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# Dialogic Pedagogy and Educating Preservice Teachers for Critical Multiculturalism

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# Dialogic Pedagogy and Educating Preservice Teachers for Critical Multiculturalism

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## Abstract

The study investigates the potentials of educating preservice teachers for critical multiculturalism through dialogic pedagogy. The study findings suggest that dialogic pedagogy experienced some successes in encouraging preservice teachers to revise their worldview about certain topics in the multicultural curriculum about which they were not initially open to dialogue. The study should contribute to the literature of dialogic pedagogy and multicultural education in terms of suggesting more democratic educational approaches toward teaching the controversial topics of the multicultural curriculum.

## Keywords

teacher education, education, social sciences, diversity and multiculturalism, education theory and practice, higher education, teaching

## Introduction

Multicultural education as a reform movement in education has faced many challenges in teacher education programs (Gorski, 2012; Martin, 2010). Specifically, critical multicultural education that invited White students to examine their historically and contemporarily social privilege and power (Sleeter, 1995) was typically met with emotions of anger, resentment, and deliberate disengagement (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). These challenges raised the concern of many multicultural educators about the worth of the movement and its success in effecting change in the ideologies and perceptions of White preservice teachers toward their prospective minority students (Caldéron, 2006; Delpit, 1992). In this article, the author suggests that many multicultural courses fail in sustaining long-term results (Holins & Guzman, 2005) owing to the educational approach that they follow and that muffles or stifles students' voices for the sake of attaining predefined curricular objectives. Alternatively, the author proposes Bakhtinian dialogue as an educational approach for critical multicultural education. A Bakhtinian dialogue argues that a true educational project could not take place without an amalgam of voices that coexist and that have the freedom to disagree or be in conflict. Bakhtinian dialogue does not have an end goal for the students to achieve (Bakhtin, 1991); dialogue takes place among subjects who are equal in their rights to express their voice in a free and democratic setting. In this

article, the author focuses on two cases that emerged from a larger study that included 35 female students in a course on cultural diversity in schooling and teaching for preservice elementary education teachers. The course in the study followed the Bakhtinian dialogic approach—henceforth referred to as dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, 2009; Sidorkin, 1999). The following research questions were posed: In an educational institution where students are required to take courses to fulfill the multicultural requirement, how does students' subjectivity guide/or hinder learning, and how do the students respond to the dialogue on the controversial issues of the curriculum? What learning opportunities, if any, did dialogic pedagogy present for the students in this class? Findings from this study should contribute to the literature of critical multicultural education of preservice elementary education teachers in terms of suggesting more democratic approaches for teaching the controversial issues of the curriculum and providing a safe, unoppressive, and potentially transformative learning environment to all students, even those who are opposed to the curricular goals of multicultural education.

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## Background and Context

As a reform movement, multicultural education aimed at responding to the needs and demands of ethnic and cultural minorities (Banks, 2012) and at emphasizing the pluralistic nature of the American society (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), 1973). However, focusing on celebrating holiday and prominent minority figures sporadically in the curriculum while ignoring the socio-historical and political context of diversity and multiculturalism in the public discourse (Weis, Proweller, & Centrie, 1997) had the undesired effects of affirming and perpetuating negative stereotypes about minorities (Banks, 2012). Meanwhile, multicultural education courses that had critical orientation and that sought to examine the histories and contributions of marginalized groups in the United States were elective courses that were mainly attended by minority students while core courses remained Eurocentric, legitimizing only classics of European origin (Banks, 1994). Thus emerged the need for a multicultural education that was more inclusive and that went beyond the single stand-alone course to ensure equitable school ecology in administration, teacher recruitment, and enrollment of students in sports and special education (Banks, 2012). In teacher education programs, the above objective became more salient as research studies suggested teachers' perceptions and attitudes about their prospective students were driving forces for advocating for their students (Niesz, 2010) and for the instructional decisions that they made in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Multicultural education in teacher education programs was, therefore, considered by some scholars as a project to prepare teachers to be political agents (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Larkin, 1995). As such, prospective teachers were expected to examine the privileges that their race and class bestowed on them (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 1995) and to interpret students' performance and academic achievement in light of the sociopolitical context of the schooling system that, allegedly, worked in the interest of the powerful dominant groups to preserve and maintain the socioeconomic status quo (Weis, 2012).

However, many studies that investigated the above approach of critical pedagogy found little success in effecting any change in teachers' attitudes and perceptions; besides, any success that had been attained was not sustained in the long term (Holins & Guzman, 2005). Part of the problem was that many multicultural programs could not permeate the predominantly White institution and its stated and hidden curriculum (Milner, 2008) nor did they allow for White students to come in contact with the marginalized groups that the courses discussed in such a way to reduce their prejudices about these groups through a human relations pedagogy (Grant & Sleeter, 2012).

Besides, Nieto (2004) contended that most of the dialogue employed in the multicultural courses was immersed in critical pedagogy as conceptualized by such scholars as Freire

and Shor. Although Shor and Freire (1987) regarded the students' role in dialogue as subjects who drove the learning goals and assessment methods, in practice, they did not take into consideration the problem of diversity among students, especially when they disagreed politically and ideologically among one another, with the instructor, and with the tenets of the multicultural curriculum itself (Matusov, 2009).

In applying critical dialogue in education, teachers could run the risk of appropriating critical dialogue to suit their own political agenda (Niesz, 2010). Matusov (2009) accused Freire himself of being a totalitarian who aimed at reconditioning the peasant to achieve his own educational and political goals without taking the peasants' agency in learning into consideration. Many studies about critical multicultural education had the tendency to homogenize White preservice teachers as well as preservice teachers of color (Amos, 2010; Solomon et al., 2005) and assumed that they all shared the same attitudes, dispositions, and knowledge about power and oppression in the American society and the public school system. Lee (2006) was concerned that questions about the forms of participation among students of color and if they differed according to racial/ethnic and linguistic differences were generally not raised in the literature.

