

Critical multicultural curriculum and the standards movement

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ABSTRACT: In the wake of challenges to curriculum brought about by the multicultural movement of the 1960s through 1980s in the U.S., we are now seeing state and national governments take control over curriculum. Although the standards movement is cast as aiming to improve schools, it can be understood as part of a political struggle over who has the right to define how the next generations will see the world and their places within it. This article juxtaposes the multicultural education movement and the standards movement in relationship to four central curriculum questions. It then explores how three early-career teachers in the U.S., who are committed to critical multicultural teaching, are making sense of contradictions between the two movements.

KEYWORDS: Multicultural, curriculum standards, case studies.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum theorists have long wrestled with several persisting questions (e.g., Bellack & Kliebard, 1977; Beyer & Liston, 1996; Kliebard, 1982; Taba, 1962), which I have synthesized into the following four:

1. What purposes should the curriculum serve?
2. How should knowledge be selected, by whom, and what should be the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process?
3. What is the nature of students and the learning process, and how should learning experiences and relationships be organized?
4. How should curriculum be evaluated? How should learning be evaluated? To whom is curriculum evaluation accountable?

As Kliebard (1995) pointed out, “curriculum at any time and place becomes the site of a battleground where the fight is over whose values and beliefs will achieve the legitimation and the respect that acceptance into the national discourse provides” (p. 250).

In the wake of challenges to curriculum brought about by the multicultural movement of the 1960s through 1980s in the U.S., we are now seeing state and national governments take control over curriculum. Although the standards movement is cast as aiming to improve schools, it can be understood as part of a political struggle over who has the right to define how the next generations will see the world and their places within it.

Teachers interested in multicultural education, or even in making decisions at a local level, are caught. Should one follow top-down directives? Should one resist, and if so, how? What is in the best interests of one’s students? This paper explores how three early career teachers who are committed to critical multicultural teaching are

responding to the standards movement. After comparing how the multicultural education movement and the standards movement address the four curriculum questions above, case studies examine how teachers make sense of contradictions between the two movements.

THE MULTICULTURAL MOVEMENT AND CURRICULUM

Multicultural education in the U.S. can be traced to the Civil Rights movement, and further back to the ethnic studies movement of the early Twentieth Century (Banks, 1996), the cultural pluralism movement of the 1940s, and the progressive education movement (Lei & Grant, 2001). The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights movement opened the door for groups who had been excluded from schools, or from decision-making about schools, to speak. As Gay (1983) noted, when schools were initially desegregated, parents and community leaders of colour began to demand that the curriculum reflect their communities, and that teachers expect the same level of academic learning of their children as they did of white children. Advocates and scholars from communities of colour and language minority communities argued that culture and language are strengths on which learning can and should be built.

As a field of inquiry and activism, multicultural education has continued to develop. Many theorists and educators, who are concerned about racism, oppression and democracy, have advanced perspectives that explicitly address social justice. For example, according to May (1999), critical multiculturalism "incorporates postmodern conceptions and analyses of culture and identity, while holding onto the possibility of an emancipatory politics" (pp. 7-8). Berlak and Moyenda (2001) argued that liberal conceptions of multiculturalism support "white privilege by rendering institutional racism invisible," leading to the belief that injustices will disappear if people simply learn to get along (p. 94). However, "central to critical multiculturalism is naming and actively challenging racism and other forms of injustice, not simply recognizing and celebrating differences and reducing prejudice" (p. 92). Scholars also argue that the persistently poor academic performance of many students of colour and language minority students reflects a systemic deprivation paradigm that has tended to go unaddressed (Gay, 2000; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003). Culturally responsive teaching and dual language schooling, along with high academic expectations, are advanced as promising antidotes to that paradigm.

Let us briefly examine how the multicultural movement has framed the four central curriculum questions.

What purposes should the curriculum serve? The multicultural movement defines the main purpose of curriculum as social improvement, particularly as it relates to peoples who have been marginalized on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, social class and other identities. Different theorists and constituents define somewhat differently the central issues needing to be addressed (for example, attitudes versus social structural change), and the central focal group (for example, racial groups, women, people with disabilities). However, they share the goal of reforming schools around principles of equity and justice. For example, by challenging school segregation, biased forms of testing, biased college admission processes, all-English curricula, tracking systems,

biased special education placements, communities of colour and low-income communities have fought for equal access to rich curricula, full educational opportunity, and the same opportunities afforded white affluent English-speaking children.

