

Teacher's Viewpoints about Other's Actions: Implications for Multicultural Education

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Introduction

Already some time ago, Paul Ernest argued how it is possible for two teachers to have similar mathematical content knowledge but very different orientations in their instructional approaches (1989). According to Ernest, this is because teachers' beliefs concerning the teaching of mathematics influence how they make sense of and teach their contents in the classroom. In other words, different orientations toward the practice of teaching influence how mathematical contents are delivered to students. More recently, other researchers have shown how different prospective school teachers encounter and interpret culturally responsive pedagogy very differently (Gere, Buehler, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009). According to these researchers, different positions taken by different prospective teachers were largely shaped by their racial beliefs, which have long histories.

There are at least two significant points depicted by these researchers (this above sentence can be deleted; it is empty). First, the bases or beliefs that teachers use to make sense of the information they encounter have a strong affective component in their pedagogical actions. Second, teachers' beliefs which largely serve as a filter for how they interpret the information they encounter in education, is most likely to have developed long before the teachers entered their classrooms. Therefore, teachers' pedagogical practices are influenced by the factors that are beyond the immediate context of classrooms.

Various researchers have used many different terms such as "attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy" (Pajares, 1992, p. 309) in order to investigate how and why teachers react, interpret, understand, and translate specific information and view their students in ways they do. That such a long list of terms has been used to explore teachers' thought processes reflects the messiness and complexity of teachers' beliefs (Pajares, 1992).

As cultural, ethnic, racial, social, and linguistic diversity has become a major defining feature of schools and society in U.S and other countries in the world, several researchers have studied prospective teachers' and in-service teachers' perspectives toward people and cultures different from their own and how these perspectives influence those teachers' classroom interactions, their expectations of academic achievements of diverse student populations, and interpretations of multiculturalism, for instance (e.g., Bakari, 2003; Lewis, Ketter, & Fabos, 2001; Silverman, 2010; Song, 2006; Tatto, 1996). Lewis, Ketter, & Fabos in their study



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concluded that their own interpretation of multicultural literature and interactions among participants of different racial backgrounds were largely constituted within their own social and political locations. In other words, teachers' social, cultural, historical, and educational backgrounds that are intimately linked to those teachers' pedagogical beliefs become the implicit guidelines for how they work with diverse student populations.

Recognizing the significance of teachers' beliefs, and hence assuming that "teachers' beliefs have profound influences on their instructional judgments and actions (Gay, 2010, p. 143) while also recognizing that teacher educators and teachers including those of racial minority need more interaction with each other within and across "ethnic cluster" (Gay, 2010, p. 144) particularly in current diverse educational settings, this study explores how the teachers from different cultural and racial backgrounds interpret actions of the characters represented in the short stories and movie that embody intercultural and multicultural themes. The two short stories are "Mother Margaret & the Rhinoceros Café" (Kaiser, 2003) and "Crazy" (McCracken, 2003), and the movie is "Crash" (Danbury et al, 2005), and they are understood as intercultural and multicultural in this study because the characters in each stories and movie are from different racial and cultural backgrounds and the plots revolve around the conflicts and tensions arising from interactions among different characters. The questions that guided this study are: How are actions of the characters in the short stories and movie understood and represented by the participating teachers? Within a thematic analysis employed to analyze the data in this study, what categories are used by these teachers to represent their beliefs? Where do these categories come from and how might they relate to relevant external forces and structures of society? What are the consequences of the teachers' beliefs about the actions of cultural Others in the short stories and film with respect forging more productive forms of multicultural education?

I wish to explore whether and how teachers' responses to fictional characters in the short stories and film in this study may very well manifest in and impinge upon their teaching diverse student population. More specifically, embedded in the teachers' responses to actions of fictional characters are their assumptions about success, failure, right, or wrong in everyday life including in multicultural education.

Conceptual Framework

According to Bourdieu (e.g., 1977, 1990, 1998), all people are inescapably constituted within a variety of historically constituted social and political discourses. Moreover, these discourses are not explicitly learned but implicitly learned through every day practices and deeply internalized. They thus falsely appear to be self-evident and objective facts, and they dispose people to take particular actions or make particular choices in ways that are neither entirely conscious nor intentional. In this regard, Bourdieu also argued that only by investigating and making explicit the implicit meaning embedded in people's psychologies and viewpoints can they be subject to analyses and possible change. In other words, and more in relevance to this study, although not entirely possible, understanding the constitutive forces of teachers' viewpoints is necessary because they mediate teachers' sense makings of the world, students, and multicultural instructional practices. Notwithstanding the social fact that teachers are subjects-in-process and that they may alter their beliefs about diversity as they learn from working with their students, it is also important to understand that teachers enter classrooms with already formed beliefs about diversity which become an implicit filter through which



those teachers work with their students. That said, if some of teachers' beliefs have counter-productive effects in promoting students' academic achievements and emotional growth, it seems reasonable to argue that those viewpoints must be transformed; yet, we cannot transform something that we know little or nothing about. Recognizing the impossibility of tracing exact sources of teachers' beliefs, it still seems necessary to make an effort to understand, however incomplete, the sources that shape teachers' perspectives that inhibit their ability to serve students from all backgrounds.