Alternatively, dialogic pedagogy instead of Freirean dialogic theory could respond to the issue of diversity among students and could be more revealing to different forms of classroom interactions in critical multicultural education. There are only a few studies that investigate dialogic pedagogy in critical multicultural education. These studies only report on the transformation (Fecho, Collier, Friese, & Wilson, 2010) of individual students or focus on anecdotes of interactions taking place among individual students on one single topic in the curriculum (DePalma, 2007; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010). Although this article focuses on the cases of individual students as well, the author does not report on students' transformation toward curricular goals. Instead, the author argues that the success of any educational approach does not necessarily mean the success of the curriculum. On the contrary, the students might never agree with the tenets of the curriculum; but the fact that they were allowed to grapple with these tenets and to come to their own conclusions freely should be enough to judge the educational project as being successful.

## Theoretical Framework: Critical Multicultural Education and Dialogic Pedagogy

To Bakhtin (1991), truth is born in a dialogue that takes place on the boundaries of social relationships. For an idea to be born, a minimum of two consciousnesses need to come together and to dialogue. In education, traditionally, a monologic discourse has been taking place between teachers and students in which the teacher assumes the role of the

all-knowing individual who has the mission of teaching truth to those who are ignorant of it and who are in error (Bakhtin, 1999). Matusov (2009) maintained that such discourse exists even when teachers claim to be engaging students in dialogue. Dialogue as an instructional tool or a classroom management technique is still a monologic approach to education as it only takes into account the truth as told by the curriculum or the institution and sometimes according to the teacher's convictions but ignores the students' agency in their own learning.

A universal conceptualization of the truth has major ontological harm for the students as it makes the students objects of the instructor's fantasies and pedagogical aspirations (Matusov & Smith, 2007) and denies them the right to disagree, to differ, and to bring to the educational project their own version of the truth. Students, as subjects, refuse such objectification and respond by resistance, resentment, and disengagement (Candela, 1999; Skidmore, 2000). Teachers, in turn, respond by different methods of punishment that they claim are for the students' good while in fact they are projections of the teachers' frustrations with their failed curricular goals. Matusov, von Duyke, and Meacham (2013) considered such responses on the teachers' part pedagogical violence jeopardizing any true learning that could take place in an otherwise healthy educational relationship.

Dialogic pedagogy, alternatively, considers students as subjects who have equal voices to that of the teacher and the curriculum Matusov (2011) maintained that an authentic dialogic project allows students to be authors of their own learning as they initiate inquiries, wonderment, and learning journeys, or as they respond to the authoritative word of the curriculum or to questions raised by others. Matusov (2011) insisted that authorial learning could only happen if the instructor is sincere in seeking an answer that emerges in the student's consciousness and not in imposing his or her own convictions.

Because students author their own learning, in dialogic pedagogy, it could be expected from the students to seek voices that are diverse and that might not be present in the class. In critical multicultural education, this should solve the problem of the hegemony of the instructor's voice and that of the White students. DePalma (2010) maintained that in her struggle to combat the trend of talking about absent communities in her multicultural course, she invited guest speakers from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community on campus to her class. In this case, the choice of who to invite to speak still reflected the power of the instructor in directing the class learning goals; however, DePalma (2010) considered such opportunity that dialogic pedagogy made available as a step forward toward a more polyphonic instruction. Sullivan (2011) interpreted Bakhtin's conceptualization of the term *polyphony* as the negotiation of different voices within a complex and diverse educational project. Likewise, Gardiner (2002) maintained that polyphony encompasses "a plurality of independent voices and

consciousness . . . [all] fully valid" (p. 24). More importantly, these voices are necessarily unyielding to the authoritative word, and all maintain the right to be subjects as opposed to objects of their own existence.

In critical multicultural education, polyphony takes the onus of investigating institutionalized racism and White privilege from the instructor and the students of color. Alternatively, such responsibility becomes distributed among different stakeholders, including Whites who have an investment in social justice and equity pedagogy. Dialogic pedagogy alerts the students that they need the word of the other—especially those who disagree with and differ from them—to shape their own word. Thus, in critical multicultural education, even those who disagree with the goals of the curriculum and with the instructor's word, are necessary to provide the dialogic provocation for the learning of others. The monologic word of those who refuse to dialogue and who believe that they possess the ultimate truth is essential to advance the learning of those who are open to dialogue because it provokes a deeper understanding of the truth.

## Methodology and Method

This investigation was carried out using qualitative research methods including critical ethnographic methods of data collection, field note writing, and data analysis. In this study, the author took the role of a participant observer who also wore the hat of the course instructor. As a participant observer, the author followed the methods outlined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) for an ethnographer who also tries to be totally immersed in the experience of those she is studying. For example, instead of the traditional methods of recording every single event while on the field, field notes, in this study, were recorded on a digital recorder directly after each class highlighting only moments of challenge and conflict among class members, from the viewpoint of the researcher as the course instructor. Realizing the fact that such method needed a broader perspective than that of the researcher who was also the instructor, the author sought to enhance data from these notes by in-depth interviews with students after the course was over. In-depth interviews had the purpose of realizing member check (Merriam, 1998), in which, the researcher checks her understanding and analysis of the data against the word of the other, who was also involved in the same experience.