How should knowledge be selected, by whom, and what should be the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process? A central concern of multicultural education has been opening up what counts as knowledge and who gets to decide. Scholars and educators point to countless ways in which “objective truth” has not been objective, but has consisted of “grand narratives” that begin with the experiences and concerns of elites, and fold everyone into generalizations that are supposedly universal and objective. Further, knowledge and the knowledge selection process relates directly to power. As Collins (1998) put it, “despite their commitment to truth, many of the truths produced by anthropology, biology, sociology, political science, history, and other academic disciplines manufactured consent for colonialism, imperialism, slavery and apartheid” (p. 197).

Multicultural educators have argued that curriculum should be inclusive in order to be fair and accurate, and also that the quality of school experiences for students from historically marginalized communities are severely compromised when textbooks either omit their communities entirely, or portray them in distorted and derogatory ways. On college campuses during the 1960s and 1970s, youth demanded ethnic studies courses that related to their own experiences. Ethnic studies scholarship burgeoned as programs were created and faculty who were hired to teach in these programs found themselves needing to unearth subjugated knowledge in order to teach it. Now, thirty years later, a wealth of ethnic studies research, as well as women’s studies, disability studies, gay/lesbian studies, and other critical studies, offers depth and substance to the quest for culturally relevant knowledge in the various disciplines. This research led to development of various models and approaches to multicultural and bilingual curriculum design (e.g., Gay, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Tetreault, 1989; Watkins, 1993).

In short, the multicultural movement has continued to open and explore the nature of knowledge from diverse socio-cultural standpoints. Knowledge is connected with power; multicultural scholars and activists maintain repeatedly that, “the group who appropriates the device has access to a ruler and distributor of consciousness, identity and desire” (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999).

What is the nature of students and the learning process, and how should learning experiences and relationships be organized? The multicultural movement directly challenged deficit perspectives about children from historically marginalized communities, and ethnocentric assumptions about what “normal” children are like, and maintained that honouring children’s connections to their cultural and linguistic roots and their community-based identities provides the best base for academic learning. Scholars have built on this work to develop theories of culturally relevant pedagogy, which intentionally connects teaching to the lived experiences and knowledge frameworks of students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000).

The multicultural movement, along with progressivism and critical pedagogy, examined relationships between power and the teaching-learning process. Critical

pedagogy conceptualizes students as creators of knowledge, connecting student-generated knowledge with empowerment (e.g., Ada, 1988; Shor, 1980; Giroux, 1992). Freire (1970) explicitly rejected a "banking" form of pedagogy "in which students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (p. 53), viewing it as an instrument of control over the masses. Instead, he viewed empowering pedagogy as a dialogical process in which the teacher acts as a partner with students, helping them to examine the world critically, using a problem-posing process that begins with their own experience and historical location. To Freire, the development of democratic life requires critical engagement and dialogue. Thus, even though multicultural educators recognize that children and youth need to learn the culture of power (Delpit, 1995; Reyes, 1992), educators agree that the pedagogical process should aim toward empowerment and build on knowledge and thinking processes young people bring.

How should curriculum be evaluated? How should learning be evaluated? To whom is curriculum accountable? The multicultural movement has emphasized accountability to historically oppressed communities, since much of the movement arose through grassroots community activism. Communities have emphasized that expectations be high for children, but also that means of evaluating student learning be fair and broad enough to actually capture what children know and can do. Historically, standardized testing has not been designed to do that, and even revamped paper-pencil tests are usually inadequate as sole means of evaluating learning (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

THE STANDARDS MOVEMENT AND CURRICULUM

Today's standards movement became publicly visible during the 1990s, although it began before that. Historically, one can go back to the turn of the Twentieth Century, when early curriculum theorists conceptualized the school as a factory, producing workers for the needs of society. For example, in 1916, Ellwood Cubberley wrote that:

Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of twentieth-century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down (cited by Beyer & Liston, 1996, p. 19).

Similarly, the "back to basics" movement in the 1950s and the competency-based education movement of the 1970s sought to raise student achievement by specifying exactly what all students should know.

The genesis of the current standards-based reform curriculum movement in the U.S. is often traced to publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education), which launched a round of highly visible reform reports that framed the main purpose of schools as regaining U.S. economic competitive advantage internationally. On their heels came a barrage of highly visible conservative critiques of multiculturalism that targeted curricular changes and policies that had been instituted in schools and universities (e.g., Bloom, 1989; Ravitch, 1990; Schlesinger, 1992). They charged that multiculturalism was damaging education and

social cohesion, that multicultural curricula were intellectually weak, and that such curricula addressed minority student achievement in damaging ways by appealing mainly to self-esteem rather than hard work and challenging ideas.

In response to the reform reports and critiques of multiculturalism, starting in the 1980s, states began to construct disciplinary content standards. By the mid 1990s, most states had content standards in place, and were designing or beginning to implement statewide systems of testing. *No Child Left Behind*, passed by Congress and signed into law in 2001, has further solidified this movement. Let us now briefly examine how the standards-based reform movement frames the four central curriculum questions.