Methods

Setting and participants

This study is a part of a larger yearlong study of 14 teachers who live and teach in Korea, China, and the United States. The three ethno-racial groups in this study were White, African American who live in the United States and Asian² teachers who live in China and Korea. – who lives where? One major premise of the study was that multicultural education is never just about what happens in classrooms in immediate face-to-face relations but it also involves interactions with long socialization histories that teachers and students bring to pedagogical events. Participants of this study were middle and high school English or English as a foreign language teachers, and their teaching years of experience ranged from one to eleven years. The participants were recruited from an English teachers' listserv, and participation was 100% voluntary. All teachers from China are from Shanghai and all teachers from Korea are from Seoul. The context of this study was not an academic course. The researcher, who taught English as a second language for several years, also participated in the study occasionally. Mainly due to the participants' physical geographical locations, all discussions and interviews were conducted online using PICCLE (Pedagogy for Inter-Cultural Critical Literacy Education available at <http://piccle.ed.psu.edu/moodle/>).

Data and Data Sources

Three data collection strategies were employed: on-line discussions of contemporary short stories and films, life history interviews, and discourse based interviews (of content of on-line discussions). In the larger study, all participants engaged in on-line discussions of contemporary fiction and film dealing with intercultural relations (including tensions, conflicts, and resolutions) to explore how they understand and create differences. For the larger study, I chose six short stories and three movies as the subjects for online discussions. The short stories I chose were: (a) "Mother Margaret & the Rhinoceros Café" (Kaiser, 2003), (b) "Incident on 33" (Romanow, 2003), (c) "Crazy" (McCracken, 2003), (d) "Circumcision through Words" (Foss, 2003), (e) "Pancho and Gary" (Eidse, 2003), and (f) "Welcome to Mill Street" (Kennedy, 2003). Each story is a part of an edited collection of award-winning short fiction entitled *Mother Margaret & the Rhinoceros Café: 2003 Canadian cross-cultural stories* (Symons & Sekar, 2003). The three movies I chose were: (a) *Borat* (Cohen, Roach, & Charles, 2006), (b) *Crash* (Danbury et al., 2005), and (c) *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1998). We spent about a week discussing each story and film, and all the stories and movies chosen for the larger study have themes that involves tensions and conflicts arising from the characters who are from racially and culturally different.

From the larger study, I chose the participants' on-line discussions on the two short stories and one movie for this study. Two short stories were "Mother Margaret & the



Rhinoceros Café" (Kaiser, 2003) and "Crazy" (McCracken, 2003), and the movie was "Crash" (Danbury et al, 2005). Brief descriptions of the two short stories and movie are discussed in the subsequent section, and the two short stories and movie were chosen for this study because the participating teachers' responses to the characters in them were most prevalent in these two short stories and movie when compared to other short stories and movies chosen for the larger study. More specifically, I have chosen to closely look at the participants' responses to the actions taken by the fictional characters in the two short stories and movie.

Life history interviews (Odell & Goswami, 1982) were conducted first in order to ensure that the participants' responses would not be colored by the on-line discussions. Then, once the on-line discussions were finished, discourse-based interviews (Odell & Goswami, 1982) that focused on strategically selected sections of the content of on-line discussions were conducted. These interviews were helpful in drawing out some of the assumptions and tacit knowledge embedded in the participants' contributions to on-line discussions.

Data Analysis

Participants' contributions to on-line discussions were read several times and coded through the basic coding sequence: open, axial, and selective iteratively between primary data and the emerging theory. Coding strategy of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to identify and analyze the patterns and themes within the participants' response to actions of others as they are represented in the two short stories and one film. Coding is an essential and necessary phase in grounded theory method through which "the conceptual abstraction of data and its reintegration as theory takes place" (Holton, 2007, p. 265).

Findings: Participants' Responses to actions of others

In this study, I analyzed participants' responses to the main characters' final actions in the stories "Mother Margaret and Rhinoceros Café" and "Crazy" and in the movie, Crash. Interestingly, the participants' coded utterances self-organized largely into three different categories with each category predominantly characteristic of one of the three ethno-racial groups in this study. Before moving onto the findings, I contextualize the final actions of the characters within the larger plots of "Mother Margaret and Rhinoceros Café," Crazy, and Crash.

Mother Margaret and Rhinoceros Café

In "Mother Margaret and Rhinoceros Café," Mother Margaret, the main character, is a single woman without much education and a member of the Dene (Native American) community. She and her children have been living each month largely on a government check, but one day, Mother Margaret decides that she is going to stop depending on her government subsidy and gets permission from the elders to turn an old store into a restaurant. As the restaurant does well, rumors start to swirl that she is working her children too hard, that consequently her children are not doing well in school, and that she is not a good mother. The landlord wants to increase her rent as well. Mother Margaret weathers these difficulties and conflicts as best she can. However, when she decides to replace the old jukebox with a new stereo system, people (even those that she considered as friends) decide that Mother Margaret has gotten too big for her britches and begin to shun her, making her business almost impossible to be successful. She ultimately ends up closing her business.

Crazy



In the story, Crazy, Kamal, a main character, is a Muslim from Iraq and an illegal resident living in Toronto. Although many details are left to the reader's imagination in this story, what seems clear is that it is very important for Kamal to stay in Canada because he needs to stay away from Iraq for political and personal reasons. Kamal becomes very uncomfortable, distrustful and resentful of Pawel, a Polish immigrant who is trying to be Kamal's friend and to help him get fake citizenship papers. In his efforts to help Kamal, Pawel asks him a lot of questions and entices him to drink alcohol, which in Kamal's culture is a sin. Misunderstandings based on cultural differences and differences in life histories abound. Kamal becomes increasingly suspicious of Pawel's motives despite the fact that, to the reader, it seems clear that Pawel is trying to be friendly and helpful. In their final meeting, Pawel asks Kamal for the personal information he needs so that his cousin can make Kamal a fake Canadian passport, birth certificate, and so on. Kamal feels that Pawel is going to use this information to turn him in as an "illegal alien" and, in fear, ends up killing Pawel.

