

## Assessing Preservice Teachers' Zones of Concern and Comfort with Multicultural Education

By Carmen Montecinos & Francisco A. Rios

Currently, racial/ethnic minority students represent a third of the K-12 student enrollment across the United States; by the year 2035, they will represent over 50 percent (American Educational Research Association, Division K Newsletter, 1998). This significant increase in the ethnic diversity of the K-12 population, coupled with persistent disparities in educational attainment among various ethnic/

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racial groups in the United States, has supported an educational reform movement known as multicultural education (Banks, 1997). This movement's goal is to redesign schooling in ways that "increase educational equity for a range of cultural, ethnic, and economic groups" (Banks, 1997, p. 7). Teacher preparation accrediting agencies and professional associations, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, have joined this movement through the development of guidelines and standards for the infusion of multicultural education in teacher preparation. As of 1986, 27 states had implemented guidelines and requirements for the

inclusion of multicultural education or human relations content in teacher education (Martin, 1991).

Diverse approaches have been proposed to redesign schools for equity and excellence. In the literature there are a wide variety of new, and at times contradictory, images that have been constructed under the generic term "multicultural education." Christine E. Sleeter (1996), for instance, has described three common metaphors used in the literature to conceptualize multicultural education. One view sees it as therapy for reducing the prejudice and stereotypes that individuals bring to their interactions with others. A second view regards multicultural education as a set of teaching techniques that can enhance teachers' repertoires when dealing with a culturally diverse student body. The third is an academic perspective where multiculturalism is a topic to be debated among intellectuals. Sleeter criticizes these metaphors as being inadequate to the task of effectively preparing students who can engage themselves in the ongoing struggle to advance social justice for the various groups who fail to get their adequate share of resources and decision-making power in the larger society. She proposes an alternative metaphor, social movement, which seeks to connect the work of school people to the ongoing social justice work conducted by disenfranchised communities.

Of interest to teacher educators is the possibility of identifying elements of the theoretical and ideological fabric through which prospective teachers come to conceptualize multicultural education as teaching techniques, as therapy to change individual's views about diversity, or as an educational reform effort that must coalesce with the civil rights movement. It is our contention that teacher education must directly speak to these elements if it purports to be a powerful intervention in shaping the choices prospective teachers will make regarding multicultural education. Teacher educators and their students have a wide array of choices to make regarding the educational goals and objectives, with their corresponding curriculum, pedagogy, and school-wide practices, that they will pursue in the name of multicultural education (Banks, 1997; Giroux, 1992; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1993). Studies in this area have shown that these choices are largely shaped by structural and district-wide constraints and possibilities, along with the complex, wide array of interrelated beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge held by individual educators (Hamilton, 1996; Goodwin, 1994; Marshall, 1996; Montecinos & Tidwell, 1996; Payne, 1994; Rios, 1996; Sleeter, 1992, 1993).

The current study was designed to examine preservice teachers' concerns and comforts with concepts and practices advocated by the alternative approaches to multicultural education. Guiding this study is our belief that knowledge of the specific practices and concepts that students reject can assist teacher educators in developing curriculum and pedagogy that speak directly to students' apprehensions and misunderstandings (Marshall, 1996). By examining the practices and beliefs that students endorse, on the other hand, teacher educators can find the common grounds from which they and their students can initiate a positive analysis about the

nature of traditional schooling and the changes that an education that is multicultural entails. An examination of students' rationale for accepting or rejecting various concepts offers teacher educators opportunities to pinpoint discontinuities in students' thinking that could be the target of educational interventions.

### Six Approaches to Race, Class, Gender, and Exceptionality in Education

The typology of approaches for addressing race, class, gender, and exceptionality in education developed by Sleeter and Carl A. Grant (1993) was used as the conceptual framework to study preservice teachers' cognitions about multicultural education. In what follows we sketch the major features of each approach since space does not allow for a thorough discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of each.

The first approach, Business as Usual (BAU), is characterized by curriculum that: favors teacher-centered activities; pays little attention to a match between students' learning style and teaching styles; provides little individualization of instruction; segregates students in ways that tend to parallel racial, gender, and class divisions in the wider society; and includes the contributions of people of color, women, and people with disabilities sporadically.