What purposes should the curriculum serve? The business community and conservative allies argued that U.S. students are increasingly failing to learn skills and knowledge needed to make the U.S. economically competitive. Since technological advances and global restructuring have transformed the nature of production and work, the U.S. needs to develop many, many more workers suited to the demands of this new economy. Thus, the standards movement defines the main purpose of curriculum as educating and training future workers for a revamped global economy. The Business Roundtable has forcefully articulated this purpose, defining standards, assessment, and accountability as cornerstones to curriculum reform.

At the same time, many educators who are concerned with high rates of academic failure among children of colour and children in impoverished communities, and with the poor quality of curriculum in many urban and rural schools, see the standards movement as a useful tool. For example, Haycock (2001) argued that increasing the academic achievement of minority and low-income students requires focusing on high standards, a challenging curriculum, and good teachers. Thus, defining the purpose of curriculum as improving achievement of those who historically have been undereducated links the multicultural education movement with the standards movement.

How should knowledge be selected, by whom, and what should be the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process? The standards movement assumes consensus about what all students should know and be able to do, and that consensus curriculum frameworks can be established by disciplinary “experts”. To some, on-going debates about curriculum have led to confused and disorganized curricula. To others, the multicultural movement itself weakened disciplinary academic standards. Further, the standards movement assumes that worthwhile knowledge is measurable on standardized tests, and in most states, in English. School or classroom-level selections of knowledge are to be made *within* the boundaries of states’ content standards, and aligned to them.

What is the nature of students and the learning process, and how should learning experiences and relationships be organized? Implicitly, the standards movement casts children as empty vessels to be filled with prescribed knowledge. Standards documents, as well as *No Child Left Behind* legislation emphasize that all children can learn, implicitly framing children as relatively homogeneous except for differences in achievement level. Differences such as those based in culture or language are minimized in standards discussions, except as groups whose scores are to be

disaggregated in order to close achievement gaps. State standards generally are much more specific about what to teach than they are about the nature of teaching and learning. An exception is in the area of reading, where mandated teaching strategies are specified in many state standards. In addition, it is assumed that specific “best” teaching strategies that work in classrooms across the country can be identified through experimental research.

How should curriculum be evaluated? How should learning be evaluated? To whom is curriculum evaluation accountable? Evaluation of students’ learning is strongly emphasized in the standards movement, with criterion-referenced, standardized tests serving as the main evaluation tool. Schools and teachers are to be held accountable to the state through testing, with the requirement of meeting annual targets. Schools are also being held accountable to parents, in a market-based context in which parents have the option to seek another school if the one their children attend does not produce reasonably high test scores.

CASE STUDIES OF TEACHERS

Teachers who are interested in multicultural teaching are caught in between two different sets of assumptions and discourses. Beginning teachers may or may not recognize this or struggle to make sense of it. The remainder of this paper examines three teachers who were early in their careers, and who expressed enough interest in multicultural education to enroll in a Master of Arts in Education program that has this as its focus. Each of the three teachers was a student in at least one of my courses. After having had them as students, I observed each in their classrooms for 2-5 hours, and interviewed each for about an hour during spring, 2004. Additional forms of data for each case study are described below.

Ann: Second-year teacher

Ann was a second-year teacher who had moved to California from the East Coast about two years previously. A young white woman, she taught fifth grade in an elementary school that serves a very diverse, largely low-income student population in which the largest racial/ethnic groups are Mexican American and African American. She completed my course in Multicultural Curriculum Design in Fall 2003, as her first course in the Master of Arts in Education program. At that time, multicultural teaching was new to her, although she had student taught in a London school that served students of Afghani and Pakistani descent. In addition to two one-hour observations in her classroom and an interview, data for this case study also consist of a set of reflection papers she wrote over the semester, a research paper, and a unit that she designed (which I observed her teach).

What purposes should the curriculum serve? Ann was fairly new to thinking about this question. As a new teacher, she believed that it was her job to teach to the prescribed textbooks and academic standards. At the same time, she saw schools as places where young people might learn to construct a better world. In the interview, she said,

We need to teach diversity, because of everything that’s going on in the world. If we

make it like a natural process, then people won't grow up to have prejudice and hate.
(January 28, 2004)

Over the fall semester, Ann had begun to reflect on connections between school and politics. In a paper, she commented that parents she worked with and her immediate co-workers did not seem to see schools as having a political purpose; education professors were the main group raising such questions (October, 2003). But in the introduction to the unit she developed, she wrote: "Our future depends on improving the quality of life on earth. A considerable part of this improvement is people's ability to exist peacefully with one another" (December 15, 2003). Although Ann was more comfortable thinking about the process of teaching than the politics of education, she wrote in a reflection paper that articles written by teachers in *Rethinking Schools* helped her link the two, and see how to teach students to question the world (November 24, 2003). I suspect they also prompted her to question her own assumptions.

