# From Deficit to Expansive Learning: Policies, Outcomes, and Possibilities for Multicultural Education and Systemic Transformation in the United States

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**Abstract** This chapter outlines the cultural-historical context that informs the depth and breadth of the construction of difference based on race, class, language, and ability in relation to multicultural education in the United States today. The chapter first highlights the history of multicultural movement from the early twentieth century to the present. The author examines demographic changes that underscore a need for national policies to address diversity and new populations including policies that account for immigrants who constitute an increasingly diverse and skilled global citizenry. Then, the chapter reviews the ways in which education scholars have conceptualized culture and multiculturalism in United States. The author argues educators must understand the history and cultural contexts of students' lives in order to develop a multicultural classroom and curriculum. Lastly, the chapter presents two successful education programs for youth from historically marginalized culturally and linguistically diverse background: The Migrant Student Leadership Institute and Learning Lab, author recommends educators pursue multicultural curricula and programming as a means to foster a critical dialogue about the importance of non dominant students and communities' active participation in a democratic and inclusive society.

**Keywords** Multiculturalism • Policy • Racial disproportionality • Sociocultural theory expansive learning • The migrant student leadership institute • Learning lab

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# 1 The History of Multicultural Education in the United States

With roots in the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, multicultural education in the United States has moved through three phases: An early focus on ethnic studies; a mid-twentieth century focus on intercultural education; and a more recent turn toward multiethnic studies that includes the study of global migration (Banks 2004; Gollnick and Chinn 2009; Nieto 2009). At the turn of the twentieth century, African American leaders in education—notably W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter Woodson—campaigned for educational equality. These and other scholars, including George Sanchez (1940) writing about Mexican Americans' de facto segregation, demanded universal literacy and school integration (Nieto 2009). Their efforts informed the later Civil Rights Movement, which in turn informed the landmark 1954 desegregation ruling by the US Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The question of the case was the following: Does the racial segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprive the minority children of the equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment? The following opinion of the court was delivered:

> We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.
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> Because these are class actions, because of the wide applicability of this decision, and because of the great variety of local conditions, the formulation of decrees in these cases presents problems of considerable complexity. On reargument, the consideration of appropriate relief was necessarily subordinated to the primary question—the constitutionality of segregation in public education. We have now announced that such segregation is a denial of the equal protection of the laws... (Brown v. Board 1954)

Along with the growth of ethnic studies came an appreciation for teaching tolerance and promoting cross-cultural dialogue. The interwar and post-World War II years in the United States thus saw the growth of a second phase, intercultural education that followed from ethnic studies. This phase stressed the need for cross-cultural communication and the promotion of mutual respect. According to Gollnick and Chinn (2009), the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish community provided leadership at this time.

Like ethnic studies, intercultural education was imbued with a deep sense of social justice. It intersected with 1960s and 1970s movements that focused on bilingual education, gender equity, and the rights of persons with disabilities. For example, there were several key court cases in 1970s for people with disabilities. *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children* (*PARC*) *v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) was a seminal case concluded that states must guarantee a free public education to all children with mental retardation ages 6–21 and younger if school districts provide services to preschool age children without disabilities. This case laid the foundation for the establishment of the right to an education for all children with disabilities.

However—and ironically, because the intent of multicultural education was to include everyone—certain groups of students became defined as lacking cultural capital and were internally segregated, within schools, as a result of civil rights campaigns. To be sure, civil rights activists of the 1960s and 1970s led the way toward the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (now, Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]). This law granted the right of students with disabilities to receive free, appropriate, and public education. The law prohibited publicly funded schools from excluding students with disabilities. However, researchers quickly noted the unintended consequences of this progressive law of educational inclusion. The students from non-dominant racial groups and living in poverty were over-represented in special education classes for more subjective disability categories such as behavioral disorders and excluded from mainstream classrooms (Dunn 1968; Donovan and Cross 2002; Heller et al. 1982). African American and Native American boys were, and often remain, the most affected group (US Department of Education 2014).

Multicultural studies starting in the 1990s entered a third phase—multicultural education in the context of globalization—that examined topics covering human mobility, public policy, and multi-direction immigration. Scholars began to examine the *transnational* networks of knowledge and movements through which ideas about culture and history flow. Research shifted from thinking about the intersectionality of race, language, class, disability, and other markers of identity to looking at how positions of dominance and subjection unfold historically, through differential access to and control of educational opportunities.