Critical ethnography requires a deep and abiding dialogue with the Other as never before. This means that our attention to ethnographic positionality still must remain grounded in the empirical world of the Other . . . we attend to how our subjectivity in relation to the Other informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of the Other. (Madison, 2011, p. 9)

However, the author did not rely only on field notes and in-depth interviews to understand how dialogic pedagogy

worked in this study. To minimize the bias effect of data reporting, the author also relied on the students' written works and their interactions on the class website. The interactions and responses of students to one another are reported verbatim, in this article, to allow the reader to participate in the analysis of the data and to make his or her own conclusions alongside or even aside from the author's own interpretation (Foley, 2010). This article seeks to reveal two strong cases of monologic interaction that emerged in the study; however, the study itself involved all class members who signed a consent form to use the class discussion, their coursework, and their forum contributions as data sources. These were 24 out of the 35 students who enrolled in that course. Therefore, although the study focuses on these two specific cases, their experience should not be seen as separate from the context of their interaction with other class members and those whom they discussed the course material with outside the class. Similarly, other students in the course provided data that were helpful in the interpretation of these cases, although they were not the main focus of this article. For example, in the original study, the author conducted interviews with 12 students 2 years after the course was over; however, the student of the first case study was not one of these students as she did not respond to the invitation to be interviewed. Instead, another student who became a good friend with the first student during the time of the course came to the interview and her relationship with that student was discussed and used as data to supplement the investigation about the first case.

Another step that the author took to minimize the bias in data reporting and data analysis was to consult with members of an intellectual group of professors of education and graduate students in the department in which she was a doctoral student at the time of the study. Through several meetings organized and led by the author's dissertation advisor at that time, discussions took place about several samples of data and what they meant in light of the literature of dialogic pedagogy and multicultural education.

### *Research Site and Research Participants*

**Research site.** This study took place in a research institution located on the East Coast. Although the university is state assisted, it is also privately chartered and receives funds from a variety of different sources. Student enrollment is predominantly White. Faculty members are also predominantly White and constitute 80% of the total full-time faculty employed by the university. The ratio of males to females among full-time faculty is 1.5:1. These statistics published on the university's website show a predominantly White institution with males at the lead numerically in the faculty body and females in the student body.

Students in all programs and departments are required to complete three credits in an approved course or courses stressing multicultural, ethnic, and/or gender related content

for graduation. Moreover, faculty members, affiliated with multicultural courses, are required to provide evidence every 5 years that students manifested success in the above areas so that their course can be recertified. These requirements are implemented across the board but in the elementary teacher education program, the multicultural requirement might be more than the three credits mentioned above if students specialize in Urban Education.

**Course description.** The course that the study investigated is a core requirement for all education major and education minor students. As described in the institution's course catalogue, the course is supposed to examine roles and responsibilities of the classroom teacher toward diversity. Course description also specifies the topics that the course covers such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, poverty, and language. The curriculum was designed by a professor of education who has many publications on dialogic pedagogy. Because the course was offered without a practicum and to make up for the lack of firsthand communication with members of the ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic communities that the course tackled, the course designer selected videos featuring members of these communities as part of the learning material offered in the course.

**Course design and topics.** The course was designed to create a dialogic pedagogy environment. Students were informed on the course syllabus that

in our instructional view, how you think and feel about the pedagogical issues in the class is the most important course/project content, because at the end of the day, it will be you who will be the final agency for your teaching decision making in your future classroom. (course syllabus in 2011)

To ensure that the students would express their opinions freely and without the fear of losing grades or failing the course, the course designer maintained that "there are no tests or exams. All assignments are not graded, except the final project, to let you safely explore the important and complex issues of diversity in education" (course syllabus in 2011). This does not mean that students were not assigned grades for their contributions but rather that students got full credit no matter what their opinion was as long as it was grounded in the material that they learned about in class.

To ensure that all students got to voice their opinion during the class time including those who were shy and those who could have felt intimidated by other students, students were asked to fill in an index card and submit it at the end of each class. These index cards were also used as an attendance record and students did not have to write on them except their names and the date if they chose to. Moreover, to ensure that the dialogue would continue beyond the classroom time and space, students were asked to do two web postings on the class blog per week. Students had the option

either to initiate these postings or to post in reply to other class members. Most of the time, the titles of the web posts were provided by the students who chose to initiate the discussion. In addition to the web posts, students were asked to do four mini projects for the semester. Mini projects were opportunities for students to do their own research through investigating online statistics or conducting interviews with stakeholders in the education field. The first mini project asked students to reflect on their objectives for taking a course on cultural diversity. Two of the mini projects asked the students to look at statistics and research details from government websites and other institutions to investigate gaps in academic achievement, enrollment, employment, or annual income between Whites and minorities including women. The fourth mini project asked the students to interview a person who was outside their social and/or racial circle and to discuss with them any of the educational topics that the class discussed. Students were asked to choose the topics and interview questions and to report what they learned from the experience and how it was related to the topics discussed in class. Mini projects and class web talks were not graded assignments yet they still carried weight in the final grade in the sense that students were given full credit for submitting contributions that engaged the voices of the professional communities and not just mere personal opinions. The only graded assignment was the final project but this was not included in the data gathered for this study.

Course material categorized institutional racism into three major categories. The first was social as represented in educational games and the media. Students watched the movie *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (Picker, 2001) and discussed the article *The Oregon Trail* by Bigelow (1995). Later in the course, this discussion was enhanced by examining the impact of images and portrayals of minorities in the media and the society on the self-image and self-worth of minorities, especially Blacks, through watching the documentary *A Girl Like Me* (Davis, 2005). Students also investigated socioeconomic inequalities in funding education and teachers' attitudes toward their minority students through an activist documentary, *Fear of Learning at Hoover*, about Proposition 187 in California (Simón, 1997). Another topic that the course covered was racism in research and different ways the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks has been interpreted historically and contemporarily. The students read Fordham's article on the burden of acting White among Black students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) that also included Ogbu's theory on the achievement gap among Blacks depending on their history of voluntary or involuntary immigration in the United States. The discussion included a BBC documentary video on Black students being ostracized and harassed by their friends for achieving academically, as this was described as acting White. Videos were used to augment the discussions on the scholarly articles by inviting the voices of minorities whom the class was missing. Gender issues, sexuality, and homosexuality were discussed in terms of

gender roles in education, bullying, and teaching about sex in elementary school.