How should knowledge be selected, by whom, and what should be the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process? Although Ann began the semester assuming that a teacher's role is to teach what is in the standards and textbooks, after analyzing her social studies textbook and identifying ways in which histories of communities of colour were marginalized, she found herself faced with a dilemma:

I have concerns with teaching the history textbook content. As a public school teacher, though, you really can't go outside of your prescribed literature and academic standards. So, I believe at this moment that it is my job as a teacher to try and guide the students to question and look at the text differently than what they read in the chapter. . . .The dilemma is how to tactfully incorporate other multicultural views in a school-adopted textbook, and be able to cover all the standards the state and government expects of you at the same time. . . . (September 30, 2003)

Over the semester, however, she became increasingly critical of her textbook. For a paper, she read U.S. history from perspectives of indigenous writers such as Ward Churchill and Winona LaDuke, which led her to realize that the text has a narrative storyline that contradicts those of indigenous peoples. She also realized, based on interviews with some of her students, that "they knew very little about the colonization period of the United States" and particularly indigenous people (December 15, 2003). By the end of the semester, she wrote in a paper:

History is told overwhelmingly in the white European male perspective. . . . The history text teaches the story of American history as 'We the People' as a succession. All the chapters from 30,000 B.C. to 1600 are never rethought after colonization. . . .The broader ideology that is being supported in the text is that it is natural for Europeans to succeed prior races without accepting or studying their culture. (December 8, 2003)

To that end, she designed and taught a three-day unit that juxtaposed perspectives of Wampanoag Indians and colonists in Massachusetts during the 1600s.

Thus, over the semester, as a result of analyzing her own textbook and reading counter-narratives by indigenous scholars, Ann began to question the neutrality of

state-mandated curriculum.

What is the nature of students and the learning process, and how should learning experiences and relationships be organized? Ann struggled with how to implement constructivist teaching strategies while maintaining classroom discipline. For a reflective writing assignment, students were to identify a teaching practice they favoured and had tried unsuccessfully, and analyze their response. In a reflection paper, Ann wrote about her experiences with small group activities:

The students did not respond to my group activities as well as when practised in my student teaching. When given manipulatives in Math, they were thrown sometimes. In Language arts we worked in writing workshop groups, and more times than not there were disagreements and fights. The science experiments resulted in many referrals and suspensions. (November 3, 2003)

Her new teacher mentor told her that she was giving the students too much freedom, and that “this kind of population needs seat work, and a definite routine everyday. . . .As a result, I backed off on these activities and have a ‘whole class’ teaching method instead of learning centres” (paper, November 3, 2003).

But she was not comfortable shifting to a teaching paradigm that regarded children as empty vessels to be filled. Ann commented that Donald Macedo’s writings, assigned in class, helped her formulate this struggle:

My theory on this is that students tend to talk out and voice expressions when interested in a certain subject matter. . . .I feel that some cultures need to be heard, literally, more than others. The quote from Macedo, “Education so as not to educate” makes me think. Is this the type of teaching that I’ve adopted from my mentor, just silencing students that probably need to speak out? My dilemma here is, how to have a classroom where students speak out, learn in different ways, and in group settings, without having troublesome discipline problems. (November 3, 2003)

Ann developed and subsequently taught a three-day unit that included a variety of teaching strategies. I observed days two and three. Day two involved a rather rowdy simulation activity in the gym, followed by a recitation lesson; Ann struggled to keep the class under control the whole time. Day three involved a carefully-structured role-play in which they brought the colonists to trial for misusing the natural resources on which the Wampanoag depended. Ann had created parts for every student. She also invited students to think through who was guilty, why, and what the resolution should be. The students were engaged throughout the lesson, with very little off-task behavior. Through this and other carefully planned activities, Ann began to reclaim her earlier conviction that learning should be active and that students should be challenged to think for themselves, as she saw the connection between well-planned, engaging lessons and students’ response.