The second approach, Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different (TCD), is characterized by teachers who recognize the need to make adaptations to the mainstream curriculum and pedagogy to better help students of color, women, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities to succeed in mastering that curriculum. Emphasis is placed on individualizing instruction to help students develop the cognitive skills and knowledge that represent the standard—as defined by the experiences of the dominant cultural group.

The third approach, Human Relations (HR), is characterized by instructional content and activities that emphasize the affective components necessary to create a society that respects all cultural groups. By promoting feelings of unity and reducing stereotypes, prejudices, and biases students are encouraged to develop strong friendships across ethnic, gender, social class, and disability lines. For these first three approaches, at the societal level, the goal is to help people adjust to the existing social structure and mainstream cultural program.

The fourth approach, Single-Group Studies (SG), refers to curricula that target a specific social group (i.e., Women's Studies; Chicano Studies; and so on). Via an in-depth study of that group's historical and contemporary presence and a critical examination of the group's oppression by society at large, this approach seeks to promote social justice for the group in question.

The fifth approach, Multicultural Education (ME), attempts to reform the total schooling process in an effort to reduce discrimination, provide equal opportunities, and strive for social justice for all groups. This requires reconceptualizing the

entire schooling process so that it reflects the diversity of society at large, including the hiring of a diverse teaching staff.

The sixth approach, Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist (SR), also purports to restructure the whole educational program to achieve greater equality and social justice. It extends the previous approach by helping students practice democracy in the classroom, analyze current social arrangements, and develop social actions skills to change adverse circumstances in their own life as well as the in lives of people from socially subordinated groups.

A review of previous research shows that most often preservice and inservice teachers conceptualize multicultural education from the HR and the TCD perspectives, despite efforts by scholars in the field who conceptualize it in much broader terms (Sleeter, 1996). Grant and Ruth A. Koskela (1986) reported that preservice teachers who had previously received information about a social reconstructionist approach to multicultural education most frequently integrated into the curriculum those aspects that allowed for the individualization of the skill-related needs of students. A. Lin Goodwin's (1994) survey of 120 preservice teachers showed that the majority understood multicultural education to mean changing individual's views on race issues and for another 16 percent it meant adapting instruction to account for individual differences. In a study of multicultural teaching concerns Patricia L. Marshall (1996) also found that both inservice and preservice teachers were mainly concerned with utilizing the proper techniques and contents to meet the needs of diverse learners and relating positively to these students. Carmen Montecinos' (1994) study of how preservice teachers of color understood multicultural education showed that, in the absence of substantive preparation in this area, they tended to conceptualize it as HR. Johanna Nel (1993) asked 280 university students to choose between five goals (based on a rewording of Sleeter and Grant's framework) for teaching in a pluralistic classroom. Over 60 percent of the respondents selected the BAU and HR goal statements. These approaches, she argued, do little to challenge the disabling relationships between teachers, students, schools, and minority communities. In a prior study Martin Haberman and Linda Post (1990) had asked 227 white cooperating teachers to choose among the various goals identified by Sleeter and Grant (1993). That study also found that teachers gravitated toward the BAU, TCD, and HR approaches as they emphasized goals that focused on changing individuals not groups or society. What is it about an approach that attracts some students and fends off others? The studies cited did not explore this question.

In the current study we conducted a qualitative analysis of students' rationale for endorsing and rejecting various concepts and practices associated with these alternative approaches to addressing race, class, gender, and exceptionality in schooling. Our purpose was to examine if there were some identifiable belief patterns that gave coherence to their choices. In doing so, we sought to understand what are some of the beliefs relevant to multicultural education that need to be

explicitly enlarged and reconstructed by a multicultural teacher preparation curricula that, at the school and societal level, seeks to promote equality and cultural pluralism—the recognition and appreciation of the common culture and the diverse traditions that co-exist in United States society (Sleeter & Grant, 1993). How can teacher educators help teachers move beyond the prevalent view in which multicultural education is mainly a concern with individualizing instruction to better help students adjust to mainstream educational programs?