*Students in the course.* There were 35 students enrolled in the cultural diversity course all identified as females. Four identified as African American; one as first generation Korean American, one as Latina and middle class, one as White and lesbian; and one from a same sex household. The students' demographic information was extracted from the results of a questionnaire that was administered at the beginning of the semester.

The study focused on cases of monologic interactions and the role that monologism and dialogism played in students' learning. Two students who manifested extreme monologism in the dialogue were selected. However, the larger study revealed that the majority of the students swung between monologism and dialogism throughout the course. In this context, the author would like to justify her choice of the study case design in reporting the data. Yin (1994) maintained that case study designs are best for situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. The reason the author selected these two students is to suggest that even in cases of extreme monologism and resistance, dialogic pedagogy could play a role in students' learning and future decision making as teachers. Both students in this study came from similar socioeconomic background but they were different racially. The first student, Bonnie, was White and self-identified as upper-middle class. The second student, Monique, self-identified as African American, suburban, and middle class. Although only one of them seemed to be overtly opposed to the curriculum, the other was opposed covertly and for different reasons. The monologic/dialogic dynamic (in this course), thus, could differ according to the participants' racial, ethnic, and cultural background and also according to their individual experiences and the way they interpret or perceive reality. This is why the author found that zooming on two individual cases could help the reader understand in depth the unique experience that the individual participant went through in that course, and while the author does not claim that such experience is representative of the opportunities or challenges to learning that all dialogic multicultural classes might offer, they also could not be unrepresentative (Tobin & Davidson, 1991).

Moreover, the author decided to analyze the data 2 years after the course was over to prevent any ethical issues related to the conflict of interests between the researcher who was also the course instructor and the students among whom some consented to being participants in the research. At the beginning of the course, students were asked to fill in a consent form for using their oral and written contribution in the class for research. The consent form assured the students that while data would be collected during the course, no analysis would take place except after the course was over and that their real names would not be used in reporting the data. As

**Table 1.** Operationalization of Bakhtinian Theoretical Framework and Data Sources.

Theoretical framework	Operationalization	Evidence from the data
Dialogism	Students' attention to the others' opinion as reflected in expressions of including that opinion in their words and in extending that opinion either by adding to it or by disagreeing with it upon further consideration	Students' revised opinions as indicated by words such as "eye-opening," "didn't consider it before," "see it differently," or words such as "agree," "disagree," as long as the agreement or disagreement is justified
Monologism	Students' utterances continue to express preconceived worldviews that do not show any sign of inclusion or consideration of the view of the class community, the instructor, and the learned material	Students' contributions do not include any changed views and do not reflect any need for learning
Students' authorial learning	Students providing provocations to further the dialogue and, thus, the learning process (Matusov, 2011)	Students' posting links, videos, articles, local, and global news that students sought as a response to a discussion or as an initiative to further the discussion

the author was analyzing the data 2 years after the course was over and wanted to supplement the data with interviews to achieve member check as discussed above, she sent an email to the class list that was still preserved in the course database and got 12 responses from students who agreed to be interviewed. The first case study was not among those students but an insider's view on some of the process she went through during this course and after was offered by one of her friends who also used to be a student in the course and who came to the interview. The first student consented to using her written work and class discussion for research even though she did not come to the interview.

**Data analysis and synthesis.** The theoretical framework of dialogic pedagogy guided the initial coding of the data. The data were coded line by line in bottom-up process to assign codes and to find emerging themes related to students' interactions in terms of monologism and dialogism as defined by Bakhtinian scholars, which the author discussed in the "Theoretical Framework" section of this article. When the author first started coding the data, she counted moments of dialogism and monologism. How these terms were operationalized in coding the data and sources of evidence are discussed in Table 1. However, after the initial coding process, the author also added students' authorial learning as another code when she found students posting links of websites and YouTube videos either to respond to a certain argument or to start a new one based on the topics discussed in class and

continued on the class web. In the final process of data analysis, the author, through investigating relationships among the themes of dialogism and monologism, tried to form the hypothesis that dialogic pedagogy would penetrate even a stubbornly monologic mind, and this hypothesis was tested through constant comparative methods (Merriam, 1998), setting data from the above-mentioned case studies against data gathered from other students.

Table 1 shows how the data analysis operationalizes the theoretical framework and aligns its tenets with the codes assigned to the students' utterances.

## Findings

### *Lack of Educational Goals and/or the Desire to Learn as a Source of Monologism and as an Obstacle to the Learning Objectives of the Course*

One of the overlooked issues in critical multicultural education is whether students see its worth for their own learning and for their teaching career. Students might parrot buzzwords and slogans that they hear in the media or on college campuses about minorities, racism, and inequalities, but until they feel the need to learn about others and are able to identify these learning goals, how could one expect actual learning to take place? The two students, in this study, could not identify their goals for taking a multicultural class especially in light of the fact that the course was a requirement. Bonnie, a White middle class 20-year-old, expressed this fact frankly at the beginning of the course maintaining that if it were up to her, she would have not taken it:

Right off the bat, I think that it is necessary to point out the real reason that most people are taking this class. I am required to partake in this course regardless of my desire or lack-thereof to do so. With this demand looming overhead, I think that it squelches any real desire that we as students may have had regarding this subject. If it were not a required element, I am sad to say that, no, I would not be enrolled in this course. There are many reasons for this. The first is that I would much rather be spending my time learning about things in my concentration area. This would include English, or even my interests in history. (Mini Project I, September 9, 2011, 8:10 p.m.)