Emphasis was less on defining the traits of culture groups and seeking means of communicating "across cultures" than on understanding how ideas about culture and diversity are produced through different understandings of world events, differential access to resources, and participation in local and world markets. Multicultural educators' tasks thus became a matter of teaching about the *incessantly* changing terrains of global realities. Multicultural educators and researchers stressed the need for "internationalization"—for students, advocates, policy makers, and educators to become more aware of how the United States and its students fit into a world characterized by fluid and fast movements of people, goods, and information.

As with most curricular matters in the United States having to do with teacher education, the tenets of multicultural and global education became integrated with standards for new teachers. Starting in the 1990s, members of the federal government sought to identify what every student should know, particularly in areas of reading and mathematics. Although responsibility for setting education policy and identifying curriculum in the United States rests ultimately with each of the 50 states, the federal government historically has provided a degree of funding for programs pertaining to students' special needs. In 2001, the government exerted unprecedented pressure on state systems of education when the Congress passed and the President signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB 2001). For the first time in history, the United States government required all schools receiving federal aid for special programs to report students' test scores by categories of students' race, gender, English language proficiency, disability, and income level as

a precondition for schools to receive future federal aid for special programs (NCLB 2001).

The history of multicultural education, in short, marks, follows and also seeks to transform broader trends in formal schooling. First cast in terms anti-discrimination education, then in terms of education as a civil and human right, and most recently as a set of measured standards for schooling in a global age, multicultural education has both endured and changed with the times. Its symbolic and pedagogic value has covered a sufficiently large surface area so to include many groups, issues, and ideas.

## 2    Philosophical Underpinnings of Multicultural Education in the United States

At a deeper level, the philosophical undercurrents of multicultural education run across a wide range of social and political values. Although educators often agree about the positive value and transformative possibilities of multicultural education, the scope and content—even the very existence, at times—of multicultural education has been a subject of public, sometimes highly politicized, debate. The substance and tenor of discussion is often complicated and contradictory, though it is precisely at points of contradiction that multicultural education—like the United States democracy itself, many political philosophers would argue—is enlivened, transformed, and productively regenerated.

One set of competing principles has to do with individual versus collective sovereignty. As a nation whose founders studied European law and history, the United States legal system embeds a particular version of western European political ideology. This political ideology, in its strand, rejects authoritarian government, defends freedom of speech, association, and religion, and grants the right of parents to educate their own children. The general sentiment from one angle within this liberal-democratic philosophy is that "the individual is sovereign" over "the tyranny of the majority," as John Stuart Mill put it in *On Liberty* (1859: 11).

From another angle, democracy is understood to mean that collective reforms should be undertaken in the interest of maximizing the overall well being of the citizenry, not only the well being of individuals. The argument from this angle is that without practical measures taken by the government to make educational opportunities available to everyone, social classes reproduce themselves, the United States leadership becomes inbred, and individual talent is left behind. It depicts schools as social engines that, if properly tooled, can generate and regulate equality. In the words of Horace Mann, the Massachusetts senator most closely associated with the founding of public school: "Education, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men-the balance wheel of the social machinery" (1848: 86).

One of Mann's ideals was to build consensus while fostering diversity-an idea that remains at the core of multicultural education as it is practiced in the United States. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, the United States leaders began to project an image of the nation as a "melting pot." This ideal however has never entirely matched everyone's realities and is inept of conceptualizing a globalized world where are almost 200 million immigrants and the amount of new technical information is almost equal in the information produced in the entire history of the world in only a couple of years (Darling-Hammond 2010).

The ideals of building consensus, creating harmony, or forming unity often meant silencing certain voices and excluding nondominant cultural groups from civic participation (Bal 2012). Most students in the United States today learn that the ideal the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal"; but whether or how to make this ideal a reality for all is less commonly agreed upon. Some critics of multicultural education regard multiculturalist leanings as a threat to dominant culture and the western canon. Other critics argue that multicultural education has become too nebulous. By having widened its scope to include many forms of identity such as gender, sexual orientation or religion, these critics argue that the field has lost its original objective of addressing the needs of and inequalities experienced by members of particular groups.

The very concept of multiculturalism—at least as practiced in the United States—derives historically from the western Enlightenment and as such is hardly representative of *all* cultural possibilities (Caughey 2009). Nonetheless, this point is rarely taken up in studies of multiculturalism in the United States. Instead, what has become clear through multicultural studies education is that older divisions of capital versus labor, left versus right, urban versus rural, even military versus civilian or majority versus minority are today anachronistic (Schuck 2009).