## Methodology

### The Context

Data for this study were gathered from three different cohort groups (N=79) taking courses in the teacher preparation programs of a state university in the Pacific Southwest. This university's mission statement as well as course requirements emphasize terms such as "international perspective," "global community," "multicultural outlook," "global awareness," and awareness about issues of race, class, and gender. This outlook is extended in the College of Education where one of the "core values" is to create and sustain "an inclusive environment that reflects and affirms diversity." The university has 3,250 full-time students. Demographic statistics indicate that 32 percent of the university's students and 35 percent of the faculty are members of under-represented populations.

### Participants

Group 1. This group consisted of 32 of 35 students (three were absent when the instrument was administered) enrolled in a three-credit course entitled "Cultural Diversity and Schooling." This is a prerequisite course for entry into the university's teacher preparation programs. Thirty of the 32 students were undergraduates. This group included 27 females; 27 White, one African American, and four Latino/a students. The students were given the questionnaire during a class period in the second week of an eight-week summer course. At that point, the students had been assigned to read information that covered the nation's changing demographics and to begin exploring the meaning of "culture." Although a discussion of Sleeter and Grant's (1993) framework was part of the course content, students had not yet been asked to read that information.

Group 2. Like students in Group 1, these participants were enrolled in the course "Cultural Diversity and Schooling"; 25 of 33 students in that course participated. The group consisted of five males and 20 females; 18 Euro Americans, five Latinos, and two Filipina students. In contrast to Group 1, Group 2 responded to the questionnaire during the fifth week of the 15-week fall semester course. This means that they had Sleeter and Grant's framework in their hands for a longer period of time, although they had yet not been required to read it. Educational equity was one of the major themes considered in class discussions.

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Group 3. The questionnaire was administered to 22 students who had already been accepted into the teacher education program with a middle level education emphasis. The theme for this cohort was “Democratic education for middle level school reform” and included sub-themes like “empowerment of students is essential to the students’ participation in a democratic society” and “education is a political act.” This group consisted of six males and 16 females, one African American and all others Euro American, except for three students who claimed some Native American ancestry (though none are affiliated or registered with any specific tribes or with the federal government). One participant was studying for her bilingual credential. By the time they responded to this questionnaire, they had already completed the “Cultural Diversity and Schooling” course and were enrolled in a one-credit course (an additional two-credits would be taken in Spring) entitled “Theories and Methods of Multicultural and Bilingual Education.” They responded to the questionnaire during the second class meeting of this course. About half of the students mentioned having heard about Sleeter and Grant’s typology.

### Instrumentation

A paper-and-pencil questionnaire, developed with the assistance of Sleeter, provides a short description of a school experiencing changes in its demographic composition, a high incidence of low academic achievement among students of color and low income students, and conflicts along racial and social class lines (see Table 1). This description is followed by six short vignettes describing approaches teachers could use to address the issues the school is confronting—one for each approach in Sleeter and Grants’ (1993) typology. Each vignette focuses on the features that distinguish a given approach from the others, glossing over the commonalties among them. For each vignette, respondents are asked to indicate what aspects they agreed with and why, what aspects they disagreed with and why, and to provide a justification when choosing their preferred approach for addressing the concerns of that school.

### Results

Two analyses were performed to summarize and interpret the data. First, responses were read to determine the frequency with which concepts were singled out for endorsement or rejection. Second, we used inductive analysis to identify patterns in the rationale behind a concept’s endorsement and/or rejection (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist (Sleeter & Grant, 1993) was the conceptual framework that informed our analyses. The quantitative and qualitative analyses yielded three general findings.

First, the instrument used in this study provided students with enough information regarding each approach so that the majority (97 percent) were able to commit themselves to selecting one or a combination of approaches that best represented

Table 1  
A Multicultural Education Questionnaire

The student population in your school is rapidly becoming racially diverse. In addition, the proportion of students from low-income families is growing. A large proportion of the low-income students and the students of color are not achieving very successfully. Further, resentment between the more affluent white students and the rest of the student body seems to be growing. Your school has traditionally had a "college bound" curriculum, and the staff is contemplating what to do.