Bonnie did not only express her objection to a whole course on multicultural education, but she also spoke for everyone else in the class and indicated that they were all taking the class just to fulfill a requirement. Furthermore, in the above excerpt, Bonnie did not mention her background or lack of knowledge about cultural diversity; something that she revealed much later in the semester. In a midsemester mini project in which students were asked to interview someone outside their social circle, Bonnie felt the need to discuss her background to justify her reasons for choosing the person whom she interviewed. This was the first but not the only

time, henceforth, Bonnie acknowledged her limited cultural diversity experience,

I am a White class female from the higher end of the middle range of socioeconomic realms. I grew up in a home with both of my parents and triplet brothers as siblings. In addition, I was raised from a Christian worldview. Although my life was incredibly stable I am not as cultured as I would like to be. All of my education has been through private or public schooling within the United States. (Bonnie, Mini Project III, Closing the Gap Between Social Groups, October 21, 2011)

In the above excerpt, even though Bonnie admitted that she was not as “cultured as I would like to be,” she did not examine her assumption that there should be correlation between a stable life and a “cultured” person, which in turn would suggest that those who did not have a stable life were less “cultured.” Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines the word *cultured* as “having or showing good education, tastes, and manners.” Throughout her class contributions, Bonnie affirmed assimilative views that put the onus on marginalized groups for not learning the appropriate “American culture,” assimilating to “American values,” and achieving the “American dream.”

For example, in commenting on the video “Fear of Learning at Hoover Elementary,” a video documentary that was released at the time Proposition 187 was in California court to determine its constitutionality in denying undocumented immigrants education and health services, Bonnie blurted out in class, “I just don’t understand: why can’t those people assimilate?” (field notes, Class Session 6: Undocumented immigrants and immigration, October 7, 2011). Later, on the class web, Bonnie wrote,

People began immigrating to America because they wanted a better lifestyle. Well, if we continue to allow illegal immigrants to reside here without, as you said, paying dues . . . our society based on democracy and community will completely dissolve. There is always emphasis in classes nowadays on how citizens must “Do their part.” This should apply to illegal aliens as well. They must do their part. (Class web, Re: Illegal Aliens video, October 7, 2:31 p.m.)

Earlier, on the class web, Bonnie had expressed her feelings about the Proposition 187 video and sided with the White teachers in the documentary who expressed hostile or unwelcoming views toward immigrants. The video showed that children were subjected to micro aggressive acts of rejection and hurtful words from their teachers in such a way that questioned the kind of learning that could take place in such a hostile environment. The video also showed that the unsafe environment was both inside the school because of teachers’ attitudes and outside school because of the crime infested neighborhood in which the school was located and in which the students lived:

As I was walking out of class on Tuesday I realized that this video really irritated me. There were essentially two parties speaking during the video—the Hispanic teacher, and the

“blonde-haired white” one. What I found myself thinking was that while the Hispanic teachers in the school were putting down the “white” ones for various reasons . . . (Whether these include not learning Spanish, etc.) she was making points that to me seem completely invalid. One comment I remember was “These teachers act like they are doing the children a favor.” This was preceded by a comment about superiority, and no one can judge whether the teachers think they are better than a student. However, the fact is that the white teachers who come from a high socioeconomic background are MOST DEFINITELY doing the urban children (or illegal aliens) a favor. No teacher takes a smaller pay and harder circumstance as a choice for their career EXCEPT for the good of the children. No teacher wants that, but instead makes a sacrifice for the students because they care about not only them, but their education as well. (Bonnie, class web, Illegal Immigrants video, October 6, 5:50 p.m.)

In the above excerpt, Bonnie tried to reflect her angry tone by the use of capital letters and also by using terms that the class discussed were hurtful and offensive, such as “illegal aliens.” These responses angered some class members especially when Bonnie blurted out the previously mentioned view about assimilation. In class, Leah responded to Bonnie saying, “I don’t think assimilation is an appropriate way of putting it. America now is a stew and not a melting pot” (field notes, October 7, 2011). Amy was not as confrontational and tried to get me as the course instructor to respond. Amy wrote on the index card—thus seeking a more private forum, “I think we need to have a brief discussion about word choice in this class because political correctness is becoming an issue” (index card, October 7, 2011). When I read Amy’s index card, I emailed her to ask what she meant by political correctness; Amy responded that Bonnie’s comment about the assimilation of “those” people was not appropriate (Amy, email, October 7, 2011). Bonnie’s views did not make her popular among the class community but it seemed that Bonnie was not interested in making any friends among the class community either. Carmen, whom Bonnie became friends with during the class, indicated in the private interview,

I like people who are blunt and sassy and express how they feel but her [Bonnie’s] bluntness angered many people . . . we never spent time together when we weren’t in class. I can’t think of anyone else who was close to her. I think this was only her second semester because she had transferred from [a Christian university] and I think she transferred back there so I don’t think there were many people that she knew or hung out with . . . but I think it was a transition for her and I think she might have known that this school wasn’t the school for her and this is why she wasn’t invested in making friends because she knew that she wasn’t gonna stay. I mean of course she might have known on an unconscious level like sort of a feeling because it didn’t come as a surprise to me when she transferred back to [the Christian school]. (Private interview, January 9, 2013)