Crash

Crash is a movie about multicultural and racial conflicts set in Los Angeles, a city with a cultural mix of just about every nationality. The story begins when several people are involved in a multi-car accident. From that point, the audience is taken back to the day before the crash; they are shown the lives of several characters, especially the problems each encountered during that day. In one scene, Officer Hansen, a white police officer, shoots and kills the African American street criminal (Peter) when Officer Hansen believes that Peter is reaching into his pocket for a gun. In reality, he was reaching for a statue of St. Christopher.

Again, these texts and movie were chosen for this study from the larger study because the participating teachers most frequently responded to the actions taken by the fictional characters in these short stories and movie.

Tabulations of Responses

Shown below are tabulations of the responses by participants in each ethno-racial group to the actions taken by these characters. Again, what is evident among the participants' responses is their significant differences across the three ethno-racial groups and the similarities within each group. In my analysis, given the limited space, at least one of each participant's responses to the actions taken by each character is linked to the participant's response to life history interviews or discourse based interviews. In some cases, more examples are provided to support the arguments made in my analysis.

Numbers of Responses on Actions of Others by Ethno-Racial Groups

	Mother Margaret	Kamal	Officer Hansen
White middle-class teachers from the U.S.	6	5	6
African American teachers from the U.S.	4	5	5
Asian teachers from China and South Korea	3	2	0

Responses to Mother Margaret's Final Actions.



Starting with the responses by white middle-class teachers, out of the total number of six responses to the action of Mother Margaret closing down her restaurant, five responses placed themselves into a category that I coded as "Individualistic Explanation: Blaming the Victim." Generally, the white middle class teachers whose responses fell in this category seemed to believe that, if individuals work hard enough, they can overcome and transcend all difficulties they face. And if they do not succeed, their failure is attributed to the fact that they didn't work hard enough. In other words, that success and failure are effects of individual autonomy and responsibility was the common theme in their responses. Such views were shared consistently by five participating white teachers. Here is an example of this type of response provided by a white middle-class teacher:

If I was in Mother Margaret's position, I would have given the restaurant a longer chance and not give up so easily. I think that she quit too soon. I would have persevered and continued to keep the café open, and I would have definitely spoken up for myself. I think that it is important to let others know how you are feeling and when they make comments about Mother Margaret like that, if it were me, I would have responded right back to them. I would clarify a lot for the rumors that were going around town, because I would not have sat back and just let them happen. I would have the customers excited for her when she was installing the new radio, and I would have had more customers come in because it would be a fun place with great music for people to come and eat at. I would make her café a local place where people congregated and felt comfortable. I definitely would have done things to make sure that my business succeeded.

The pervasive use of "I would . . ." is notable in this participant's response. She clearly seems to believe in the autonomy and limitless ability of individuals, asserting how she would have done things differently if she were in Mother Margaret's position. Throughout her response, this participant seemed to assume that Mother Margaret had free will, and she hinted that, if Mother Margaret had done what she (this participant) would have done, Mother Margaret's business may have succeeded. What can be inferred from this participant's response is that she does not consider that the options that she perceives to be open to her may not have been open to Mother Margaret. Moreover, this participant does not seem to recognize that what individuals intentionally do may not always have the intended effect. For instance, letting others know how Mother Margaret felt about the townspeople's negative comments about her may have had any effect on their behaviors (but also may not have).

Furthermore, as this participant suggests, even if Mother Margaret had attempted to make her customers excited about her new radio, the customers may not have found her restaurant more exciting, especially if the reasons that people began to shun Mother Margaret in the first place were rooted in something else. Equally and more significantly, this participant seemed to view her own criteria as objective—something that would work in all contexts including Mother Margaret's. In effect, this participant blames Margaret for her inability to do things differently, and she posits her lack of capacity and enthusiasm as the apparent and sole cause of Mother Margaret's failed restaurant venture.

In fact, in a discourse based interview about her comments about Mother Margaret's actions, this participant claimed: "I was raised to believe in myself and believe that when there is a will there is a way. I don't think Mother Margaret should have given up so fast." Moreover, not a single participant in this group seemed to consider factors that may have

made Mother Margaret vulnerable in the first place and that closing her restaurant may not have been simply a matter of individual choice. In other words, all five participants seemed to overlook the possibility that for some even if there is a will there isn't always a way. While not all five participants specifically indicated that Mother Margaret should have given up her restaurant so fast, others showed a likewise response. In this regard, another white middle-class teacher stated:

I thought this was great story to illustrate the different cultures. While reading Mother Margaret and the Rhinoceros Café, I couldn't help but feel a sense of hope for Margaret. She is a really strong-willed and determined woman who decided to go for something for herself and her family. I just wish that she would have remained strong and determined longer which may have allowed her to continue running her business.

Yet another white middle-class teacher stated:

As I read Mother Margaret I was a little confused as first. I think she was an amazing woman to start a business on her own and raise a family. I was surprised by the way the community responded to her success. I was a little disappointed in the end that she just gave up her business because of what people were saying.

Here, this participant's comments about just giving up and her disappointment allude that Mother Margaret could have made a better choice.