DIRECTIONS: Read each one of the following approaches to this situation. For each one indicate:

- (1) What aspects you agree with and why.
- (2) What aspects you disagree with and why.

a. The program of the school has never been constructed multiculturally, and needs to be. This means that the curriculum for all students must be multicultural, teachers need to learn to teach to diverse learning styles and backgrounds, and the school needs to hire a more diverse staff. It just doesn't make sense these days to define a strong academic curriculum around Eurocentric, patriarchal ideas. Everything the school does should be re-worked to be pluralistic.

- [Agree with]
- [because]
- [Disagree with]
- [because]

b. The achievement problems are probably due mainly to a sense of alienation, so the first thing to work on is the affective climate of the school. Create clubs and social activities that involve broad spectrums of students so they can get to know each other, and train teachers in cooperative learning so they can have occasional projects in class that help students learn to feel comfortable with each other.

- [Agree with]
- [because]
- [Disagree with]
- [because]

c. The students who are members of oppressed groups are probably reacting to their low status without understanding why. The Black students would benefit from Black studies courses, the Latino students from Latino studies, and the low-income White students from a Labor studies curriculum. Eventually the groups can be mixed, but first each needs to ground itself in its own intellectual tradition, history and cultural strengths, in order to provide students with a strong sense of self that will enable them

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Table 1  
(continued from previous page)

to achieve and interact with others confidently.

[Agree with]  
[because]  
[Disagree with]  
[because]

d. The school is a microcosm of an oppressive society. If students can learn to address issues of social inequality in the community of their own school, they will be more able to do so in later life. The students should be engaged together, in the context of various disciplines, to examine how the school and other institutions give advantage to affluent White people. Then they should be involved in changing how the school works, using democratic processes. The teachers will need training in how to do this, of course, but in the long run this kind of process has the best chance of success.

[Agree with]  
[because]  
[Disagree with]  
[because]

e. Create a vocational track for the low-achieving students, to prepare them for jobs when they finish high school. A strong academic curriculum does not seem appropriate for the low-achievers, and this would give them an alternate route to graduation, and probably solve many of the conflicts because the students would be engaged in something more meaningful.

[Agree with]  
[because]  
[Disagree with]  
[because]

f. The traditional strong academic focus of the school simply needs to be packaged in a way that the existing curriculum is accessible to a much wider variety of students. One of the first things that should be addressed is how well the teachers teach to the varied learning styles of the students. The better the teachers become at adapting their strategies to the students, the more effectively problems will be resolved.

[Agree with]  
[because]  
[Disagree with]  
[because]

From these six approaches, which one would you be most likely to endorse? Why?  
A., B., C., D., E., F.

their views (see Table 2). When students were asked to indicate which of these six approaches they would endorse, 44 percent selected Multicultural Education (ME), 29 percent selected Teaching the Culturally Different (TCD), 10 percent selected Social Reconstruction (SR), 6 percent selected both ME and TCD, 6 percent selected various other combination of approaches, and 2 percent selected Human Relations (HR). The evidence collected in the current study indicates that prior to substantive education (Group 1) students tend to gravitate more toward the ME approach (20/32), after a little training (Group 2) they were more evenly divided between ME (n=8) and TCD (n=10), and after several courses with a focus on education and democracy (Group 3) the opinions were even more diversified among ME (n=7), TCD (n=6), and ME & TCD and SR with three selections each. The rationale offered for endorsing or rejecting each concept/practice, however, were not found to differ across cohorts.

