the individual. The students were exposed to the idea that their religion, skin color, socioeconomic level, or family history did not lock them into one specific and strict identity. Furthermore, the students did not have natural alliances in the classroom based on traditional divisions between people, thus reflecting Reed's thesis. With WCI we hoped to even bridge more connections between students who initially felt there were seemingly insurmountable lines of difference that could not be blurred. Through exercises in self reflection as well as external exercises in listening to each others' personal stories of war, religion, neglect, and cultural knowledge they learned that they were in fact unified by difference and also by shared emotional and concrete similarities.

The ethnic autobiography assignment gave the students a chance to think critically about their identity even further. They used Freire's (Freire 1973:3) idea of reflecting on ones history and current state through the lens of family stories and genealogies, recurring dreams, reactions to certain people, belief systems, and earliest memories. For many students, revisiting personal history was uncomfortable and full of troubling memories; for Jack it meant reliving the beatings he received from stepfathers and for Chris it meant reliving narrowly escaping the brutal recruitment of child soldiers by rebel forces. However, by doing this exercise each student's status as an individual as an individual was affirmed and it allowed them to think critically on why their behavior, value system, and outlook on life were that way. The students were relatively



comfortable with sharing personal histories. This revealed to me that the students had become comfortable with their fellow students despite initial differences. More importantly it was a step towards the second stage of world citizenship, which was to appreciate someone that appears different from oneself.

### *Democracy and World Citizenship*

What effect does cultural education and service learning have on identity, and the democratic idea of citizenship? According to Sanday the Boasian legacy has a “theoretical and practical understanding of multiculturalism and its commitment to problem solving in the interest of building a community-oriented moral order based on equal rights.” (Sanday and Janowitz 2004:65). Paulo Freire also offers important theory for the intellectual framework towards world citizenship. Freire is a proponent of empowerment through education, rather than an education that is based simply on learning facts and recalling them (Torres 1998:218). In this sense, Freire is alluding to the “politicity of education”, that education can be used as a political tool for the educated and not just the educators. This is in stark contrast to the idea presented by Antonio Gramsci which suggests that, “educational systems, and schools in particular, appear as privileged instruments for the socialization of a hegemonic culture.” (Torres 1998:13). The type of educational system described by Gramsci can be used as a way to maintain the status quo, and keep the subordinate, less educated, and immature members of society in those roles. In this paradigm, the educated would be victims of the glass ceiling effect, in which they can see equality and better social roles, but the system never permits them to evolve into those roles. Torres (Torres 1998:11) calls this the dilemma of democracy;

always reflect on the problems that their students face and attempt to use the strengths of diversity to shape an effective and relevant curriculum for the students (Jacob 1995: 456 – 457)

### **Conclusions**

Activists, researchers, and policymakers alike devote time to understanding education system in America in order to make the social and academic environment of schools more conducive to learning. The social and cultural aspects of a school and its academic curriculum can be dealt with separately, but through participant observation and academic research it becomes evident that there can be a unique correlation between the two at any given school.

Without extrapolating too much from my field work or the intellectual framework, I conclude that the WCI model can be a useful general guide for effective social studies curricula for the cultivation of world citizenship. That is, the social makeup and environment of the school should be examined often so that the curriculum can evolve to meet the needs of the student population. While the basics of high school curriculums, including mathematics, hard sciences, and literature should not be sacrificed, the curricula for courses which fall under the general heading of social studies should be re-considered often. The laws of physics remain stable and classic works of literature have a timeless quality, yet the world and its politics and societies are constantly changing, and so should outdated curricula.

The World Culture Initiative is a particularly salient example of a progressive high school social science course. The social climate at University City High School is made up of a largely African American student population, but it had significant

Difference will continued to be recognized, but it will have different connotations. The idea of cultural pluralism was spearheaded by Horace Kallan as the ideal of what American society should be, a veritable “mosaic of cultures”. All groups of people would assimilate only to the idea of a pluralistic American culture, where they can maintain a personal identity and coexist with others that do the same (Baptiste 1983:296).

A curriculum and social environment of a school must also be adapted towards students’ motivations. Competition is one institutional norm that is pervasive in high schools; however school and succeeding in school can mean different things to different students (Jacob 1995:451 – 457). This is certainly clear in the WCI classroom; some students value receiving the highest grade, others want to be friends with the teacher, some have pure intellectual pursuits and are not overly concerned with grades, others want to bide their time until graduation and free time to make money, others would like to be the class clown or even the bully to gain respect or fear from peers. A challenging type of motivation to tackle is the one that inspires students to be “cool” rather than “clever”, to be more focused on popularity and reputation within a peer group that with academics (Williamson 2004:26 – 28). While students in the WCI believe the curriculum has had an effect on their outlook towards peers that are different, they are unsure if those motivated by reputation would retain any of the lessons learned in the anthropological curriculum. While the literature suggests many ideal situations for multicultural curricula, the realities of American life must once again be acknowledged. This lack of academic motivation is one problem, and when it is coupled with a low socioeconomic status, a student will not leave high school on equal footing as his or her peers. Ideals cannot be forced when the reality is much different, therefore teachers and administrators must

minorities of non-African Americans and immigrant students from around the globe, most notably from Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. As the various cultures interacted with each other there is a heightened opportunity for tension and discrimination based on skin color, religion, language, and behavior in addition to the normal tensions between high school students; such conflicts occur at UCHS. The World Culture Initiative aimed to foster a desire towards world citizenship and replace the aforementioned tension with productive and pluralistic interaction between students as well as cultural self-respect.

Research suggests that the problems of lack of self-reflection and self-knowledge coupled with little interethnic communication are a result of adolescents not having a "place of gathering" (Caunenko and Gasper 2005:36) in which they feel comfortable engaging in such dialogues. A school can serve this purpose, and the WCI provides a means to do so. A school is an interesting type of culture, because it is a forced association between people. The combinations of cultures that join to form the school culture of UCHS imply that multiculturalism exists at UCHS. For this very reason, UCHS and its students will benefit from a school-wide multicultural curriculum. Engagement with such a curriculum will teach the students about themselves, their peers, and the environment they are forced to be in every day.

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