Within the field of multicultural education, then, as it is practiced in the United States, the "individual versus collective" and the "unity through diversity" paradox are all reproduced in various versions. The political philosophies under-girding multicultural education in United States schools can instantiate a wide range of values, including liberal, communitarian, even conservative. To understand how multicultural education plays out at the nexus of these divergent elements, it is important to look at the changing racial, linguistic, and religious dimensions of schools, and at the history of United States immigration policies.

## 3   Changing Demographics

In the United States, educators face a high degree of demographic and cultural diversity in their schools. Approximately 48 % of all students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade self-identify as students of color. In comparison, 84 % of teachers identify as European American (US Census Bureau 2006).

Demographic projections show that in a few years more than half the student population nationwide will self-identify as nonwhite (National Center for Educational Statistics 2015). Latino, Asian American, Native American, and African American students already make up more than half the student bodies in Arizona, California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas (Gollnick and Chin 2009).

Recent waves of immigration to the United States have posed new opportunities for defining and teaching about multicultural education. Immigrant is as an umbrella term for foreign-born youth and for first generation youth from immigrant families. In the United States, immigrant children account for 10–15 % of youth under the age of 18 (United States Census Bureau 2012). It is expected that this percentage will rise to about 30 % in the next few decades (Passel 2011). About 30 % of the foreign-born population emigrated from Mexico; about 26 % came from countries in Asia; and about 14 % and 4 % respectively came from countries in Europe and Africa.

Of course there also exists a parallel phenomenon of *undocumented* immigration. In 2005, the number of undocumented migrants in the United States rose to an estimated 12 million, and in 2007 the number of deportations reached record levels: 319,000 removals (Schuck 2009). Critics of multicultural education argue that multicultural educators help to advance illegal immigration by teaching undocumented children. Multicultural educators respond that education is a human right and that educating all children equally builds a stronger national and international future.

Changes in the population are particularly evident in language practices. Not only is the national majority changing to include more members of so-called minority groups but the percentage of children who speak a language other than English at home has increased notably in recent years. In 2012–2013 academic year, 9.2 % of public school students were identified as speaking a language other than English at home.

Religious diversity is a new form of diversity for many Americans. Historically the United States has been imagined as a Christian nation. There is no state-sponsored religion in the United States. About 43 % of the population attends a religious function weekly—much more than in most of Europe, where church-state establishment is more common. Although Protestants remain the largest religious group, they no longer constitute a numerical majority. Muslim, Buddhist, Hindi, and Sikh communities have become more visible recently. In the last two decades, American public view of Islam has become quite hostile. Saad (as cited in Gollnick and Chinn 2009) reported that 22 % of Americans at that time did not want to live next to a Muslim, 18 % indicated nervousness upon seeing a covered Muslim woman on an airline, and 40 % admitted to feelings of anti-Muslim prejudice.

A major issue for United States educators since the time of 9/11 has been to find a way to teach about religious plurality without violating either the Establishment Clause or the Free Exercise Clause. In part the growing religious diversity of students makes this project easier. Teachers fostering multiculturalism can address

religious diversity through carefully designed discussions of individual and social practices and histories. Through carefully designed discussions and other activities, educators and students can collectively examine the current socio-political situations through historical and political analyses of colonialism and global capitalism. Such critical analyses will help learners to understand religions or nations as historically evolving social systems situated in specific material conditions, prone to significant and novel changes—both progressive and regressive (Bal and Arzubiaga 2014).

Less visible than racial, linguistic, or religious diversity is diversity associated with class. The United States continues to become more segregated on the basis of occupation, educational attainment, and income, yet segregation on the basis of class is often hidden by residential patterns and families' self-selection into different kinds of schools. Seventeen percent of all children in the live below the official poverty line; and 41 % of all fourth-graders nationwide are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches. Class has intersected with race in schools. Classrooms in high poverty schools are 77 % more likely to be assigned to an out-of-field teacher than those in low-poverty schools. Schools with majority white students are 60 % less likely to be assigned out-of-field teachers than majority non-white schools (Children's Defense Fund 2004).

Wealthier families can either pay for private schools or choose to reside in a high-performing district on the basis of their ability to afford high rent or buy a house. Education programs that provide parents a choice in deciding what kind of public-financed education their children will receive-e.g., charter schooling, home schooling, and private education supplemented by public voucher-often indirectly reproduce de facto segregation based on economic class, race, and ability. One consequence is that self-selection (or re-segregation) into different programs gives the illusion that change is not happening. Educators promoting multiculturalism must thus understand the various political projects and the social and economical spaces in which they are teaching and help students look beyond visible signs of difference.

