

# **“White Racism, White Supremacy, and the Social Construction of Race”**

## **RECONSTRUCTING CURRICULUM**

### **1. The NATURE OF ASSUMPTION**

- (a). She was speaking from a blind set of subconscious assumptions of which she was not aware and there was a need to deconstruct that and show her how this was so, and;
- (b). Implicit in her lesson plan as well as the statement that she had made was the notion that Native Americans are not “civilized” and that until “civilized” people (Europeans) arrived; there weren’t really any “people” there.

### **2. THE NOTION OF “CIVILITY”**

- (a) “Civility” is in and of itself a very subjective notion and what constitutes it varies from culture to culture. (Cultural Relativity)
- (b). It was her subconscious assumption that the natives were not “civilized” as compared to the European (Columbus). When teachers write plans from this knowledge base they also unintentionally convey deeply embedded cultural assumptions that are not intended. This is what we call EPISTEMOLOGICAL RACISM.

### **3. Scheurich and Young (1997) explain MODERNISM in this way:**

“The name for the Euro-American culture’s construction of ‘the world’ or ‘the real;’ Modernism is a epistemological, ontological, and axiological network or grid that ‘makes’ the world as the dominant western culture knows and see it”

POSTMODERNISM, then, “is the construction of a paradigm that seeks to implement a socio-cultural epistemology that is not solely Eurocentric, inclusive of all perspectives, and that will deconstruct modernism and reposition power in a more equitable way.”

**Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs**  
**(from “Roots and Wings” by Stacey York)**

“Racism is many things. It is a system of domination and exploitation based on the idea of race. Racism has been around a long time and is alive and well today. It is perhaps the single most influential social force shaping American life. It is woven into the economic, political, and social fabric of our country. Here’s a simple way to define racism: prejudice plus power. Institutions such as schools and child care centers have the collective power to enact and perpetuate racial prejudice in ways both overt and so subtle that often the people involved in these institutions don’t even recognize what’s happening.

We live under White racism in the United States. Racism is built into our society’s systems and institutions. White people hold the economic, political and social power by controlling and owning the major systems and the vast majority of institutions that make up American society. As a result, White people are in the position to determine how power, wealth, resources, goods, and services are distributed to all of America’s citizens. Historically, White people created these systems and institutions (for example, the education system and schools) to serve themselves and to keep out people of color. Outright racial discrimination has been outlawed, but racism continues today in ways that are complex, subtle, and often invisible to the naked eye.

Look for racism in outcomes. For example, in your local school or district are the outcomes the same for white children and children of color in the following areas?

- Test Scores
- Grade retention
- Identification as having a special need
- Selection for gifted and talented programs
- Suspension rates
- Graduation rates

If not, you can be sure that institutional racism is at work.”

*A Deconstructivist Curricular Approach*

*(Questioning the “norm”)*

1. Racism is the result of the historical, epistemological, axiological, ontological, systemic, institutional, and societal prejudice of one group (which in our society would be the group labeled “White”) over another (which in our society would be all “other” racial groups). The group that exerts the dominance cannot be the recipient of racism by the groups it subordinates.
2. Racism is not when an individual of one race speaks or acts derisively against a member of another race unless the perpetrator belongs to the group that is the assumed superior and the person being derided is the assumed inferior.
3. Racism is not situational. The group that is dominant is never in the position of “other”—even when in a situation where they are the numeric minority because racism is a consciousness not instances of physical majority or minority.
4. Racism is not an on/off phenomenon.
5. Racism is omnipresent. It is never not there. It is a consciousness. No one needs to “play the race card.” The card is always face-up on the table.
6. Denying the dominance of whiteness in our society does not ameliorate racism in America, it exacerbates it.
7. Individual racism, though certainly unsavory in nature, is only the tip of the iceberg. To truly understand how racism works as a system of institutionalized oppression, one must come to understand societal, institutional, and civilizational racism, which are the roots of racist ideology.
8. Racism is not necessarily overt acts. Racism is a consciousness passed discretely through all of our societal functions to include schools, language, and culture.

9. Multiculturalism is not “learning to appreciate ‘other’ people.” It is an investigation into what it means to be white vs. what it means to be “other” and how to recognize, correct, and ameliorate such differences and assumptions. Once this system is unlocked, one can then begin to investigate other areas of the dominant/subdominant domain i.e. sexism, classism, and homophobia.

10. Three F’s Multiculturalism (Food! Fun! Fiesta!) is detrimental to progress. Such an approach minimizes the true essence and nature of oppressive relationships as well as disguises and diminishes the impact of oppression.

11. We cannot individually dismiss racism as evidence of personal evolution i.e. something that we have “overcome.” Racism is a complex syndrome that constructs the way that we “know”-- not necessarily something practiced by bad individuals.

12. You do not have to practice racist acts to be racist.

13. As a white person, you have inherited and benefit from a set of privileges underscored by social dominance and a position of cultural superiority whether you agree with or accept said positions or not.