Next, all four responses by African American teachers to the action of Mother Margaret closing her restaurant were coded as "Contextualized Explanation: Trapped in Location." More specifically, to varying degrees, the participants in this group offered contextualized explanations for Mother Margaret's action. These participants characterized Mother Margaret's context as one of severe oppression and acknowledged that one's hard work does not always guarantee one's success. Here is an example from one of the African American teachers:

I think that the Native Americans in this story had "barrel of crabs" mentality which probably comes from the years of oppression that the Native American population has faced. I am only comparing it to our African American and African Diaspora communities, but in communities where people have been severely oppressed and held down socially, economically, etc., the support in that community tends to decrease. "Barrel of crabs" mentality means when a person is moving upward, people, usually the ones they know, or that are from the same race, neighborhood, economic class, are pulling them back down just like if one crab sees another climbing out of the cage (oppression), another crab will climb on top of the one trying to escape. The result, no crab ends up escaping from the cage. I see this in my community all the time, and it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to be the crab climbing up even if he tries really hard.

Although this participant did not talk about Mother Margaret or her actions explicitly, he attempted to provide a broader, more contextualized explanation of what happened to her and her restaurant. In other words, this participant offered a plausible reason for why people in Mother Margaret's community were non-supportive and how that may have contributed to Mother Margaret decision to close her restaurant. This participant, like the other three participants in this ethno-racial group who responded to this topic, placed the issue within long histories of oppression and also used his own experience as an African American, as a member

of oppressed group, to explain what happened to Mother Margaret in the story. Using the metaphorical expression “barrels of crabs” mentality common within African American and African Diaspora communities,” he drew parallels between the “climbing up crab” and Mother Margaret. The crabs who were trying to get on the top of the climbing crab represent the people in Mother Margaret’s community who shunned her and tried to bring her down. Implicit in his message is that Mother Margaret’s hard work was relatively insignificant with respect to the restaurant’s success or failure compared with the larger social forces at work here. Such a view is very different from that of the white middle-class teachers in this study. Whereas the white middle-class teachers seemed to be interpreting the events in this story from very individualistic, psychological stances in which they firmly believed that “if there is a will there is a way,” this participant (and others in this ethno-racial group) seemed to be interpreting it from a more systemic, sociological stance wherein because of long histories of oppression within a hierarchically organized society some individuals are often trapped or “caged,” not only by their oppressors but by their own people as well.

In his discourse based interview regarding the “barrels of crab” mentality, this participant offered the following elaboration:

From my experience, I know that African Americans who are “left-behind” develop resentment and we normally do not go out of our ways to support others; in fact, some of us may deliberately withhold information because we DO NOT want to see others succeed. I think this is because those who are “left-behind” feel that those who succeed will succeed in the cost of them being left-behind which is exactly what happened during the time of slavery and even now in the wider world.

Clearly, this participant’s perspective is rooted in general knowledge of histories of oppression of a marginalized group and individual members that belong to such a group, as well as in his own personal experience as one of those members. Here, this participant’s life experience at least partially (good) colored his responses to Mother Margaret’s actions. What must be noted here is that while the status of social class by the white teacher in this study was self-reported, the African American teachers did not volunteer any information their social class. Moreover, as none of us ever occupy one social position but we occupy many, what influenced the differences in the white teachers’ and African American teachers’ responses may also be contributed by complex intersections of social class, gender, and age. Therefore, the claims made in the findings remain partial.

Next, all four responses by Asian teachers from China and South Korea to Mother Margaret’s decision to close her restaurant were coded as “Collectivist Explanation.” All of these participants explained Mother Margaret’s actions as inevitable due to the lack of support offered by the Dene community to which Mother Margaret belonged. In the words of one Chinese participant:

What struck me the most about this story is the fact that the nature of this Mother Margaret’s community is so non supportive. Coming from China, I believe that the only way that individuals in a society can succeed is through everyone in their society to act together and support each other. Without such a support, it is no wonder that Mother Margaret had to close her restaurant.

Here, somewhat similar to the African American teachers, this participant considered the lack of support from the members of Mother Margaret’s community as a plausible explanation for Mother Margaret’s decision to close the restaurant. However, this

participant's response seems to be rooted in a very different source than a "barrel of crabs" mentality. Instead, she seems to believe in the power and importance of interdependence amongst people who belong to a particular community or society. Her belief may also be influenced by other factors such as social class, gender, and age; however, she does point to her ethnicity in discussing the importance of community support. For this participant, an individual's success depends on the support of the members of one's community, and implicit in this assertion is that no matter how hard one may try, without support from the community, success cannot be achieved. Thus, this participant concluded that Mother Margaret's closing of her restaurant was unavoidable in a context where almost nobody was being supportive. In her life history interview, she often talked about coming from a country based on collectivism, and the effects of being socialized within this country seem to have influenced her interpretations significantly (e.g., "Coming from China, I believe. . ."). Once again, the analysis of the teachers' responses remains partial and the findings reported in this study cannot be generalized since the analysis pertains only to the participating teachers. My goal here is not to reinforce racial stereotypes but to show that while people's perspectives are always in the process of becoming as they encounter different life experiences, race and ethnicity remain an "element of social structure" and "a dimension of human representation" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55).