## 4   Education and Immigration Policy

Immigrant youth are the fastest growing student population in the United States (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2010). Changing demographics spur changing federal and state policies, which in turn change how public view the diversity and multiculturalism. Although there is no single policy defining multicultural education, a cluster of immigration and education policies shape and direct ideas about diversity and schooling. For example, in states like Arizona and California, fueled by the national unity and homogenous national identity projects, a coordinated effort supporting anti-immigrant and bilingual education policies create a powerful hegemonic discourse that conceptualize the cultural and linguistic practices that nondominant students bring to school as academic and behavioral deficits. These polices, as a form of social control, see the role of schools and educators as "fixing" the linguistic

and cultural deficiencies of the students from nondominant communities (López and López 2010).

The history of immigration in relation to schooling can be marked by three events: 1924, when Congress established the Border Patrol; 1965 when it passed the Immigration Reform Act; and 2002 when Congress passed the Homeland Security Act. Immigration The 1924 Border Patrol was established as part of that year's Immigration Act. The Immigration Act allowed deportation of undocumented persons at any time and sought to police borders through proactive policies. The Act also established a quota system based on national origins of the number of people entering. After September 2001, the border became a flashpoint for discussions about good government and citizenship. In 2006 Congress jointly increased border personnel and built 700 miles of double fencing (Fraga 2009).

For at least 25 years after the Immigration 1965 Act passed and opened doors to many nonwhite immigrants, schools supported bilingual education. In no small part, the bilingual education movement came out of the civil rights era of the 1960s. Mexican American students wanted to learn and speak Spanish in schools-to which state and national leaders largely responded at that time favorably. Cooperation between constituents and leaders resulted in the passage of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act. In 2001, however, Congress-facing pressure from state legislators and their constituents, many of whom were stirred up by now about immigrants as the main cause of job loss, terrorist threat, and looming economic problems-passed the English Language Acquisition Act.

The English Language Act included nine provisions, all of which favor English teaching. The eighth provision is noteworthy here in that it gave the federal government the power to supervise states' compliance with the Act; it also refused to fund states whose own state education policies failed to comply with the federal legislation. Some scholars question whether international covenants pertaining to multicultural education might be used to question national policy. The United Nations' 1960 Convention Against Discrimination in Education, for instance, projects cultural and language minorities, and can be read to include the rights of immigrant children. No action at this time is being taken, however, at the level of international governance and organization.

Across the late twentieth century, United States education and immigration policies were clearly complex, highly politicized, and paradoxical. But most observers agree that by the early 2000s, United States policy was both pro-English language and pro-immigrant-as though political leaders were trying to please a wide range of constituencies. Most Americans today support immigration, but do not support violation of laws. Many value their idealized immigrant past, believe in the ideal of building unity through diversity, and believe that the United States is a pluralistic society. It would seem that the mixed history and politics of the United States would have ensured by now that the value of multiculturalism would be less vexed; yet as Sonia Nieto (2009) aptly notes, despite all the hard work of educators over the years, "The improvement of educational outcomes for students marginalized by society because of social and cultural differences, remains largely unchanged" (p. 91).

Notwithstanding ongoing issues, multicultural education remains a prominent focus of educators. Since its origins in the United States more than one hundred years ago, through its "intercultural" and "ethnic studies" phases, multicultural education has served as a rich concept through which to address and teach about social changes. Today's educators draw on interdisciplinary research and professional experiences to tackle new challenges of the twenty-first century. In doing, they bring to the table of public conversation practical issues that call for future research and discussion.

## 5   Practical Issues: Implications for Educational Research and Practice

The most pressing questions that emerge from the historical, philosophical, and policy analyses are: *What should educators do*? *With so many countervailing interests, practices, and ideas in play*, *how should educators move forward with a multicultural curriculum*? *And finally*, *how should researchers study to understand and utilize diversity*?

Most educators strongly support the teaching of multiculturalism as a transformative educational strategy that is similar to J. and C. Banks' (2007, p. 1) definition:

> Multiculturalism is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school.

Likewise, most educators recognize that the students from nondominant cultural groups deal with structural and social inequities in schools. These students live in the concentrated poverty neighborhoods and attend the racially segregated dysfunctional schools that lack even minimal educational opportunities, high quality teachers, and a nurturing physical and social environment (Darling-Hammond 2010). As a result, nondominant students experience higher drop-out rates, lower academic achievement and college attendance, and negative economic and psychological life outcomes.