14. A multicultural curriculum is not one in which you infuse the “standard” Curriculum (epistemologically based in a White/Euro paradigm) with “other” material (i.e. books about “other” people; plays about “other” people; facts about “other” people; things “other” people eat, etc.) Such strategies only reinforce the present white Euro curriculum as the “norm!”

Because the question must arise “to whom and by what unspoken assumed subconscious, epistemologically-entrenched, standard” do these people, books, foods, ideas, etc. become “other.”

#### Steps toward Multicultural Curriculum Transformation

(From <http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/education/multi/index.mhtml>)

Just as there are several conceptualizations for multicultural education there are several perceptions as to what constitutes multicultural curriculum transformation. Approaches for multicultural curriculum transformation range from slight curricular changes to a fully revised social awareness and action conceptualizations. James Banks (1993), Peggy McIntosh (2000) and others have formulated continuums for curricular reform that help move transformation efforts from the former toward the latter.

The following stages of curriculum transformation have been adapted from several existing models including those by Banks (1993) and McIntosh (2000).

## **Stage 1: Curriculum of the Mainstream**

The curriculum of the mainstream is Eurocentric and male-centric. It fully ignores the experiences, voices, contributions, and perspectives of non-dominant individuals and groups in all subject areas. All educational materials including textbooks, films, and other teaching and learning tools present information in a purely Eurocentric, male-centric format. This stage is harmful for both students who identify with mainstream culture as well as individuals from non-dominant groups. It has negative consequences for the former because, according to Banks (1993) it: Reinforces their (mainstream, dominant culture) false sense of superiority, gives them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups (p.195)

The curriculum of the mainstream has negative consequences for students from non-dominant groups by failing to validate their culture, experiences, and perspectives. According to Banks (1993), it further alienates students who already struggle to survive in a school that differs so greatly from their home cultures.

## **Stage 2: Heroes and Holidays**

Teachers at this stage "celebrate" difference by integrating information or resources about famous people and the cultural artifacts of various groups into the mainstream curriculum. Bulletin boards may contain pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr. or W.E.B. DuBois, and teachers may plan special celebrations for Black History Month or Women's History Month. Learning about "other cultures" focuses on costumes, foods, music, and other tangible cultural items.

The strengths of this stage are that the teacher is attempting to diversify the curriculum by providing materials and knowledge outside the mainstream culture and that the Heroes and Holidays approach is fairly easy to implement with little new knowledge needed by the teacher. Still, the weaknesses heavily outweigh the strengths.



By focusing celebratory attention on non-dominant groups outside the context of the rest of the curriculum, the teacher is further defining these groups as "the other."

Curricula at this stage fail to address the real experiences of non-dominant groups instead focusing on the accomplishments of a few heroic characters. Students may learn to consider the struggles of non-dominant groups as "extra" information instead of important knowledge in their overall understanding of the world.

The special celebrations at this stage are often used for justification -- not to truly transform the curriculum.

The Heroes and Holidays approach trivializes the overall experiences, contributions, struggles, and voices of non-dominant groups, fitting directly into a Eurocentric, male-centric curriculum.

### **Stage 3: Integration**

At the Integration stage, teachers move beyond heroes and holidays to add substantial materials and knowledge about non-dominant groups to the curriculum. The teacher may add to her or his collection of books those by authors of color or by women. She or he may add a unit which covers, for example, the role of women in World War I. A music teacher may add slave hymns or songs from Africa to her or his repertoire. At the school level, a course on African American History may be added to an overall curriculum.

The strengths of the Integration stage are that it moves beyond special celebrations to deal with real issues and concepts and that it more closely ties the new material into the rest of the curriculum. But many weaknesses remain:

### **Stage 4: Structural Reform**

New materials, perspectives, and voices are woven seamlessly with current frameworks of knowledge to provide new levels of understanding from a more complete and accurate curriculum. The teacher dedicates herself or himself to continuously expanding her or his knowledge base through the exploration of various sources from various perspectives, and sharing that knowledge with her or his students. Students learn to view events, concepts, and facts through various lenses. "American History" includes African American History, Women's History, Asian American History, Latino American History, and all other previously differentiated fields of knowledge.

### **Stage 5: Multicultural, Social Action and Awareness**

In addition to the changes made in the Structural Reform stage, important social issues including racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism are directly addressed in the curriculum. The voices, ideas, and perspectives of the students regarding these and all other topics are brought to the fore in the learning experience - the students themselves becoming yet another multicultural classroom resource. The textbook is viewed as a single perspective among many, and the relevance of its limitations, along with those of other educational media, are explored and discussed.

## Lesson Plans: Process, Procedure, Content, Assumption (Meta-cognition)

- IMPLICIT IN ANY LESSON PLAN ARE HIDDEN ASSUMPTIONS.
- A LESSON PLAN IS NOT JUST AN ABSTRACT SET OF PROCEDURES TO ACHIEVE A DESIRED LEARNING OUTCOME;
- LESSON PLANS ALSO IMPLICITLY HELP US TO FORM OUR BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT OUR WORLD

NOTES (for following activity):

ctions