How should curriculum be evaluated? How should learning be evaluated? To whom is curriculum evaluation accountable? Ann had beginning skill in evaluating student learning using authentic assessment. In the unit she developed, she assessed student learning mainly by reviewing their work and attending to their comments during discussions. But the state’s testing system overshadowed any other approaches to evaluation of student learning. Toward the end of the interview, she commented:

The tests, the big tests, the state tests districts are, they're all coming up in three months, and there's so much to teach, and, now this week everybody's way ahead of me because I took a week to kind of stop and really, really thoroughly investigate the Native Americans. . . . And now there's science and social studies in the testing also. (January 28, 2004)

Ultimately, as a second year teacher, Ann felt accountable to the state. And, although she could critical evaluate curriculum and student learning herself, what mattered was how students did on the state's tests.

Ann exemplifies a new teacher who is uncertain about her own skills and assumptions, but very responsive to examining issues through a critical multicultural lens. Her school had adopted the assumptions of the standards movement; Ann was drawn to those of the multicultural education movement. Over the five months of my work with and case study of her, she grew tremendously. At the same time, she was feeling her way along as a new teacher, in the context of tremendous pressure to raise test scores. One can wonder how she will continue to develop her thinking about curriculum over time.

Cheryl: School context and a novice teacher

Cheryl is an African American elementary teacher who had been a student in three of my graduate courses between 2000 and 2002. When the district closed the school of her first teaching position, she took another position as a second grade teacher in another community that serves a highly diverse, urban population. When I visited her classroom in February 2004, Cheryl was midway through her second year there. In addition to one classroom visit that spanned about five hours, and an interview, data for this case study also consist of notes I kept on student work during one of my courses, and her master's thesis.

What purposes should the curriculum serve? Cheryl entered teaching with a strong desire to improve education experiences of children of colour. She was concerned about low expectations many teachers have for such children, and believed that all children should be taught to grade-level standards. As a multi-grade teacher, however, she did not see standardization as the solution, and recognized a conflict between the growing standards movement and the flexibility she valued in her classroom. She also saw school as a way of helping future citizens become more responsible. For example, one of her interests was preservation of the earth through managing resources wisely; she was also interested in students developing cross-cultural appreciation and a global conscience. In her first teaching assignment, she had some control over curriculum, partly because she was teaching in a multi-grade classroom that required creative planning.

Cheryl moved to a different school at a time when the state narrowed reading textbook adoptions for primary level down to two scripted packages, and increased pressure on teachers to raise reading and math scores. This shift connected with her commitment to teaching to grade-level standards, but also narrowed how she was to think about curriculum. In the interview, she repeatedly expressed mixed feelings about this. For example,

Well, I would say that it makes my instruction be more centred, because you have to

hit these standards. The reality of it all is the kids are going to be tested on it. . . . I've gotten away from, um, some of the things that I really value, like I'd like to spend more time with the kids with the guided reading, individually, more individual time, but this program, there's not a lot of time for that. (February 5, 2004)

How should knowledge be selected, by whom, and what should be the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process? Cheryl believed that curriculum should reflect cultural diversity, and had acquired a wonderfully extensive collection of multicultural children's literature. She was very good at developing thematic units, using a broad array of children's literature. She was also good at doing background research to unearth knowledge by and about diverse cultural groups. For example, in order to develop her own background for a unit on "Recycling with a Global Conscience" while in one of my courses, she became interested in learning about Asian perspectives, so she located articles by Vietnamese, Indian and Pakistani writers. Further, as a multi-grade teacher, she believed that children's interests should play a part in structuring curriculum.

When she moved to her second teaching assignment, Cheryl found herself in a context in which the curriculum was already decided, leaving little space for her own decision-making. The reading/language arts program her school adopted occupied three hours per day; math was allocated another hour and ten minutes. She felt that the design of the reading/language arts program was better than what she did on her own:

If you would have asked me a few years ago, I'd have been totally against it, but actually using this program, I can say that it works quite well. It is heavily phonics based, you know, and it gives them everything that they need, and it's designed to adhere to the standards, so you get standards-based material, that works quite well. Because, you know, when you're designing your own thing, I used to just pull out a book and say, OK, I'm gonna hit this one, and this, and this, and this program is very systematic. (February 5, 2004)

As a second grade reading teacher, Cheryl was still a novice. Formal instruction for teaching reading at the elementary level had consisted of two, three-credit, pre-service courses in Language and Literacy for the elementary level, and one graduate course in children's literature. Her previous teaching experience was with three grade-levels in one room. So, as a novice teacher, she appreciated a systematically planned curriculum.

But it left her with little time to pursue students' interests, work in depth with multicultural children's literature, work with writing, or teach other subjects such as social studies and science. Further, her reading/language arts text defined much of what constituted a multicultural curriculum. For example, while showing me extensions she was able to add to her reading/language arts textbook, she explained that,

We're able to do it [integrate multicultural content] in that sense, now you may not be able to pull in everything you'd like to pull in, but I think, you know, . . . you can actually integrate quite a bit. . . . But due to time constraints, I can't go real deep in it, 'cause I don't have the time to. (February 5, 2004)

While the stories in the textbook looked very culturally diverse and engaging, the school's curriculum had reduced multicultural content to textbook stories and holidays. Gone, for example, was time for Cheryl to teach her unit on "Recycling with a Global Conscience".