Second, the vignettes allowed students to endorse/reject concepts/practices advocated by a given approach based on what was said in the text as well as what students' appeared to have inferred as logical implications of what was stated and not stated. With respect to the latter, for example, when ME advocated for the need to hire a diverse staff, several respondents inferred "get rid of Anglo teachers" and/or expressed concern that ethnic minority teachers would be hired because of their ethnicity and not because of their professional qualifications. Similarly, by advocating a need to multiculturalize "all schooling," several students inferred "the traditional strong academic curriculum will be watered down." These inferences are

Table 2  
Number of Students Selecting Each Approach to Multicultural Education

SET	n	Approaches Endorsed							
		ME	HR	SG	SR	BAU	TCD	ME & TCD	Other
Group 1	32	20	1	0	1	0	7	2	1
Group 2	25	8	0	1	4	0	10	0	2
Group 3	22	7	1	0	3	0	6	3	2
TOTAL (N)	79	35	2	1	8	0	23	5	5
(%)	44	2	1	10	0	29		6	6

ME: Multicultural Education; HR: Human Relations;  
SG: Single Group Studies; BAU: Business as Usual;  
SR: Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist;  
TCD: Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different.

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examples of some of the misconceptions about multicultural education that a teacher education curriculum must speak to directly.

Third, there were identifiable patterns in students' choices of concepts/practices to endorse and reject. Table 3 presents the number of students who agreed and disagreed with the concepts and practices advocated by each approach. Below we discuss three interrelated beliefs that give coherence to students' areas of concerns and comforts with various aspects implicated in an education that is multicultural: (a) commitment to integration; (b) conceptions of equal educational opportunities; and (c) conceptions of racism.

A Commitment to Integration

As can be observed in Table 3, students consistently and concomitantly expressed a strong belief in integration and a rejection of practices that they believed

Table 3  
Number of Students Agreeing and Disagreeing  
with Each Concept/Practice (N=79)

# Agree	# Disagree	Concept	Approach
0	9	occasional projects	Human Relations
3	33	affluent Whites	Social Reconstruction
3	46	entire statement	Single-group
5	3	school as microcosm	Social Reconstruction
	14	hire diverse staff	Multicultural Education
6	4	non-eurocentric	Multicultural Education
8	69	vocational track/ low achievers	Business as Usual
7	1	adapt strategies	Culturally Different
11	19	rework everything	Multicultural Education
10	10	address affective climate	Human Relations
12	0	address inequity issues	Social Reconstruction
12	46	Black/Latino studies	Single-group
12	13	entire statement	Social Reconstruction
12	2	democratic process	Social Reconstruction
11	0	involve students	Social Reconstruction
14	5	entire statement	Human Relations
17	0	entire statement	Multicultural Education
19	4	repackage existing curriculum	Culturally Different
19	2	entire statement	Culturally Different
25	0	ground in traditions	Single-group
25	1	cooperative learning	Human Relations

would engender greater divisiveness among social groups. Students unanimously rejected the Single Group's suggestion that: "The Black students would benefit from Black studies courses, the Latino students from Latino studies, and the low-income White students from a Labor studies curriculum. Eventually the groups can be mixed, but first each needs to ground itself in its own intellectual...." About a third of the students explicitly endorsed the idea of grounding students in their own traditions. However, a majority (58 percent) vehemently objected to the idea of separating the groups or just studying one's own group. The following students' responses reflect the views of most:

[Agree with ...] the idea of using time to study different cultures.

[because ...] it places value on cultures.

[Disagree with ...] NOT in isolation.

[because ...] All students should have basic understanding of cultures and the specific ones at the school and nation. They benefit from sharing experiences TOGETHER!

[Disagree with ...] The students being segregated in order to teach them about their own culture.

[because ...] Segregation would make the students further apart instead of working together.... This curriculum would create racism.

Their rejection of practices that were perceived as segregationist was also manifested in the unanimous rejection of the suggestion to (BAU): "Create a vocational track for the low-achieving students, to prepare them for jobs when they finish high school." In a rejection of tracking we found the greatest consensus among these participants (87 percent). This student's response echoes the voices of those who rejected tracking:

[Disagree with...] Creating a vocational track. Vocational opportunities can be given in elective classes.

[because...] Vocational tracking segregates students and implies that they are too stupid to go to college. We are in a new era where everyone needs to be motivated to learn.