The above excerpt suggests that Bonnie not only rejected the multicultural course and the class dialogue, but that she decided to reject the whole institution and return to her former

school that was in congruence with the “Christian worldview,” which she had expressed was the basis of her upbringing. Bonnie’s views, however, were not mere opinions grounded in her own personal denial of White privilege and racial discrimination. The author suggests that Bonnie’s views represented some sort of political and ideological positions that have always existed in the American public discourse. Lippy (2012) contended that a traditional cry for the Americanization of all people groups was an ill-disguised call for Protestantizing everyone in the society to preserve the image of America as a Christian (Protestant) nation. These cries have existed, according to Lippy (2012), since the arrival of the first wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe with religious faiths different than the Protestant traditions. Bonnie’s monologism could have, thus, been grounded in her own interpretation of what it means to be an American stemming from some fundamentalist Christian worldview, according to Libby, which in turn could have represented a challenge to her learning about minorities in that course; her views could have also affected her relationship with other students in the course. However, there were instances, albeit rare, when the dialogic word penetrated Bonnie’s conscious. I will discuss this issue in the “Students’ Authorial Learning as an Opportunity for Dialogue and Learning” section.

However, Bonnie was not the only student who believed that there was not much to learn in the multicultural class. There were other students who did not see the value of the course to their own learning, although they did not express it as frankly as Bonnie did. Monique, the second case study, maintained,

I am taking [this course] because I work for an after-school program for school-age children. According to State Law, I must complete at least one three-credit education course to continue working there. At first I thought that taking a 3-credit course solely for keeping a temporary job seemed like a waste of time. However, looking through the course selection, [this course] was the only course that fit in my schedule. The class also seemed to be the only class opened. I was also glad that the class fulfilled my multi-cultural requirement. (Mini Project I, Why am I taking this course? September 5, 10:37 p.m.)

In the excerpt, Monique mentioned many reasons for taking the course, none of which included any educational needs or learning goals. Elsewhere, Monique expressed her conviction that she was all knowledgeable about the African American experience and there was nothing new that she could learn. This insistence cost her low grades in a course on Black American studies that she claimed she took as a therapy (but not to learn):

I didn’t learn anything because I already knew this stuff but she [the professor] was very highly opinionated so it kind of made it hard to interject even some things because she was so . . . she wasn’t teaching Black American studies; she was teaching her life and Black American Studies based on her and you learn it based on what she wants you to learn and you experience Black

American studies the way she wants you to . . . there were some White students. I feel like it was an eye opener for them . . . you know we already knew everything but for us it was kind of frustrating because we had to learn from her experience as a Black woman, we couldn’t really put our own experiences and you felt that you needed to do that . . . to input your experience? Yea, I thought it was gonna be therapeutic but it was like this is what being Black means and if you don’t write it on the test you fail. I got a C like really? In my own . . . in my own people. (Private interview, August 8, 2012)

But the claim that Monique knew everything about the African American experience was not true. In commenting on her own upbringing, Monique maintained,

I based my whole Black experience on my family because they didn’t . . . this is the life they made for me so my dad he is from Ghana so there is a rich culture there and my mom is from the South . . . you know the Black neighborhoods of the South so that’s my experience there so really I just took what my family gave me and put my identity that way because really there is no way to turn. I never really identified with rap. I never really identified with Urban culture that much and that’s what I used. I hadn’t even started going to a Black church before I came here because in Ghana there is the type of people who are into the African culture and there are Africans who are more—well in dad’s generation—now it is not really like that—who are more concerned being British so basically White so my dad was like that. (Private interview, August 9, 2012)

Monique also indicated that her whole upbringing was in a predominantly White neighborhood in the suburbs and, thus, was regarded as an “oreo” (Black from the outside and White from the inside by many Black people). Monique did not specify which Black people regarded her as an oreo but her experience in the Black American studies class and her acknowledgment that it was eye-opening to the White students but not to the Black ones suggests that she stereotyped Blacks and categorized them all in one group and erroneously regarded their experience as unified. Monique’s stereotyping of the other was also extended to her classmates as well and affected her desire to engage in a dialogue with them. In her opinion, because they were White, she did not believe that any of them were serious about the topics of the course:

I definitely think it [multicultural education] is kind of entertainment for them a little because they are farly removed from it and most of them haven’t even been put in that situation where they can kind of even sympathize so I feel like they just read it and it kind of goes into one ear and comes out from the other so I don’t think they are even interested unless they have some interest like one have a biracial child, then she could be especially interested but I don’t think they really care to understand what’s going on. (Private interview, August 8, 2013)

In the above excerpt, Monique accused the White girls in her class with something she herself was guilty of. She, too,

was “farly removed” from many of the experiences discussed in class and she, too, did not have much sympathy for other minorities. In the interview, reflecting on the topic of sexism that was discussed in class, Monique maintained,

The sexism didn't really inspire me as much because I didn't really know that it was there. The discussion on homosexuality was heated. I was kinda of apathetic because my sister is a Lesbian and she is very outspoken, annoying, and I really just because of my personal experience with that the way that she is always outspoken always gay pride makes me not care, makes me shut it out so unfortunately I wasn't really I was very apprehensive to that part of the class because I didn't really—I was just basically tired of hearing about it because of what I get at home so yea. . . . [Researcher: Even if it were about how to prevent bullying in this area? Even then did you feel it was annoying to you?] Unfortunately yes, because of the way my sister paints homosexuality. I mean I have gay friends and stuff but they are not like my sister because my sister is like very highly intellectual and hippy and annoying and basically just like one bad stone spoils the soup. (Interview, August 13, 2012)

So even though Monique claimed to have many gay friends, one experience that she claimed was bad with a gay person made her decide that she was “apathetic” to the topic of homosexuality even if it meant providing a safe and bully free environment for that group of students. Monologism in Monique's case meant self-involvement in one's own convictions to the extent of shutting out any other voice from outside. Monique's monologism did not allow her to see anything new that she needed to learn in the first place.