Cheryl also mentioned that the scripted program reduced her own thinking. Since it was planned right down to what to say and what answers to accept from children, she didn't need to spend very much time preparing, and in a sense, wasn't really needed except to transmit the program. So, while it might make her reading instruction more systematic, her school's standards-based curriculum took away most of the teacher's power to make curriculum decisions.

What is the nature of students and the learning process, and how should learning experiences and relationships be organized? Cheryl's pre-service program and first teaching experience developed her interest in developmentally appropriate instruction. Her experience as a multi-age teacher taught her that children could excel beyond grade-level standards, if curriculum was organized flexibly. Her familiarity with developmental psychology and learning theory supported her interest in peer tutoring, small group instruction, and teaching to children's zones of proximal development.

When she moved to her second teaching assignment, Cheryl found herself using a curriculum that was designed largely around principles of behaviorism and direct instruction. She had mixed feelings about this. On the positive side, the systematic approach seemed to be helping the children learn to read, and she was able to use some small group instruction and peer tutoring. But she had put away most of her learning centres, and had less time than she would have liked to involve her students in reading books of their choosing, writing, and doing hands-on activities.

How should curriculum be evaluated? How should learning be evaluated? To whom is curriculum evaluation accountable? I do not have data about how Cheryl approached assessment and evaluation in her first teaching assignment. In her second teaching assignment, students were tested regularly as part of the reading/language arts program her school was using.

I give the same skills tests, which is like directly after all of our stories, like at the end here, so after about four stories, they get a skills test. Once that's done, I give the California standards-based – that other test. . . . I may give a summative test to test their skills as we're working through the unit, and then also we have, like an integrated theme test that kind of breaks up a little bit, so you can see what standards they're actually reaching throughout. But, I mean, I give a whole lot of testing. (February 5, 2004)

Some of the test results were sent regularly to the state, which was monitoring student progress. So, in the model her school was using, curriculum is evaluated through testing, and teachers are held accountable to the state.

But when I asked Cheryl about assessment as a part of multicultural curriculum design, she replied that she doesn't do assessment except for all of the reading testing. My impression was that teachers in her school were required to administer so many reading tests that Cheryl was experiencing testing as overkill.

Cheryl exemplifies how a novice teacher can end up adhering to a standards movement ideology when it connects with part of her own value system (raising achievement of students of colour), and when the materials she is given are planned more systematically than she has the experience or background to do herself at that point in her career. Although Cheryl brought some very good skills, resources and interests from a multicultural education paradigm, the standards movement paradigm not only did not recognize or value these, it also left Cheryl with little time to use expertise that she *did* bring. As she gains more skills and confidence with the second grade curriculum in this school, might she shift back more fully toward a multicultural paradigm?

Rita

Rita is a Mexican American elementary teacher who, as a teenager, had immigrated to the U.S. from México. When I visited her classroom in February 2004, she was midway through her fifth year in the same school teaching second graders. All of her students were from Mexican backgrounds; some were born in México, others in the U.S. Since all had Spanish as their primary language and their parents wanted them in a bilingual program, Rita taught them in Spanish for at least half of the day. She had been a student in five different courses I taught between 1995 and 2003. Data for this case study consist of one classroom that spanned about five hours, and an interview; my ten years of knowing and working with Rita also played a role in my interpretation.

What purposes should the curriculum serve? In the interview, Rita emphasized that the purpose of schooling is empowerment. She recalled a point in her last graduate course in spring 2003, when suddenly big ideas fell into place:

I realized at that point how important it was, the significance, the relevance, I just never saw myself as an oppressed group. I knew we were oppressed, but I didn't know – it was the time when we learned about emancipatory stuff, and it clicked, and I went wow! We need to teach our kids when they are little about overcoming all of that, about power. (February 10, 2004)

She explained that throughout her college education, she had been learning about various cultural groups, various forms of institutional discrimination, and actions one can take. But it wasn't until she was about to graduate that she realized that multiple groups in the U.S. share positions of being oppressed, and need to learn to work collectively in order to bring about changes; and that as a teacher, she could begin to help children claim power.