A commitment to integration was also evidenced in students' concerns about the suggestion to (HR): "Create clubs and social activities that involve broad spectrums of students so they can get to know each other." Although many (38 percent) mentioned that this was a good idea because knowledge of those who differ from oneself promotes understanding and harmony, several others expressed concerns (25 percent). The patterns of participation in these clubs, they argued, would not only mirror but also further existing social divisions. This view is articulated by a student who wrote:

[Disagree with...] creating clubs.

[because...] the students already in the class have their own clicks and may not be open to letting an outsider into their group. This may further alienate new students.

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A final example of this commitment to integration can be seen in students' concerns with the suggestion that (SR): "The students should be engaged together...to examine how the school and other institutions give advantage to affluent White people." Students' endorsed the process (i.e., engaged together) but feared what they believed would be the social consequences (i.e., further resentment among groups) of what they would be studying (i.e., White privilege). Among the 33 students who explicitly rejected a discussion of white privilege, the rationale offered by most expressed a concern with separatism:

[Disagree with....] focusing upon how institutions work to advantage affluent White people.

[because...] again, this is inherently divisive and tends to foster an "us against them" mentality.

As noted earlier, the majority of the participants were White and perhaps they responded to this statement primarily on the basis of a perceived threat to their social location rather than from a belief in integration.

### Beliefs about Equal Educational Opportunities

Students' underlying conceptions of equal educational opportunities also give coherence to their adoption/rejection of specific concepts/practices associated with these various approaches. Charles A. Tesconi and E. Hurwitz (1974) have described the changing interpretations that philosophers and educators have given of the concepts of equality and equality of educational opportunities. They note that historically equal educational opportunities was understood to mean that all students should have access to similar instructional resources. In other words, by equalizing inputs racial and class disparities in educational attainment would be erased. This interpretation later changed, especially after the Coleman Report, to mean that equal educational opportunities should be determined on the basis of outputs. From this perspective, equal opportunities would be achieved when the range of achievement levels within a group remained constant across groups. The implication is, therefore, that schools must provide unequal resources to ensure this comparability of outcomes among groups that start school on an unequal foot.

As we illustrate next, it seems that the preservice teachers who responded to this questionnaire translated equality as comparable outcomes across groups into a conception of equal educational opportunity that involved adapting teaching strategies to meet individual differences. Thus, the individual and not the group becomes the basis for judging educational equity, a belief consistent with a core value in the United States: individualism. Consider, for example, three out of the four concepts that drew the most frequent positive endorsements: adapting instruction to students' learning styles (56 percent), creating social clubs (38 percent), and giving students choices for a vocational or college-bound education (37 percent). All of these imply guaranteeing individual choice and providing for student

uniqueness. For instance, in response to the BAU vignette, one student wrote:

[Agree with ...] option of vocational track.  
[because...] for some it would be more meaningful.  
[Disagree with...] tracking!  
[because...] if not strictly optional, tracking itself can give rise to conflicts.

Another student responded to the BAU vignette by asking "Is this a cop-out? I see no need to give up on low-achievers. Our mission is to teach All students, Equally!...certainly we need to adapt education to individual needs." In response to the TCD vignette, a student stated:

[Agree with...] all people learn differently and it essential to give everyone the opportunity to learn to their fullest.

Likewise, creating social clubs, as proposed by the HR vignette, was favored when it involved "creation of clubs/activities to include a wide range of students [because of] equal opportunity."

#### Conceptions of Racism

Students' discussions of what was conducive to social integration and equality also revealed their understandings of the social construction of racism. The interplay among beliefs about integration, equality, and racism are illustrated by two of the three most frequently rejected concepts (see Table 3): the entire vignette describing the SG approach (rejected by 58 percent) and an open discussion on White privilege (rejected by 41 percent). The majority of the students seemed to believe that equality is negated by practices that highlight differences that entail social conflict and by practices that address inequity issues in terms of social groups rather than individuals. Those who rejected these concepts seemed to believe that by identifying not only systemic inequity but also who is on top of the social hierarchy, the curriculum would create oppression. For instance, in response to the SG vignette a student wrote:

I disagree with C [SG] statement. This is the kind of teaching that has been prevalent for several decades and as we could see in the 1960s and 1970s with riots and fighting this method did not work. People thought let's give the Blacks a couple of courses in Black studies and make them happy, the same with Chicanos. Did it help? NO! It only made people more upset at the oppression in which they continued to live under.