Responses to Kamal's Action

In this section, I discuss the participants' responses to Kamal's killing Pawel in the end of the short story, *Crazy*. In this section, due to the limited space, I chose one response by one participant in each ethno-racial group as an exemplar of the overall pattern of the responses for each group. Of five responses posted by white middle-class teachers, four responses were coded as "Rational Explanation." The pattern in which the participants in this group responded to Kamal's action is very similar to the pattern in which the participants in the same ethno-racial group responded to Mother Margaret's action. Specifically, they emphasized what the main characters—as individuals—could have done to have achieved different outcomes. In other words, although to varying degrees, these participants often seemed to view an individual's action as always rational and intentional, and they interpreted Kamal for his actions based on these assumptions. For example, one participant claimed:

While Pawel felt he was helping Kamal he was in fact insulting him. That being said, Kamal also allowed his prejudices and stereotypes of Pawel's culture to cloud his judgments. Perhaps if these two men were both more accommodating and actually took the time to learn a little about each other, then the men could have become friends.

This participant construed the two individuals in the story as someone who could have acted other than they did if they had been more "accommodating" and had taken the time to learn more about each other. Furthermore, this participant seemed to view Kamal's action as intentional or conscious such as when he stated that "Kamal also allowed his prejudices and stereotypes of Pawel's culture to cloud his judgments." Such a stance holds Kamal more accountable for his actions. He allowed his "prejudices" to cloud his judgments." Such an interpretation somewhat ignores the possibility that a host of oppressive conditions and experiences across an entire lifetime might have led Kamal to be paranoid, vulnerable, and desperate in the first place. This participant also appears to have assumed that individuals are somehow able to understand diversity fully and that such understanding leads to intercultural

harmony. However, many sociological scholars have shown us that the dispositions that motivate people's actions are not always immediately visible, that people's actions are not always intentional or conscious, and that their ability to perceive others is also limited by the social conditions within which they have been constituted (e.g., Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Furthermore, the emphasis placed on learning about other cultures as a solution to cultural conflict (and as a key factor that could have prevented Kamal's killing of Pawel) seems also deeply rooted in this participant's experiential and ideological locations. According to Britzman (2003), there is a distinction between the two approaches of learning about and learning from. Adopting Britzman's perspective, learning from the Other presents an philosophical investigation into an openness to transform oneself while in contact with Other which opens up a possibility to the ethical possibilities in multicultural relations as opposed to learning about the Other presents a more narrow investigation into an accumulation of knowledge about Others.

In her life history interview, this participant discussed having experienced a cross-cultural exchange program to Chile when she was in college. She stated that she learned "so much" about the culture of Chile and how that program emphasized the importance of "cross cultural competence" and "tolerance" of different cultures by learning about different cultures. Although this take on cultural exchange programs is common, one could argue that it is also dangerous. Many scholars of intercultural relations have shown that intercultural conflict is not so much about a lack of knowledge on either or both sides but a function of long histories of domination and oppression clashing and colliding in the context of interpersonal exchanges -- interesting (e.g., Papastergiadis, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977). In other words, person-to-person relations are always constituted in and through long (and often violent) histories of relations between cultures. And if these histories have involved colonization, things become ever more complex.

Next, there were five responses by African American teachers to Kamal's killing of Pawel, four of which were coded as "Contextualized Explanation" because participants attempted to speculate about the social and historical conditions that could have led Kamal to kill Pawel. In the words of one African American teacher:

People have killed others for far less in our and other societies! Kamal knew that he would be killed if he was deported back to Sadam's regime. It was not simply being deported that pushed Kamal over a paranoid edge; he knew that deportation ended with death.

Note that the reasoning embodied in this response is very different from the reasoning embodied in the majority of the responses by white middle-class teachers who held Kamal entirely responsible for his actions. Again, because information about African American teachers' social class is not provided, the factors influencing the difference in responses may also be largely contributed by social class. However, interestingly, just as there were similarities among the responses of white middle-class teachers to the actions of Mother Margaret and Kamal, there were similarities in the ways that African American teachers explained the actions of these two characters. For both Mother Margaret and Kamal, African American teachers tried to understand the conditions that might have disposed these two characters act in the ways they did. In a discourse based interview, one African American teacher invoked the following statistics to support her explanation:

Have you read the recent statistics about the American prison system? One out of one hundred Americans are in jail. However, it is direr for the black man and woman. One out of every nine black males between the ages of 18 and 34 are incarcerated. One out of every 100 black females is incarcerated. The statistic for white males? One out of 365. That is a staggering difference in statistics. This speaks volumes concerning the continued struggle for many black people in America. You know what this means? We can't just look at the statistics. So, we must first ask why Kamal had to kill Pawel before judging Kamal as crazy.

This participant contextualized his responses to Kamal's action within statistics about criminality and the American prison system. Noting significant differences in ratios between blacks and blacks in prison and whites and whites in prison, he problematized any and all explanations for Kamal's actions based on reason, free will, or intentionality alone, and he introduced the possibility that systemic or sociological explanations may have more purchase (e.g., long histories of domination/oppression, social Darwinism, etc.). From the perspectives of these latter explanations, it is wrongheaded simply to blame Kamal for not acting rationally because the root cause for his actions might be more sociological than psychological. Just as the reasons for why a much larger percentage of the black population compared with the white population is incarcerated in American prisons are likely to be rooted in a society built on relations of domination and oppression, the most plausible reasons for Kamal's actions might also be more systemic and sociological than individual and psychological.

Lastly, there were two contributions by Asian teachers from China and South Korea that focused on Kamal's killing of Pawel. Both were coded as "Religious/Moral Explanation." One participant from China wrote the following:

It's obvious that there are many people like Kamal in Toronto area and just because he is in fear of being reported and deported, however strong, he cannot commit the most horrible crime in all human cultures.