Youth form nondominant background are also over-represented in special education programs for subjectively identified disability categories such as emotional disturbance and learning disabilities, while they are under-represented among high achieving classes and gifted and talented programs.[1] Moreover, school discipline

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[1] Disproportionality—or the unequal numbers of students from particular cultural, SES, and/or demographic groups in special education classes—has been studied for nearly five decades. Two National Research Council (NRC) reports examine this issue (Donovan and Cross 2002; Heller et al. 1982); and the 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations of the Public Law 94-142, the special education law, stress the importance of addressing disproportionality. Yet, nationally and internationally, the phenomenon continues (Artiles and Bal 2008).

has been racialized in the United States. Nationally, African American, Native American and Latino students are punished more severely for less serious reasons such as disrespect, excessive noise, or insubordination compared to their white peers (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008).

In United States schools are negative perceptions toward nondominant students' behaviors. These students' academic identities are generally constructed as troublemakers, disruptive, resistant, and unlikely to succeed (Ferguson 2001). Negative perceptions and prejudices are also experienced by newly arrived-immigrant and refugee students (Bal and Arzubiaga 2014). To illustrate, 65 % of all immigrant/refugee students indicated that Americans have negative perceptions about immigrant students and their intellectual potentials (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001).

Multicultural curricula and classrooms might better serve nondominant students and challenge the long-lasting inequities and deep-seated prejudice (Ladson-Billings 1994). But before this happens, a sea of change needs to occur in the conceptualization of culture in education research and practice. To help educators think through and beyond the conceptualization of culture as mere inheritance of traditions, beliefs, and norms frozen in time, a robust and practical theory of culture examining the intersection and dynamic interactions of individual, institutional, and interpersonal factors is necessary (Artiles et al. 2010). In a sense, there is a need to put the "culture" back into "multicultural education."

# 6   Putting the Culture into Multicultural Education

The concept of culture in education studies has not always been as clearly defined and carefully examined. "Culture is very difficult for humans to think about. Like fish in water, we fail to 'see' culture because it is the medium within which we exist" (Cole 1996, p. 8). Since at least the early twentieth century in the west, two general conceptualizations of culture have arisen. Each conceptualization affords certain positions for minority students. One assumes that each ethnic or racial group can be categorized in cultural scale from low to high (Gallego et al. 2001). Within this framework, the thoughts and behaviors of each member are genetically bounded and behaviorally determined by the degrees of culture found in that society. For example, *culture of poverty* or *cultural deprivation* can explain racial disparities in social and educational outcomes (Erickson 2009). This conceptualization still dominates education and psychology literature in the United States (Bal 2011; Bal and Trainor 2015).

A second view of culture is based on sociocultural or cultural historical theory that holds that culture is instrumental and ever evolving. Informed by dialectic materialism, sociocultural theory was built on Lev Vygotsky's (1978) and his follower's experimental and ethnographic work. It provides a generative and

transformative notion of culture and cultural mediation: Individuals make and use culture to break away from constraints of their immediate environments (Vygotsky 1978).

Sociocultural theory defines culture as "a historically unique configuration of the residue of collective problem solving activities among a social group in its efforts to survive and prosper within its environment(s)" (Gallego et al. 2001, p. 955). This operationalization opens up more possibilities to develop comprehensive theories of learning and development by offering a basis for understanding and designing teaching and learning as transformation of individuals and social organizations.

From this perfective, three sets of factors come together in the making of school cultures. *Individual factors* include the cultural and linguistic competencies that students and teachers bring with them. *Institutional factors* involve the structural context that is already there such as rules, privileged behavioral practices, narrative styles etc., in schools. *Interpersonal/interactional factors* refer to the different yet overlapping social environments that emerge in schools when people work together such as the ecology of interactions (Rogoff 2003). Such a dynamic and instrumental view of culture considering both structural constraints and innovative potential of individuals can:

> [a] inform future research priorities and policy making in general and special education; [b] document how special [and general] education practice, research, and policy [are] enacted in racially and economically stratified schools and communities; and [c] lead to significantly improved educational outcomes for students from historically underserved groups (Artiles et al. 2010: 296).

How we define culture or cultural difference and the ways in which we study nondominant students and communities play a critical role in understanding the salient educational disparaties and how we address these problems through educational practice. Erickson (2009) argues, education and social scientists have studied cultural diversity in a normative and ahistorical way to moralize cultural differences and to judge some as better than others. Academia has justified and reproduced the existing social order for the benefits of dominant groups. Gutiérrez (2006) explained the cultural and political work of how researchers may perpetuate dominant models of cultural superiority and inferiority by using the concept of *white innocence*. White innocence refers to "the dominant subject position that preserves racial subordination and the differential benefits for the *innocent* who retains her own dominant position vis-à-vis the 'objects' of study" (Gutiérrez 2006, p. 4).

