

Professional Book Review

Milner, H.R. (2010). *Culture, curriculum, and identity in education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 232, ISBN:9780230622043 (hc). \$84.99

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Culture, Curriculum, and Identity in Education would be recommended for teachers working within multicultural schools. This book provides educators with insight into the human emotional responses of minority groups and the implications of a white curriculum on students of diversity. This insight prompts a compassionate response that compels teachers to be more culturally aware and culturally sensitive during curriculum planning and implementation, as well as, in teacher-student relationships. Throughout the book, Milner (2010) drew on the personal experiences of individuals from diverse perspectives. He presented a clear and comprehensive snapshot of the affected individuals and brings an awareness to the identity-perception gaps of the teachers. His consistent focus of meeting the personal and learning needs of students resonated throughout his book.

Schools have been, and still are, becoming increasingly diverse. Milner (2010) attempted to explore, and explain from his perspective as an African-American teacher, the challenges and obstacles faced by non-white and minority students in what he referred to as a dominant white culture. His attempts were supported by his life experiences and his research of these phenomena. He relied heavily on the label and identity of white males and white females and their birthright as individuals being graced with white privilege, but did not provide a definition of what white privilege would encompass in respect to the topics of his book. Many of Milner's conclusions throughout the book identified racism and discrimination by whites being the cause of the loss of deep learning privileges of non-white and minority students. However, lacking in his argument are any interviews or interactions questioning the ideas, thoughts, and values of the white teachers or white members of society. Regardless, Milner displayed a passion in his quest to uncover hindrances and phenomena surrounding the causes of our non-white and minority populations of students earning lower academic grades and experiencing lesser academic success than their white peers.

Milner divided his book into four parts. Part one is titled *Identity and P through 12 Curriculum in Multiple Contexts*. This section of his book explored the identity-perception gap where teachers confront the difference between who they think they are and how their students perceive them. He explored, in this section, the experiences of an African-American teacher in a predominately white suburban English classroom and a female math teacher who is an out lesbian of German heritage in a culturally diverse school. Part two of his book is titled *Culture, Curriculum, and Identity with Implications for English-Language Learners and Immigration*. Here, Milner's focus turned toward the increasing Latino population who enter the English-dominated classroom without knowledge of the English language. He brought to light the struggle of these ELL students' ability to socially interact with their English-speaking teachers and peers and how their limited social interactions affect their learning experiences. In part two the author introduces Kendra and Conrad, two black immigrant college students, and shares the dialogue of their personal educational and social experiences pertaining to discrimination and racism. Part three of Milner's book maneuvers around and within the implications of spirituality and its impact on the teachers, the teachers' instruction and relationships with the students, and research on leadership. Milner titled part three *Spirituality as Identity with Implications for Research and Teaching*. In this section Milner courageously addressed the often-avoided topic of spirituality, bravely expressing to the reader, that the impact of spirituality plays a large part in the success of providing deep learning in the classroom. The fourth, and final part, Milner titled *Culture, Curriculum, and Identity with Implications for Teacher Education*. Milner expressed his frustration in the low numbers of teachers of color in diverse classrooms. He reiterated a perception mentioned previously in the book, that white female teachers have limited experience and are unprepared to teach in urban, high poverty, and diverse schools.

Milner quoted Elbaz-Luwisch (2001), "storytelling can be a way of admitting the other into one's world and thus of neutralizing the otherness and strangeness" (p. 134). As an educator in a rural, high poverty, and diverse school, I share with my students, my story of growing up in poverty on a small dairy farm with a mother who was raised in the Bronx and father who was raised on a dairy farm. I share the challenges of being a single mother who chose to go back to college for a master's degree in education. Just as the stories of Milner's characters exposed me and enlightened me on their life stories and the challenges they faced, they allowed me to have compassion for their situations.

While reading through the shared experiences, communication between the affected and affecter appears to be missing. Communication is key to leadership and in relationships formed in the classroom (Davies, 2007). In a diverse world, it expresses interpersonal relations that are important in today's society (Bucher, 2000). Thus, communication allows us to find commonalities with others of different cultures, ethnicities, and belief systems. Milner pointed out in his book that educators cannot be color-blind or mute, and must recognize and respect that people are different colors and races, have different interests, different socioeconomic statuses, different family dynamics, different personalities, different cultures and subcultures within cultures, and different abilities.

Kristina, the math teacher who is an out lesbian and of German descent, struggled with a situation where she felt her students did not value her for her expertise in her field, instead viewing her as their lesbian math teacher. However, Kristina may have failed to have a dialogue with her students to understand why they were reacting to her in the way that they were. In her dialogue with Milner, she expressed feeling as if her students, who were non-white, did not listen to her because she was lesbian. She was concerned that she would not be able to teach them as much as she wanted due to their misunderstanding of her. However, without proper communication, Kristina's conclusion that her sexual orientation caused her students' behavior is unsubstantiated.

Wilson, a female African American English teacher in a predominately white school, felt as if she was ostracized by her colleagues for expressing and teaching the culture, history, and literature, of her culture. Milner did not indicate that there were any conversations with those accused of ostracizing, as to why they were treating Wilson differently, or if they were aware of how they were treating her. Perhaps communicating with them would have exposed what the treatment and feelings really were. Did Wilson have a negative childhood experience that left her over-sensitive to white people? Were the differences of culture, interests, or intimidation of her degree the cause? Was a misunderstanding or lack of communication causing the situation to appear discriminatory?

Analisa had recently moved from Mexico and was attending an English-speaking school. Her teacher struggled to meet her social and educational needs due to the language barrier. Milner stated that Analisa appeared withdrawn from her classmates and tended to keep to herself, oftentimes appearing to withdraw. As a foreign tourist in Germany and France, I did not find myself engaging or conversing with others who did not speak English. This was not due to feeling ostracized, rather, I didn't share the language and could not enter into the social setting.

Conrad and Kendra were two black, immigrant, Canadian college students who stated that they did not recall experiencing racism, nor did they let racism define them. Despite Milner's assertion about racism, the lack of evidence regarding the questions that he asked those students, made his assertions weak, failing to correlate these students' experiences with racism.

The author shared a personal experience that made him feel discriminated against. While walking past a custodian's cleaning cart, he was rudely asked if he was the custodian and then told he had to move the cart. Sometimes it is difficult for us to see the physical differences in people of ethnicities different than our own. Milner had stated in the book that the custodians were African-American, so perhaps to his coworker, Milner resembled the custodian who was with the cart earlier. We could also consider if his co-worker struggled with an egocentric personality and treated everyone disrespectfully.

To say racism doesn't exist or occur in schools, or to state that curriculum is tailored and appropriate for a diverse student population is naïve. According to a research project conducted at Stanford University, low socio-economic families experienced more discrimination than others (Nieto & Bode, 2013). Milner's viewpoint pertaining to his experiences and the experiences brought forth in his writing, and to his attentiveness to the needs of a more multicultural curriculum brings richness to the experience of reading his book. Multicultural education emphasizes the importance of providing justice by drawing attention to providing a solution to societal injustices (Kaya & Aydin, 2014). One of Milner's perspectives pertaining to developing a multicultural curriculum was that we should not be color-blind. However, a perspective of cultural blindness would seem more appropriate. Culture includes all students and would lead to a holistic approach in finding a means to a curriculum that would provide all students with deep learning experiences (Sleeter, 2005). Perhaps if curriculum developers and educators were a more culturally diverse and culturally sensitive group, maintaining an open mind and an open line of communication, not attempting to understand, but to have compassion while embracing differences, a sequel would speak of the prevalence of equity and fairness.

References

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