Since the story takes place in Toronto, this participant indirectly compared Kamal with other illegal immigrants in Toronto whom she perceived to be in the same situation as Kamal but who never committed a crime because of it. If others in the same situation as Kamal did not commit a crime, Kamal's action was not justifiable. What can also be inferred in her response is that she did not perceive the risk of "being reported and deported" as a justification for Kamal's action in the story. Unlike the African American teacher who considered the possible consequence that Kamal might be killed if deported, this participant did not seem to consider such a consequence. Furthermore, for this participant, killing is "the most horrible crime in all human cultures" regardless of circumstances, and thus Kamal's killing of Pawel was absolutely unacceptable. When asked to elaborate her thinking in a discourse based interview, this participant noted:

My parents taught me that I should always be kind to everyone I meet in my life because they are the people whom I already met before I was born. This is Buddhism philosophy in which we believe that people we encounter in our life are believed to be the people who we have already had special relationships in our previous life. This is not only limited to human beings but also animals we encounter in our life time. This is why killing is not acceptable whether it is a human being or an animal.

From the socialization history provided by this participant, it hardly seems surprising that this participant would invoke a particular religious/moral framework to condemn Kamal's action. However, what is important to note here is that many Koreans or Chinese are not Buddhist, and although the participant uses the pronoun we to represent more than an individual, it is also necessary to recognize that Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism have an intermingled history in China, and many Koreans are Christians. Hence, the analysis of the Chinese participant is very limited in its generalizability.

In sum, although both the white middle-class teachers and the Asian teachers in this study condemned Kamal's for killing Pawel, the underlying reasons for their stances were very different. In partial contrast, the African American teachers tended to place less blame on Kamal for his action because they contextualized the murder analogically within their own long, painful, and often violent history of oppression and abuse in the United States.

Responses to Officer Hansen's Action

In this section I discuss the participants' responses to Officer Hansen's shooting of an African American street criminal as portrayed in the movie *Crash*. The responses by white middle-class teachers dimensionalized themselves into two categories: (a) Rational Explanation and (b) Statistical Explanation. In what follows, I discuss one example of each type of explanation before moving onto discussing the responses by African American teachers and Asian teachers in this study. Out of six responses by white middle class teachers to Officer Hansen's action, four responses were coded "Rational Explanation." The two other responses were coded "Statistical Explanation." Because coding is done by an individual who bring a certain set of perspectives but not others, what I present under each coding is also perspectival. One white middle-class teacher who offered a "Rational Explanation" argued that:

If Officer Hansen had given Peter a chance and thought about what he was about to do, he would probably not have murdered Peter. As intelligent beings, we need to use our brains more sometimes!

Almost identical to the patterns of white middle-class teachers' responses to Mother Margaret and Kamal's actions, this participant focused on what Officer Hansen could have done to avoid shooting the African American street criminal, Peter. Within a framework where human beings are quintessentially rational beings murdering Peter could have been avoided if Officer Hansen had thought more about his action and had used his brain. Yet other explanations are certainly equally or more plausible. As I noted earlier, much sociological research has shown that person-to-person relations are never contained solely within the interactions themselves (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) but within instances of larger social forces, structures, and histories at work. From this perspective, Officer Hansen's action may not have been the result of not acting rationally or using his brain but an effect of some master narrative at work. In his encounter with Peter, Officer Hansen may not have seen him as an individual or a blank slate but as a dangerous black man like all other black men. Such an alternative explanation, however, does not seem to have been part of this participant's interpretive arsenal.

Another white middle-class teacher offered a "Statistical Explanation" for Officer Hansen's action:

The young police officer did not shoot the Black American male because he was black but because he acted in a threatening manner. . . If crime statistics show that a

large percent of violent crimes in the LA area are committed by Black American males then is it not wise to be weary of such people? You only get one life. . . . I do not believe that such actions are racist acts; they are smart acts.

Unlike the first white middle-class participant discussed above, this participant construed Officer Hansen's killing of Peter in *Crash* as a smart act, justifying his construal with "crime statistics." Given the history of violent criminal acts committed by black men in Los Angeles, Officer Hanson's act might well have saved his life, and "you only get one life." Contrary to the African American teacher discussed earlier—who also used criminal statistics to support his systemic, sociological argument for why Kamal might have killed Pawel—this participant uses statistics to justify an individualistic, psychological explanation that both justifies Officer Hansen's killing of Peter and vilifies black men who presumably choose—as individuals with free will—to act violently and unlawfully. Absent in his explanation is any discussion of the larger historical, social, economic forces that might constitute the conditions of possibility underlying the crime statistics.

Interestingly, the African American teachers in this study responded very differently to Officer Hansen's action and also offered quite a different take on "statistics." Unlike the white middle-class teachers discussed above, African American teachers did not consider "statistics" as objective but as symptomatic. All five responses by African American teachers embodied more or less the same content, which I coded as "Historical Explanation." Invoking this explanation, one participant wrote:

Being Black in America for many, means that we have to work that much harder at what we want in life. As with anything, hard work and persistence is necessary for success. Yet, some black people experience a fight that requires them to not only be excellent at what they do; but also tenacious because when you are born Black in America, there are already statistics looming over you, that you are going to be this kind of person and that kind of person. Peter was not an exception.