In the above two cases, one could see that the students' monologism grounded in their personal convictions, and their lack of educational goals represented a challenge to the learning objectives that the course aimed to achieve. However, the next section of the findings maintains that these students did not leave the class without being impacted by the dialogic word that seemed to have penetrated their monologic wall and given them new realizations despite their expectations of the course.

### *Students' Authorial Learning as an Opportunity for Dialogue and Learning*

In this study, dialogic pedagogy took place whenever students were allowed to guide their own learning. The course was structured to have students dialogue with others and in many cases to choose that other to dialogue with. For Monique, the only time during the course that she sought the other for dialogue was when she felt puzzled and confused about them. Despite the fact that Monique claimed that she knew everything about what it meant to be Black, Monique felt at a loss when she could not understand her Black boyfriend who came from a different socioeconomic status than she did: “[he] comes from a lower-class, poor southern family. Although my Mom is from the south, I had no clue what

his childhood experiences would compare to mine” (Mini Project III, October 31, 2011). The above quote is extracted from Monique's assignment of closing the social gap by interviewing someone outside the students' social circle. Monique decided to interview her boyfriend at the time who was also a college footballer. After doing her research and interviewing him, she claimed to have understood things that she never did before:

So after talking to him for awhile, mostly about sports and college classes, I realized that Drew is someone who lives to the stereotype of being “the dumb football player.” In Drew's world, strength is the most important, because intelligence may fail you. To Drew, anyone can be intelligent, but if you are truly intelligent, you hide your intelligence, so that people will never “get the best of you.” (Mini Project III, October 31, 2011)

In the above excerpt, Monique expressed her realization that Drew had certain defense mechanisms about his identity that made him hide his true self from a world that expected only physical strength and dumbness from Black males (Fordham, 1993); however, at the time of the course, Monique could only interpret this new realization in light of gender issues, which is suggested by how she reflected on what she learned from the assignment,

Talking with Drew taught me a lot about teaching, talking to “boys,” and masculinity. Drew would not open up to in depth about anything else but football . . . To teach a “Drew,” you might need to relate everything back to athletics. Every math problem, every grammar sentence, and every other lesson that Drew needs to learn. If you really care about Drew's education, you would do him this favor. (Mini Project III, October 31, 2011)

Although the above could still be interpreted as a learning moment in which Monique had allowed a place for the other in her own consciousness and acknowledged that she learned from them what she did not know before, the truly learning moment happened, in my view, when Monique could interpret Drew's attitude in light of capitalism and institutional exploitation of racial minorities. This was expressed in the private interview I had with Monique 2 years later,

The best mini project I had was the one that I remembered the best and that's the one that was the most eye-opening project because the guy I interviewed was actually my ex on the UD campus and it was interesting because he was a football player and a lot of the athletes—college athletes—I don't know if they pick on African Americans from poor families but they do—kinda of like a lot of professors are naming it a second slavery because when they come to college, they are bound by these sports and a lot of these sports are a limitation to you because you can't really do anything else; you can't study abroad, you have to be here during the summer. They have to be here because they don't have money to go to college otherwise even though it is an honor to play for your school; they are literally bound by

their athleticism. They can't get away from it and they create an identity around it. (Private interview, August 8, 2012)

In the above excerpt, Monique had the changed realization that her boyfriend's identity and behavior had to do with more than a mere gender issue but rather with a racialized gender that regarded Black males as worthy only in light of their athletic or rather physical strength. The realization was probably related to the course in Black American studies that she took after the class in this study as she referred to "a lot of professors naming it a second slavery," or it could be related to some other educational experience. However, Monique's changed interpretation of the outcomes of the interview with her ex-boyfriend suggests that the dialogic experience she had during this interview had impacted on her lived and learning experiences beyond the time and space of that stand-alone course.

A similar experience happened with Bonnie and about an issue that she, at first, did not want to acknowledge as institutional racism, that is, the issue of undocumented immigrants. In general, this topic was the most challenging to me, as the course instructor. On one hand, it was one that incited a majority of class resistance to any alternative views about children of undocumented immigrants who, according to an almost class consensus, were "defying the law" and were not "paying taxes." On the other hand, I felt my limitation in speaking about this issue myself because I feared I was an example of the "model" immigrant in my students' views, being legal and being a successful one (as a doctoral student at the time of the study, I could have been perceived as an academic achiever). To deal with my limitations, I decided to seek the support of a guest speaker. Jackie was a literacy coach for the local school district and supervised 10 English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. I met Jackie when we were both enrolled in a master's program in teaching ESL and remembered her as being an advocate for her students. Jackie's advocacy was my initial reason for inviting her to class. Moreover, I deemed that her voice, as a White American, could be found more valid in the predominantly White context of the class than mine and even than that of the immigrant children featured in the documentary. Jackie's class visit had the result of having many students revise their views about the fairness of immigration laws and of punishing children for the mistakes of their parents and of the system, but the most interesting result and the most surprising to me, the instructor, was what Bonnie wrote:

I very much loved what the guest speaker had to say. Even though I tend to travel a lot, it is not so much out of our country which does not enable me to be as cultured as I'd like to be. Her perspective on her bi-lingual classrooms was very eye-opening. Although I did not agree with her ideas of allowing all children to attend universities with or without SSID #'s, I do think that she is making an immense difference in these children's lives. (Class web, Guest Speaker, November 7, 8:37 p.m.)