Writing about the cultural situatedness of research activity, Arzubiaga and colleagues (2008) proposed researchers need more comprehensive, textured, and instrumental analysis of experiences and practices of students from nondominant communities. Arzubiaga and colleagues (2008) offer a dialectic-materialist view of culture that seeks to understand how people work as active social agents to change their selves and their organizations.

# 7 Sociocultural Approaches to Learning

Sociocultural theorists see that people learn and develop "through their changing participation in the socio-cultural activities of their communities, which also change" (Rogoff 2003, p. 11). Culture provides a toolkit that structures and is structured by people's learning in specific social-spatial-temporal contexts where individual and social histories, goals, practices, tools, and power/privilege intermingle (Cole 1996). Sociocultural researchers examine on how people participate in the socially constructed, culturally enacted, and historically constituted contexts (Holland et al. 1998). Main intellectual lineage of sociocultural theory within the United States goes back to scholars in psychology and education, including but not limited to Michael Cole, Sylvia Scribner, James Wertsch, Frederic Erickson, Barbara Rogoff, Ray McDermott, Kris Gutiérrez, Yrjö Engeström, Louis Moll, James Gee, and Alfredo Artiles.

The main contribution of sociocultural studies to students' learning is an increased understanding among and for educators of how learning occurs in the context of everyday activity or through *informal learning*. This is especially important for nondominant students, for reasons that their competence in informal cultural and linguistic activities is often characterized by deficit (Cole 2013). As Bransford et al. (2006) aptly suggest the most crucial consideration in exploration of learning is not where learning takes place, but the *discontinuities* between informal learning and the explicitly didactic teaching/learning practices.

An example of the cultural expression or output of informal learning is in the rhetorically powerful narratives of many African-American youth. These narratives share similar characteristics with high quality literary texts (Nasir et al. 2006). However, they are not the privileged way of performance in schools. Students using these narrative styles are generally devalued and positioned negatively as incompetent or "at risk" learners (Bal 2014). Regular experiences of devaluation, negative identification, and social stereotypes influence learners' future participation, affect, and performance on academic tasks (Steele 1997).

Research on informal learning demonstrates the critical roles for multiple voices and practices. Learners are not passive receptors but active social agents in their life-long learning and development (Engeström 2011). Students' active engagement assists students' cultural communities in adapting to a constantly changing world. Studies of informal learning provide a rationale for the incorporation of multicultural perspectives into curriculum and instruction. Researchers interested in multicultural education can examine the ways in which students develop different-even contradictory-pathways of competence in academic and non-academic settings systems as well as how students' academic and behavioral performances are assessed in daily activities and through research. For example, it would be important to study how teachers build on students' existing cultural toolkits to facilitate developing new networks and different ways of practicing and expansive learning for both dominant and nondominant students.

Even though learning is situated in activity, not every activity results in *deep or transformative learning*—"a deep understanding of complex concepts, and the ability to work with them creatively to generate new ideas, new theories, new products, and new knowledge" (Sawyer 2006: 2). Deep learning activities allow nondominant students to (a) appropriate the school-based knowledge and thinking, various cultural resources and practices, collaboration, and previous experience to reason unique configurations of real-world problems; (b) actively participate in constructing their own knowledge in meaningful and valued activities; (c) reflect critically and dialogically on their own process of learning and actions; (d) experience flexible and just-in-time feedback from others within the classroom and school setting; (e) feel safe and have a sense of belonging and positive identification; and (f) be adaptive expert learners who maximize future learning opportunities and engage in innovation and expansion (Bransford et al. 2006).

To better understand how multicultural educators can facilitate deep learning environments for nondominant students and families, consider two exemplary programs that employed sociocultural approaches to learning and organizational transformation: The Migrant Student Leadership Institute and Learning Lab.

## 8    The Migrant Student Leadership Institute

The Migrant Student Leadership Institute (MSLI) is a 4-week-long summer residential program for migrant students. Its goal is to help migrant students develop the skills and competencies needed to enter into higher education, and to assist them in reflecting on and directing their own personal and shared experiences as nondominant students (Gutiérrez 2008). Most of the participants' parents have come from central and south America; a few have come from Vietnam and the Philippines. A majority of the students and parents work as farm laborers and live in impoverished neighborhoods.