According to this African American teacher, Officer Hansen saw Peter, as many White Americans do, as another dangerous Black person. This participant also signaled the persistent racial inequality in America as part of the problem --being Black in America (as opposed to White or other race) means that one has to work harder (than others) to achieve the same goals. He also made clear that he understands the relation between hard work and success but went on to claim that this relation plays out differently for Black people compared to White people. For Black people in America "there are already statistics looming over you" that essentialize Black people as a particular kinds of people—people who are, among other things, both lazy and violent. Thus, Black people not only need to work hard to achieve success, they need to work all the harder to prove that they are not like the Blacks constructed through statistics.

The differences between the responses by African American teachers and white middle-class teachers to the action of Officer Hansen seem non-trivial indeed, and they also seem firmly located within very different social, cultural, racial, and economic histories. One final comment related to this issue is worth making. Throughout the online discussions in this study, when very different—and especially contradictory—perspectives were shared by people occupying very different ethno-racial locations, almost without exception, participants tended to interact only with members of their own group and to avoid interacting with members of other groups. In a sense, they acted out exactly what they professed.



No Asian teachers responded to the scene in which Officer Hansen shot Peter, and why this was the case is not clear.

Discussions, Conclusions, and Implications

Although findings showed that the responses from participants in none of the ethno-racial groups in the study were entirely homogeneous, harmonious, stable, or bounded, they revealed some significant consistencies within each ethno-racial group and some significant differences across the three groups. This does not mean that these findings can be generalized. It does not mean that a subject is determined by certain cultural rules nor does it mean that any participant's thinking and perceiving with respect to any ethnic or racial group can be generalized. It does, however, mean that these findings are telling in some way, which I unpack below.

Notably, the similarities within each ethno-racial-national group are not necessarily because groups were defined by ethnicity-race-nationality. (e.g., Hall, 1999). It is not the case that four white middle-class teachers responded to Mother Margaret's action in a similar pattern because they are white or middle class. Rather, from their contributions in online discussions illuminate that it is because the members of each ethno-racial group were likely to have shared similar historical, cultural, political, social experiences and similar social, political, and economic contexts.

The white middle class teachers' liberal individualistic interpretive frame, the African American teachers' contextual-historical interpretive frame, and the Asian teachers' collectivist interpretive frame raise a few pressing questions about how social positions are directly linked to power and social identity. Recognizing that social class which was not provided by African American and Asian teachers may very well have influenced their responses, it still seems important to ask the following questions. What life experiences (both historical and lived) shaped participants' responses in the ways they did? Did participants speak from positions of relative domination or subordination? At least partial answers to these questions were found in participants' responses to discourse-based interviews and life history interviews. Among other things, I asked participants questions such as: What life experiences could have at least partially influenced them to believe we live in a world in which one can cross any boundary one wants to cross? What life experiences could have at least partially influenced them to believe strongly that, when one is "born Black in America," not only one has to work harder than others at what one wants in life but one also has to work hard to prove what one is not? What life experiences could have at least partially influenced them to believe that America is a country free of racism?

Not surprisingly, many white participants explained how their own (and their family members') life experiences pretty much showed that the motto, if there is a will, there is a way, is true, that their success resulted from hard work, and that one can cross any boundary one wants to cross meaning that one can will oneself to overcome difficulties. Also, not surprisingly, most African American participants explained how they (and their family members) had encountered constant obstacles and limits in their lives and that they had to work harder than others to accomplish the same things. Lastly, most Asian participants, who stated that they lived in culturally and ethnically "homogeneous" countries and had mostly "heard" ideal things about America and Americans, stated that they did not think that racism really exists in America. So, very different sets of life experiences and socialization histories,



and also naivities/lack of education seemed to have appropriated very different dispositions and viewpoints through which to see and the similar basic events and issues. Hence, these experiences and histories may have unfolded as they did largely because of larger constitutive social structures and conditions already in place that delimited and imposed which positions could be taken and not taken (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The white participants in this study perceived few impediments to achieving their goals. These participants also located reasons for success and failure in the individual not the social realm. Since people from dominant groups seldom have to learn the perspectives of the dominated, it is easy for them to assume that their perspectives are objective, neutral, and how things ought to be (e.g., Jones, 2001; Jones & Jenkins, 2004). Also, given that whites are “unmarked” in our society (e.g., Hall, 1999), the tendency in white teachers to believe that their perspectives are universal, neutral, and objective is not surprising. This, of course, is not to say that all white middle class teachers to believe that their perspectives are universal. Thus, operating with and encouraging/enforcing their standard is unlikely to be seen as forced assimilation or cultural domination. Yet, these largely unconscious practices justify, perpetuate, and strengthen the status quo. Indeed, it is often suggested that, at least in the United States, hegemony is closely tied to liberal humanism and individualism (e.g., Boler & Zembylas, 2003).

Similarly, people from historically oppressed groups often encounter limits and obstacles that are outside of their intentional control. Rosaldo's (1989) argument that “victims of oppression. . . can provide insights into the workings of power that differ from those available to people in high positions” (p. 173) is both relevant and educative with respect to the findings in this study. Indeed, the African American participants in the study seemed to have a much deeper sense of the nature and functions of power asymmetries in a stratified society than did white participants. Asian participants, who felt that America is an ideal country where racism doesn't exist, seem to have been constructed within and complicit with particular media representations of America. In their life history interview, these Asian participants reported that they have had a very limited exposure to American films and novels that portray a long history of racism in America, and therefore, their limited exposure may have largely contributed to how they viewed America as an ideal country where racism does not exist. These representations index the power of those who represent America internationally and the cultural imperialism of those representations (Said, 1994).