We're expecting students to get power in college. College doesn't – college gives you power, but you must bring it with you, from when you're little. That's when I realized, wait a minute! I did have power, but I didn't know how to use it. People were taking it away from me. And I was letting them. And now I can't let that happen. So then I realized, I need to teach my students to be creative people, responsible citizens, independent thinkers, people who speak their minds, all of those things, I need to teach my little ones all of that and more. (February 10, 2004)

So, she began to investigate what her second graders would need to learn in order to succeed in junior high, high school, and ultimately college. Further, since her students

came from a community that cannot afford what middle class communities might take for granted, she saw school as critical:

I want all kids to be exposed to technology. . . .Many of my kids don't have that opportunity. Many of them live in a one-bedroom apartment, with 7, 8 different members, and they don't have a chance to use a computer. That's not to say none of my kids do. But the majority don't. Or don't get a chance to go to the library and use it. So I want them to be exposed to publishing. (February 10, 2004)

How should knowledge be selected, by whom, and what should be the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process? By her fifth year of teaching, Rita was clear that she has a right to determine the curriculum. She explained that during her first two years of teaching, she was busy getting to know the second grade curriculum. At that time, she was only vaguely familiar with the standards. Then she began to study the standards to find out what she should add to her curriculum, "like diphthongs and homophones, and all of these things, synonyms and antonyms." By her fifth year, she was very familiar with the standards and with the texts her school had adopted; she viewed them as a guide. "The standards have just guided me, let's put it that way. I don't see them as my core belief, like I believe this is what kids need to know. No, this is what they could possibly know by the end of the year" (February 10, 2004). In fact, her own curriculum is tougher than the standards for second grade. For example, she teaches her students to create Word documents on the computer and do basic Internet research, and she takes them into third grade concepts in writing and math.

I expect more than what's in the curriculum. Therefore I give them more. For example, our curriculum expects for them to be able to multiply timetables twos, threes, fours and fives. That's all. When they finish second grade, they know how to multiply times six and all the way up to eleven and twelve. And they have to be able to divide with remainders. Remainders! A remainder is a third grade curriculum. But I expect them to do it. . . . The standards say for second graders to be able to write a paragraph or two paragraphs. But why not three paragraphs? Or why not four or five at the end of the year? (February 10, 2004)

In order to do this, Rita carefully studies the standards and adopted texts, and figures out what is key and what she can skip. A combination of experience, staff development and cues in the text have helped her identify which standards to attend to. She commented that, "If you were to cover every standard, you would be 70 years old by the time you finished with all of them. It's too much, so I pick key standards" (February 10, 2004). Being selective and knowing where to focus her energies has enabled her to teach more. Although her reading/language arts program is scripted, she doesn't follow the script. She explained that she just can't – doing so isn't her. But as long as her students are progressing, her principal lets her get away with it.

She also tries to make the content as multicultural as she can, given the limitations of resources she has available. She explained that the students enjoy learning about other cultures. In my observation on that particular day, whole class instruction included two different books about Africa. She told me that her students also enjoyed Aztec dance when she has taught it.

Although Rita took charge of curriculum decision-making in her classroom, she also

selected which battles to fight. During my observation, she spent about fifteen minutes coaching her students through reading four patriotic passages for a school production. She explained to me that she really did not like this particular set of readings, but all second graders every year read them as part of the school's production. She decided that this particular battle was not worth fighting.

What is the nature of students and the learning process, and how should learning experiences and relationships be organized? Rita saw her students as active agents of their own learning. This view was reflected in writing and research projects she organized. During the previous school year, she produced five books of student writings using MS Word, which she bound like library books, and this school year she produced six. She explained that she started teaching the children to produce books when she realised that too much of the standard instructional program was boring.

I enjoy teaching but I didn't find it fun. I did not find anything fun about it, it was all about paper and pencil, paper and pencil, and I knew the kids were getting bored. I was getting bored myself, because I'm used to more interactive and engaging activities, not just one thing. (February 10, 2004)

She also reflected on her own experiences as a learner. For example, in the university she came to see herself as an author when, in several courses, books were created with student writings. Rita said that after graduation, when cleaning out her materials, she threw away her papers but kept the books. She figured that if she was most engaged in school when working on interesting projects that prompted her to think for herself, her students would blossom with similar treatment.

Rita used stations for reading/language arts and computers, and with practice, she learned to teach children how to help each other: "I train kids, like I may teach one child how to do one thing, so if another child comes to the same question, I direct that child to the other student so that I don't have to repeat myself two, three, four, five times" (February 10, 2004). This has helped the children learn both independence and peer tutoring. Rita explained that initially, the stations were chaotic, particularly the computer station. But she was convinced that her students could learn to use a classroom system that fostered independence and peer tutoring, so she experimented until she got the system working. When I visited her classroom, it was working very smoothly.