During the regular academic year, the MSLI students attend secondary schools throughout southern California. Many have experienced academic failure and have been labeled by their teachers as having social and behavioral problems in poor dysfunctional urban school of the toxic living conditions neighborhoods. To illustrate, malnutrition among migrant farm workers' children is 10 times higher than their nonimmigrant peers. Migrant farm workers' average life expectancy is 49 years compared to the average life expectancy of 73 years in the United States (United Farm Workers 2010).

MSLI conceptualizes literacy as a tool for social transformation and political engagement with the world. "Traditional conceptions of academic literacy and instruction for students from non-dominant communities are contested and replaced with forms of literacy that privilege and are contingent upon students' sociohistorical lives" (Gutiérrez 2008, p. 148). MSLI deliberately utilize students' cultural and linguistic competencies.

If we narrow down from MSLI's overarching philosophy of inclusive education to look at the elements taught in a particular subject, we see a rich integration of cultural experiences and practices into the curriculum. One of the significant genres of the critical literacy curriculum of the institute is testimonio, written and oral autobiographical accounts. Students share- and rewrite- their testimonio across a various range of reading, writing, and performance-based activities. There are other genres and activities with multiple structures such as comprehension circles, whole-class discussions, writing conferences, teatro del oprimido, tutorials, and student presentations and performances. Those activities are designed to facilitate deep learning.

The curriculum of the institute aims to combine practice-based theories of learning and development with the past, present, and future of the local migrant communities. The instructors help immigrant students to remediate/rewrite their individual and collective pasts in order to critically examine and use their collective experiences as resources for future actions (Gutiérrez 2008). MSLI activities are chosen not only to raise awareness about inequities but also to show the possibilities to transform those circumstances. Gutiérrez stated (2008, p. 155) "There is a conscious attempt to find hope and possibility in new understandings that can serve as new tools for helping students read and write their way into the university as consciously historicized individuals."

This critically designed program has created positive outcomes for students. Several students who were otherwise at risk for academic failure successfully completed high school and were accepted into prestigious universities (Gutiérrez 2008). But more importantly, for multicultural educators whose major goal is to change the structure of schools, MSLI demonstrates the possibilities of designing effective and transformative multicultural learning environments.

## 8.1   Learning Lab

Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS) Project is a multi phase mixed method study that addresses racial disparities in school disciplinary actions (or the racialization of discipline) and aims to facilitate systemic transformation in public schools in the state of Wisconsin between 2011 and 2015. Wisconsin is an important place for this work as the state was identified as one of the worst states to live for African American and Latino youth in the United States, in terms of education and life outcomes (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2014).

Throughout the project, the CRPBIS research team worked in close collaboration with the state's educational agency, two school districts, and community-based organizations (e.g., the Urban League, Centro Hispano, the Boys and Girls Club, and YMCA). CRPBIS uses a participatory social justice perspective that strives to nurture democratic institutions in order to value and utilize individual and group differences and foster emancipatory possibilities (Bal 2012).

The ultimate aim of the CRPBIS framework is to build schools' capacities for equity-oriented problem solving and systemic transformation (Bal 2011). It positions nondominant students, families, and communities as social agents that create change—not passive objects of social reform efforts (Freire 2000). The framework guides local education agencies and schools to design culturally responsive school discipline systems with local stakeholders, especially those who have been historically excluded from schools' decision-making activities (Bal et al. 2014).

In the first phase of the CRPBIS project, the research team conducted statistical analyses to identify the patterns and predictors of racial disparities in behavioral outcomes (i.e., special education identification for behavioral disorders and exclusionay school discipline) in Wisconsin schools. The analyses examined how student level variables (e.g., race, reading and math scores, and home language) interacted with the school level variables (e.g., racial composition of schools and teachers' race, language, and education). The analyses showed African American students were seven times and Native American and Latino students two times more likely to be removed from the learning environment due to disciplinary actions. Student race and academic achievement were significant determinants, which were more robust to income level, and English proficiency and school level factors such as racial compositions of students and teachers in schools (Bal et al. 2015).

In the second phase of the study, the research team moved into schools to intervene the school systems that had produced the racial disparities. The CRPBIS research team used a new and innovative methodology of formative intervention, called *Learning Lab*. I developed the Learning Lab methodology as an inclusive, inquiry-based problem solving process through which diverse stakeholders examine and renovate behavioral support systems to create supportive and positive schoolwide behavioral support systems for all and address racial disproportionality in behavioral outcomes (Bal 2011).