The findings from all groups clearly demonstrated that participants' viewpoints about the actions of others are never detached from constitutive political and social structures. This recognition seems crucially important in multicultural research, practice, and curricular studies because what disposes multicultural educators to act and think as well as how we translate and deliver multicultural curriculum is not always visible to us and because it is easy to believe (wrongly) that our actions and thoughts are objective, neutral, transparent, and autonomous.

Difficulties in multicultural relations are not so much grounded in the fact that there are many different cultures, that there are differences in the beliefs and practices of these cultures or that people from particular cultures do not have adequate knowledge of people from other cultures. Rather, differences become problems because they surface complex cultural, social, and political histories that dispose people to understand, respond to and use difference strategically (albeit also tacitly) —to include or exclude, to value or devalue, to privilege or oppress (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Participants' responses with regard to Kamal's

action, for instance, had much more to do with their social locations and the assumptions. Multicultural educators' assumptions rooted in their social locations can often hinder students' learning and growth. Even though most of us might think that it is trivial that people from different cultural and racial backgrounds perceive the world differently, empirically demonstrating how the participating teachers responded in profoundly different ways to the actions of others in multicultural stories and movie appear critically important for thinking about the necessary starting point for multicultural/social justice education that have any chance of having some counter-hegemonic effects.

After several months of discussing the stories and films, what became also noticeable was that there were almost no efforts by participants to engage in cross-talk across groups, especially when interpretations varied considerably and in contested ways. Instead, the different groups engaged in parallel play, with members of each group doing their own thing and never engaging with members of other groups which may have been due to the discomfort involved in having to face conflicting views. Thus, uncritically assuming that conversations across differences automatically happen when opportunities for such conversations are provided seems fundamentally flawed. At one level, what I am calling parallel play was surprising given how much multicultural research these days focuses on changing and unstable identities in the processes interactions and fluidity of cultural boundaries. However, at another level, it seemed a pretty good reflection of how most of us operate in multicultural contexts in our everyday lives. It is easy to stay within spaces that we are familiar with and it is easier to avoid conflicts. Differences are said to be respected but actually putting this attitude into practice seems difficult which is a problem when the only way to move beyond the familiar framework of knowing is to go beyond respecting difference but use the difference for a foundation of new ways of thinking and knowing.

Although parallel play seems to be what we do naturally, it definitely is not reflexive, and it doesn't contribute to dealing with cultural and racial differences productively. For instance, one person who feels that she is systematically and historically discriminated against on racial grounds and another person who feels that this person is not working hard enough and that her laziness contributes to her misfortune probably cannot communicate openly without a conscious effort and self-reflexivity on both sides. Similarly, a teacher who finds a student's cultural practice to be primitive and bizarre probably cannot truly respect what that student brings to a classroom. A teacher who believes his/her perspective is a universal standard probably cannot create a reciprocally productive learning environment, never mind moving toward a more just social space for all. In situations where members of different cultures must work together closely (e.g., education settings), the question of whose perspectives count and become uncontested is a thorny one because all workplaces are also unavoidably situations of power imbalance.

The findings in this study showed that various historical and social structures and forces within which participants remain largely constituted constrained their viewpoints, rather than participants appropriating and choosing particular elements within those structures and forces. The unnoticed, unintentional, and unconscious dispositions and viewpoints common to people who share similar backgrounds may be the very factors that contribute the most to the perpetuation of relations of domination/oppression. The tendency to avoid talking across difference just seems to perpetuate racial and cultural inequalities. Resisting or refusing to

learn about unconscious dispositions and not resisting naturalized dispositions and viewpoints also seem to perpetuate these inequalities.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are many mindful and reflective teachers out there, it is also important to remind ourselves that in schools, for instance, what teachers teach students and how they interact with them get filtered through the largely unconscious viewpoints through which the teachers see and understand the world. Thus, teachers cannot afford not to deconstruct these viewpoints if we are really committed in building more productive connections across differences. As demonstrated, a few teachers in this study believe that one can be all that one wants to be. Such encouragement is often necessary and probably well intended for students. However, uncritically assuming that all students have equal opportunities and equal resources or that all that matters is hard work can be detrimental for some students. For example, if a teacher thinks that “You can be whatever you want to be, and that if you put your mind to it, than nothing is impossible,” then a student who is struggling in school is probably going to be judged as not having put his/her mind to it and to not have worked hard enough. What is most alarming here is that without a careful reflection, it is easy for us to overlook the fact that our thoughts and actions are mediated by dispositions that have become both very durable and quite invisible over the course of our lives. Yet, these internalized ways of acting and thinking may be reinforcing unequal, hierarchical social structures without our even knowing it.

Because all knowledge is partial and because what motivates us at any given moment to act and think in particular ways is contingent and unpredictable, it is impossible to comprehensively trace all the forces at work in trying to understand why we think and act in the ways we do. However, this is no reason to stop and not to do anything. In fact, only if educators at all levels begin to understand, as fully as possible, the sources of the dispositions that incline us to think that some of our students' cultural practices are primitive or not as “good” as ours, for instance, can we ever begin to work against them. This kind of work should be continuous not only because our understanding of who we are will never be complete but also because our ways of understanding the world are always situated, continually (re)constituted, and never fixed.

Notes

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²My usage of this term is not to essentialize participants from China and South Korea. Because participants from China and South Korea shared many ideological stances with respect to intercultural issues that are represented in the short stories and films, I represented them as one ethno-racial group in this study. There is no doubt that both the Koreans and Chinese are not homogeneous groups.

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