The author proposes that Bonnie's use of the word *cultured* here was different than how she used it before. In the above excerpt, Bonnie expressed surprise and curiosity suggesting that she might not know much about the world of the other as she might have liked to. The guest speaker inspired Bonnie with her stories about her bilingual students and "opened her eyes." She could still see points where she disagreed with Jackie but then Bonnie still acknowledged that Jackie's stories about her immigrant students were educational to her. This was a breakthrough for Bonnie as far as dialogic pedagogy was concerned as this was one of the rare instances when Bonnie engaged the word of another and allowed it into her own worldview; I also contend that this was a breakthrough for the multicultural objective in Bonnie's consciousness. However, Jackie's visit was not the only propeller for Bonnie to dialogue about immigration. Weeks earlier, and despite what I considered then her staunch beliefs about undocumented immigrants, Bonnie posted a link on the class web from the local news. On October 12, 2011, and under the title "Deportation of Vets," which she chose for her posting, Bonnie posted a web link without any comments.. The link was broadcast on CNN on October 11, 2011, and was about two Mexican brothers who came to the United States illegally with their parents and served in the army during the Vietnam War. Both brothers were facing threats of deportation decades after being present in the States, serving in the army, wearing proudly the uniform of veteran soldiers, and having family members with American citizenship. It is interesting that despite Bonnie's constant resistance to acknowledging any institutional and social discrimination against undocumented immigrants, the public discourse outside the class incited her to consider the issue from the perspective of those immigrants. Bonnie's decision not to comment on the link poses a limitation to how far she interpreted those immigrants' experience but that link also suggests that the dialogic word penetrated her consciousness in such a way that could mean an authentic transformation in her position toward this group of people. The author cannot claim that this transformation was complete or permanent but the author maintains that Bonnie, as a teacher, cannot comfortably claim that she does not know or fully comprehend the consequences of her beliefs and actions on her students. Perhaps this is why Bonnie decided to withdraw from the whole experience of the institution, as Carmen mentioned, and return to what she could have perceived as an educational setting that affirmed "her Christian worldview."

### **Discussion and Conclusion: What Gains, if Any, Did Dialogic Pedagogy Achieve for Multicultural Education in This Study?**

The study findings suggest that in spite of the several challenges that the critical multicultural project faced and that are

well documented in the literature, dialogic pedagogy allowed for learning to take place in that course even if it were not the learning that the institution or the course instructor had hoped for. In other words, dialogic pedagogy in this study allowed students the opportunity to author their own learning in response to views and life experiences that challenged them and encouraged them to consider different versions of the truth as they knew it. Authorial learning does not necessarily have to be toward the curricular goals. Bonnie's views on diversity might have been shaken but not totally changed; Monique's interview answers still reflected a know-it-all person; but in this study, students' learning manifested itself in how they reviewed their worldview on themselves and others. When Bonnie found out what diversity entailed as she dialogued about in the course and in the public discourse, she decided to leave and not to continue her education in a semi-public institution. Monique decided to take another course on what it means to be Black, realizing how limited her Black experience was when she interviewed her boyfriend for the course under study. Matusov et al. (2013) described such experiences as being ontological in nature, leading to the becoming of the person in such a way that allowed the value of dialogue to extend beyond the time and space of the class. Bakhtin's dialogic tradition emphasized, "Meaning unveils its depths while meeting and touching another alien meaning . . . [in] a dialogue that overcomes isolation and lopsidedness of these meanings" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 354).

Moreover, Gorski (2012) worried that students' resistance toward the multicultural curriculum could be underresearched as there could be several reasons behind this resistance than merely due to that "confronting the profound impact of conquest and slavery . . . calls into question the legitimacy of the very foundation of much of White people's lives" (Sleeter, 1995, p. 19). For example, in this study, Monique did not show the upfront resistance that Bonnie did but investigation suggested that she was apathetic about some topics of the multicultural curriculum and did not see their value, although she was not White. Monique's resistance toward many multicultural topics was due to relational issues either with her own family or with the White girls in the class, but it was also related to how she erroneously perceived herself as all knowledgeable about race and racism.

Bonnie's resistance to multicultural education could have been founded in her political or religious convictions as suggested by Lippy (2012). Many Bakhtinian scholars would contend that the language of political activism that dominates critical multicultural education could lead to the failure of dialogue and the collapse of the learning process. For example, being committed to a singular vision of the good society could lead to a monologic project that does not allow participants to engage the consciousness of another (Sidorkin, 1999). The role of dialogic pedagogy in such cases is to allow students' voices to exist even when they are in opposition to the objectives of the curriculum. Dialogic integrity entails that teachers should stay open and unbiased toward

any political or ideological views when they deal with their students (Sidorkin, 1999) because a teacher's primary commitment is toward students' learning and not toward the ideas that he or she is teaching. A breakthrough for students' learning then takes place when voices meet, collide, and coexist. The end goal of dialogue, from a dialogic pedagogy perspective, is not necessarily consensus, but rather more dialogue with the purpose of more learning.

Finally, the author contends that multicultural education is the kind of knowledge that includes ethics and praxis. Teachers need to believe that education equity is the right of all students and work on ensuring that their instructional and institutional practices are in alignment with their beliefs (Banks, 2012). Teachers who do not believe in the above might not be suitable to teach urban children (Garmon, 2004). However, dialogic pedagogy allows such teachers to take the responsibility for making such a decision or not making it, in which case, as Bakhtin (1991) claimed, the individual could claim neither innocence nor ignorance for their own actions.

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### Author Biography

**Nermine Abd Elkader** is a professor of Academic English and English as a Second Language. Her research interest is focused on Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy especially as it relates to controversial curricular topics. Recently, she has been involved in research on dialogic pedagogy in second language teaching.