Formative interventions seek to facilitate expansive learning and transformative agency among practitioners in multiple activity systems (e.g., health care and agriculture) (Engeström 2011). There are five principles of formative interventions:

> (1) The object-oriented collective activity system is the prime unit of analysis (2) systemic contradictions are the sources and motives of movement, change, and development in activity systems; (3) expansive learning is a historically new type of learning, which emerges as practitioners struggle through developmental transformations in their systems, moving across collective zones of proximal development; (4) the dialectic method of ascending from abstract to the concrete is the key for mastering cycles of expansive learning; (5) an interventionist research methodology that aims at pushing forward, mediating recording, and analyzing cycles of expansive learning in activity systems is needed. (Engeström 2015: p. xvi)

CRPBIS Learning Lab is the first formative intervention in the field of special education (Bal 2011).

## 9   Learning Lab Process

Effective and sustainable institutional transformations in schools demand time, strategic planning, continuous involvement, and a robust theory of change (Frattura and Capper 2007). Learning Labs were formed at three urban, public schools (elementary, middle and high schools) with two specific goals: to (1) unite and empower stakeholders who are historically excluded from schools' problem solving processes and (2) provide a structure in which school practices are examined and renovated (Bal et al. 2014).

CRPBIS Learning Labs included educators (e.g., principals, special and general education teachers, paraprofessionals, and social workers), community-representatives working with the participating schools and nondominant students and family members (e.g., African American, Latino, Hmong refugee, and the families experiencing homelessness). School and district leaders have actively collaborated with the research team from inception to dissemination of the study findings (Bal et al. 2014).

In Learning Labs, a diverse group of stakeholders joined forces to engage in root cause analysis of disproportionality and designed new school discipline systems that were culturally responsive to diverse needs, experiences, and goals of local school communities (Bal et al. 2014). Multiple data sources (e.g., school's academic and behavioral data and interviews) with new mediating artifacts were used to inform local stakeholders' systemic transformation efforts. A set of interactive data maps was developed for the use of education leaders, educators, and families (see http://crpbis.apl.wisc.edu/). The first set of map, called the map of risk, shows the risks for racial disproportionality for all racial groups across all districts in Wisconsin. The second set of the map, called the map of opportunity, shows the racial, income, and language diversity in each school in two districts along with the social service and advocacy organizations (e.g., free legal council, homeless shelters) serving those school communities. Two Learning Lab schools successfully maintained the inclusive problems solving teams and developed culturally responsive behavioral support systems.

Overall, the analyses showed that Learning Lab holds promise as ways to facilitate the democratization of schools via culturally and linguistically diverse stakeholders' authentic and sustained participation in the problem solving processes in schools (Bal et al. 2014). Learning Labs have functioned as research and innovation sites for the CRPBIS schools and the school districts, state's education agency, and research team to test and improve practices and artifacts for facilitating ecologically valid systemic transformations. One of the school districts that participated in the project is now working with the research team to scale up Learning Lab in all schools in the district.

## 10    Conclusion

In the United States, the concept 'multicultural' pulls in two directions: One toward a celebration of diversity and individuality; and another toward the creation of a national curriculum that is paradoxically both pluralistic yet culturally unifying. In view that the United States is undergoing clear demographic shifts and changes in student population, and in view that education institutionally serves to both shape and to enable a dynamic citizenry, multicultural education in the United States is in need of sustained support and, indeed, expansion.

Culture is dynamic, multifaceted, and instrumental. Such an observation supports the need to take into account not only individual students' experiences but also the classroom and as well as wider institutional factors that play into students' lives in and outside of schools. By examining interacting multiple activity systems, educators can understand how nondominant students navigate across cultural spaces, deal with new and uncertain opportunities, and share their experiences with others. By communicating the importance of multicultural classrooms to the wider public, educators and policymakers can ensure that a national system is democratic, inclusive, and responsive to global changes.

Thinking synergistically about individual, institutional, and interpersonal factors and focusing on how individuals participate in dynamic activity systems expands the educators' understanding of learning, development and, indeed, of the world (Ladson-Billings 1994; Wortham 2006). Taken together, principles of sociocultural and sociocultural theory-oriented programs such as MSLI and Learning Lab show educators how multicultural education programs can be instrumental for transforming historically marginalized nondominant students. Such scholarship and programs are significant for a global multicultural education movement, whose ultimate aim is to transform institutions to facilitate expansive learning opportunities and outcomes for *all*.

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