Although this student recognizes the existence of institutional racism, he or she concomitantly rejects a curriculum that addresses it. Another student wrote:

[Disagree with...] the students being segregated in order to teach them about their own culture.  
[because] Segregation would make the students further apart instead of working together.... This curriculum would create racism.

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Students were more likely to endorse practices that addressed prejudices. For instance, students who endorsed the creation of social clubs (38 percent) typically said something similar to this student's response:

[Agree with...] create clubs and social activities that involve broad spectrums of students so they can get to know each other.

[because...] children need to know about other children from the inside. If they know a person is good and kind from the inside, then color or ethnicity shouldn't matter.

Only 12 percent argued in favor of the Social Reconstruction's advocacy for directly addressing institutionalized racism because, as one student put it, "if students learn to address issues of inequality in school they will be able to do so later in life." On the other hand, 38 percent argued that examining how institutions give advantage to affluent White people could "create hostility against White students and deepen resentment even further," or as another student stated, "it would be unfair to affluent White students to be blamed for society's problems." A student wrote:

[Disagree with...] "affluent White people."

[because] you are once again singling out a group culture and encouraging racism and resentment towards them.

Other students did not object to the social consequences of this approach; rather they questioned the validity of the SR claim that "institutions give advantage to affluent White people." One student wrote: "that's a generalization and not necessarily a reality." A second student wrote: "In most cases today the exact opposite is occurring."

### Implications for Multicultural Teacher Education

The current study has shown that certain elements in each approach to multicultural education, as delineated by Sleeter and Grant (1993), have affirming characteristics and each has elements that detract from its acceptance. More importantly, we are beginning to have a clearer picture, at a more specific level, of how preservice teachers respond to a range of elements advocated to promote academic success for the widest range of learners. Most positively our analysis suggests that the generic idea that schools need to provide an education that is multicultural is a belief well entrenched among these preservice teachers. At this time we cannot discern if this disposition was mostly something participants brought to their teacher preparation program or one that was mainly developed by the courses they had taken so far. Despite the fact that each group had taken a common curriculum, we found great diversity within each group regarding individual choices for a preferred approach to multicultural education. Moreover, even before any substantive course work in this area (Group 1 and 2) preservice teachers

had formed an opinion about what practices would advance multicultural education and what practices would thwart it.

Some of the beliefs documented here (i.e., students' strong rejection of tracking, their endorsement of cooperative learning, and the need to address diverse learning styles) are examples of facilitative elements for the task of preparing them to work effectively in multicultural contexts. The endorsement of these practices, however, might not translate into the implementation of the comprehensive approaches to multicultural education as advocated by the Multicultural Education and the Social Reconstructionist approaches (chosen by 59 percent of the participants). In our analysis we found that these preservice teachers' beliefs about racism, integration, and equality are more in line with the rationale behind the Teaching the Culturally Different approach (chosen by 29 percent). It is in an exploration of the lack of continuity between students' preference for an approach and some of the beliefs that inform their endorsement of discrete practices that teacher educators might find a fertile ground for helping students rethink schools for the enhancement of equity and excellence.

A review of previous research shows that the understandings held by the preservice teachers we sampled are rather common (Goodwin, 1994; Grant & Koskela, 1986; Marshall, 1996, Montecinos, 1994; Sleeter, 1996). In agreement with prior research, therefore, the overall tendency we observed among these participants was to equate multicultural education with adapting instruction to student's uniqueness. This tendency points out the consequences that profoundly held beliefs and prior school experiences have on an individual's thinking about multicultural education. As cogently argued by Paul Theobald and E. Mills (1995), in the early 1900s Thorndike's views about individualization of instruction and the fragmentation of curriculum to its lowest skills prevailed upon Dewey's advocacy for an education committed to democracy, holism, and minimal individual assessment. Not surprisingly, then, our study participants held views that reflect the schooling experiences of most adults in the United States, including themselves. The logic of individual differences reflected in these participants understandings of multicultural education echoes the dominant ideology of schooling that favors a psychological as opposed to sociological or anthropological analysis of learning and racism (Haberman & Post, 1990). This logic, however, makes invisible the interdependence between teachers' classroom practices and larger societal practices. It makes invisible the possibilities and constraints for creating equitable schools in a highly stratified and inequitable society. It is an analysis of this interdependence, however, that provides a foundation for approaches to multicultural education that seek not only to enhance the learning experiences of a given child but also to further democratic ideals and social justice for groups that have been historically disenfranchised.