How should curriculum be evaluated? How should learning be evaluated? To whom is curriculum evaluation accountable? Rita paid close attention to how students are doing on tests, although she viewed the various tests that are mandated by the state or that come with her reading/language arts package as guides. But the tests indicate that her approach to teaching is working:

I've seen students improve in their reading, and I can see from the day they come in. Just to compare, this year out of 19 students I had 14 below benchmark, two above benchmark and the rest of them, average. And right now I have 5 below benchmark, only 5 out of 14. I had 2 kids above benchmark, right now I have 7 above. I'm really pleased with their work, because kids are reading 100 words per minute. And in English they're reading close to ninety and a hundred, they're really close to that, in English and Spanish you can see both languages pulling up, and I like that. (February 10, 2004)

Ultimately, Rita saw teaching as accountable to the students' parents. She establishes relationships with the parents from the beginning of the year. These relationships are part of her conviction that schools should be giving the best possible education to children from historically marginalized communities. She is frustrated with other teachers who expect less of the children, teach them less, and pay little attention to the children's home community.

Rita's fundamental beliefs embrace a multicultural education paradigm. As a fifth-year teacher, she had worked her way through becoming familiar with the second grade curriculum, and she had learned (to some extent through trial and error) how to implement the constructivist, meaning-making, teaching strategies that she believed in. Her education had also helped her develop an ideology and conceptual tools for constructing teaching as empowerment. Ultimately, her beliefs and convictions can be traced back to her own lived experiences as an immigrant who had lived in poverty and had used education for her own empowerment. The case of Rita suggests that other less experienced teachers might also learn to place the demands of the standards movement in perspective and use them as tools for education that is crafted through the lens of critical multiculturalism.

DISCUSSION

Multicultural education and the standards movement address key curriculum questions quite differently. Multicultural education is grounded in a vision of school and social reform as based on the empowerment of historically marginalized communities, and arose largely from such communities. The standards movement defines schools in terms of the needs of the business community; it was started largely through the business community, and was linked with the concerns of critics of multiculturalism. Although both movements aim to improve the learning of students from historically marginalized groups, their definitions of what should be taught, who should decide, how children learn, and whom schools are accountable to, are very different and in many ways contradictory.

I undertook these case studies to find out how teachers who bring a strong interest in multicultural teaching are grappling with the standards movement in their own classrooms. As the case studies show, teachers currently cannot avoid the standards movement. Because of the extent to which testing based on standards is driving day-to-day processes in schools, teachers must reckon with the assumptions of this movement. As Ann shows, new teachers not only lack power within their schools, but also detailed familiarity with the curriculum they are expected to teach, and the kind of confidence in their own pedagogy that comes with experience. With support, a new teacher can learn to work constructively with multicultural education in the context of the standards movement. However, without that support and encouragement, swimming against the tide is much more difficult. Even though my relationship with Angela after completion of the Fall 2001 course shifted from professor to researcher, emails from her suggested that my interest in her work and my visits to her classroom served as a form of on-going support and encouragement.

Rita spoke of having spent the first two years of her teaching career learning the curriculum. It was after that, that she began to confront its limitations and to

experiment. More experienced teachers who move from one school to another, or one grade level to another, may find themselves in much the same situation as new teachers. Although Cheryl was a fourth-year teacher, for example, she was having to learn a new curriculum and new expectations. These three case studies suggest that developing critical multicultural educators may require on-going support over the first few years of teaching, given the contexts of schools in relation to the standards-based movement.

The case studies also show how different teachers forefront different aspects of the multicultural curriculum. All three valued strengthening the achievement of their students, as well as engaging their students with diverse perspectives and knowledge from diverse communities. The two teachers of colour tended to forefront achievement. This was evident in Cheryl's positive evaluation of her reading/language arts package, which she saw helping the students learn to read even though it short-changed her ability to do other things. It was also evident in the effort Rita made to teach more difficult skills than are in the second grade standards. In contrast, Ann fronted diverse perspectives and cross-cultural understanding, which was evident in the unit she developed and taught. These differences may affect how teachers engage with the standards movement. Those who see the movement as a tool for improving the academic education of students from historically marginalized communities may be willing to live with the way it limits the power teachers have over the curriculum if they believe their students will benefit on academic achievement tests.

The political question is: Who should have the power to define what happens in classrooms, and in whose interests? Advocates of the standards movement see it as a way to improve student learning in schools, and see the state in collaboration with the business community as having legitimate authority to define classroom work. The case study of Rita shows, however, that a teacher with a strong commitment to critical multiculturalism and enough experience to have developed the practicalities of excellent teaching, may bring a richer, more ambitious, and more compelling vision to the work of teaching. If teachers and communities are not granted the power to define teaching, power can nevertheless be claimed.

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