The findings of the current study suggest some of the beliefs that the teacher education curriculum might need to explicitly address. There are two set of beliefs

that we suggest be explored. The first is to help students reconstruct their understanding of “educational equality.” Students’ strong commitment to equality can be used as a bridge to help them enlarge its meaning to include the dismantling of social/structural practices that engender inequalities for groups of people (based on race, income, gender, etc.). This involves helping students understand, for instance, that the uniqueness of each learner must not be understood as a pristine original voice since, as Lev Vygotsky (1978) noted, the voice of one individual carries the voice and history of the community to which she or he belongs. Similarly, a learner’s choice for a vocational education or college-bound curriculum, for this social club or that, cannot be understood as a pure exercise of a free-will that is immune to prior gender-based, raced-based, and classed-based socialization experiences. The provision for equity must take into consideration both students’ uniqueness as well as that part of their identities that derive from their membership in particular social groups. As Antonia Darder (1995) has written: “To understand ourselves as cultural beings requires that we understand the manner in which social power and control function to structure the world in which we exist and to define our place within that world” (p. 323). Thinking about students in purely psychological (individual differences) terms precludes an understanding of that part of their identity that is associate with their gender, class, and racial/ethnic affiliations. By asking teachers to move away from focusing exclusively on individual differences, we are not arguing against the need to individualize instruction, but we are highlighting the limitations this view creates for restructuring the whole schooling process to achieve greater equity.

Second, a discussion of multicultural teacher education of any consequence stresses the importance of directly addressing racism (Nieto, 1996). The findings of the current study indicate that preservice teachers might be quite agreeable to addressing the interpersonal dimension of racism while resisting a discussion that explicitly addresses its social/structural dimensions. For the participants who wanted to enact the ME or SR approaches (59 percent) it is necessary that their teacher preparation programs help them reconstruct their conception of racism beyond its psychological dimension. The comments collected in this study suggest that most students were only able to engage in a negative analysis of the consequences of naming the sources of oppression. Rather, students can and should be provided with a positive analysis of the social consequences of recognizing and naming oppression. In the case of the preparation of White teachers, the findings of the current study suggest that multicultural teacher education curriculum also needs to candidly address White students’ fears and concerns regarding the status that White people would have under a multicultural arrangement. Emphasis needs to be placed on a negative analysis (i.e., White privilege) as well as a positive analysis (i.e., the contributions that White teachers can make in a multicultural social arrangement). To the extent that some White teaches see themselves as displaced by such a practice, they will—understandably so—reject it. Teacher educators need

to speak directly to the sense of helplessness that preservice teachers feel in the face of the enormous challenge of changing society and the relative sense of efficacy they feel in changing a given child. It is this dynamic that leads many teachers to “searching desperately for instructional techniques that will help them fit round pegs into square holes” (Sleeter & Grant, 1993, p.79) in the name of multicultural education

While issues of ethnic relations continue to be at the forefront of the political debate and discussion, teachers are at the front line of decision making with respect to how they think about and respond to issues of diversity. Teacher educators, and the teachers they educate, can continue to think about diversity as a deficit to be overcome or as an asset to be affirmed. They can continue to narrowly define multicultural education as therapy or teaching techniques or they can embrace it as part of a broader social movement. They can continue to prepare teachers for society as it is or they can prepare them to develop important knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to engage collaboratively with others who seek to make changes in a society/school that is currently marred by social inequities. In this article we have suggested some of the ideological elements in teachers’ thinking that need to be targeted by educators and especially teacher educators who choose this latter goal for multicultural education.

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