



## What we're teaching teachers: An analysis of multicultural teacher education coursework syllabi

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### ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of syllabi from multicultural teacher education (MTE) courses taught across the United States. Using qualitative content analysis and drawing on existing typologies for multicultural education, I analyzed the theories and philosophies underlying MTE course designs. The analysis revealed that most of the courses were designed to prepare teachers with pragmatic skills and personal awareness, but not to prepare them in accordance with the key principles of multicultural education, such as critical consciousness and a commitment to educational equity. An unexpected outcome was a new five-layer typology for MTE.

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### 1. Introduction

A broad range of scholars have conducted an equally broad range of scholarship on multicultural teacher education (MTE) in the U.S.—scholarship that explores national and state policy initiatives (Gollnick, 1995), teacher education program curricula (Jennings, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996), approaches to MTE (Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Moss, 2008), the social and political contexts for MTE (Weiner, 2000), the nature of session offerings at national multicultural education conferences (Amosa & Gorski, *in press*), and the body of related literature itself (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Sleeter, 2001a, 2001b; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008). These scholars reach a variety of conclusions, but on this they generally agree: what passes for MTE in most cases is not *multicultural* at all—at least not when assessed against multicultural education paradigms as conceived by Banks (2004a, 2004b), Grant and Sleeter (2006), Nieto (2004), and other theorists. Instead, according to Cochran-Smith (2004), Gorski (2006), Vavrus (2002), and others, MTE initiatives (including degree programs, staff development workshops, or individual multicultural education courses) tend to focus on *celebrating diversity* or *understanding the cultural “other”*—the first developmental stage of multicultural practice (Grant & Sleeter, 2006).

Unfortunately, there exists very little empirical research examining how these discrepancies play out *in practice*. In order to help fill a portion of this hole, I analyzed syllabi for teacher education

courses on multicultural education and related topics—those taught in teacher education programs across the United States. I focused specifically on uncovering the ways in which these courses frame and conceptualize multicultural education. Are they designed to encourage pre- and in-service teachers to practice multicultural education in a tokenizing *celebrating diversity* manner or do they transcend such an approach, presenting multicultural education with a more critical, social reconstructionist framework, consistent with the field's foundations of social justice and critical pedagogy?

I share here the results of this analysis. I present, as well, an unexpected outcome of this study: a new typology for approaches to MTE coursework.

A couple important caveats: first, as a teacher educator, I often have diverted from an official course design once the classroom door was closed. As teacher educators, we bring our philosophies, strengths, and limitations into our teaching. Therefore, I cannot claim to have discerned what, exactly, occurred in any particular course by examining its syllabus. It is reasonable to believe that some people teaching the courses engaged a more critical approach than outlined in the syllabus while others engaged a less critical approach. It is reasonable to believe, as well, that some professors or instructors consciously used depoliticized language in course descriptions, despite their intention to engage deeply politicized frames once their students were before them. (I have done so.) This, then, is not a study of individual instructor practice or philosophy, of the *explicit curriculum* of MTE. Rather, it is a study of the philosophies that underlie the *official curriculum* of MTE—what institutions that prepare teachers codify within syllabi as their approaches to MTE.

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Second, in order to control for certain variables, such as the influence of national standards and accreditation agencies' expectations for teacher competencies, I constrained my data set to syllabi for courses taught within the U.S. I believe, however, that the results and discussion herein are relevant across national borders. It is my hope that they will inform a larger cross-border discourse about the differences between what *should* and what *does* constitute MTE.

## 2. Context of the study

Most of the published scholarship on MTE can be grouped into one of four categories:

- (1) scholarship that critically analyzes MTE practice from a theoretical or philosophical position (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Díaz-Rico, 1998; Dressman, 1998; Gay, 2005; Gorski, 2006; Jenks et al., 2001; Keiser, 2005; Rao, 2005; Rubin & Justice, 2005; Valentín, 2006; Vavrus, 2002);
- (2) scholarship in which teacher educators measure the impact of a class or workshop, usually by analyzing data collected from their students (Ambe, 2006; Bruna, 2007; Gayle-Evans & Michael, 2006; Klug, Luckey, Wilkins, & Whitfield, 2006; Lesko & Bloom, 1998; Lucas, 2005; McNeal, 2005; Mueller & O'Connor, 2007; Wasonga & Piveral, 2004);
- (3) scholarship that describes challenges associated with raising multicultural consciousness in teacher education students, often focusing on those with racial and socioeconomic privilege (Aveling, 2006; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Marx, 2004; Moss, 2008; Nieto, 1998; Pennington, 2007; Raible & Irizarry, 2007; Sleeter, 1996; Smith, 1998; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005); or
- (4) scholarship that critically analyzes the body of literature on some aspect of MTE (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Sleeter, 2001a, 2001b; Trent et al., 2008; Weiner, 2000; Zeichner & Hoelt, 1996).

These are crucial lines of study, providing philosophical and theoretical bases for the field and models for action research within teacher education programs, among other things. But what is missing, with the exception of a few studies (such as Gollnick's (1995) analysis of state and federal policy initiatives informing multicultural teacher preparation), are inquiries into the national landscape of MTE as carried out in teacher education programs.

In regards to the literature that does exist, two themes emerged as most informative to my study: (1) approaches to multicultural education in general, and (2) approaches to MTE. An examination of these areas of the literature provided a theoretical and philosophical baseline against which to situate my analysis.

### 2.1. Existing typologies of multicultural education and MTE

Conceptualizations of multicultural education vary. But in a previous study (Gorski, 2006) in which I analyzed a history of definitions and conceptions of multicultural education from the field's scholars (such as Nieto, 2004; Sleeter, 1996; Banks, 2004a; Grant & Sleeter, 2006), I found five "defining principles" of multicultural education:

- (1) multicultural education is a political movement and process that attempts to secure social justice underserved and disenfranchised students;
- (2) multicultural education recognizes that, while some individual classroom practices are philosophically consistent with multicultural education, social justice is an institutional matter, and

as such can be secured only through comprehensive school reform;

- (3) multicultural education insists that comprehensive school reform can be achieved only through a critical analysis of systems of power and privilege;
- (4) multicultural education's underlying goal—the purpose of this critical analysis—is the elimination of educational inequities; and
- (5) multicultural education is good education for *all* students.

Unfortunately, the consensus among scholars of multicultural education practice—including MTE—holds that such practice usually fails to reflect these principles (Gorski, 2006). In fact, MTE practice tends to reflect more of a human relations or "celebrating diversity" approach than one committed to educational equity and social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Díaz-Rico, 1998; Hidalgo, Chávez-Chávez, & Ramage, 1996; Jackson, 2003; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Vavrus, 2002).

In order to clarify this gap, many multicultural education scholars have developed typologies or stage-theories that summarize approaches to multicultural education practice (Banks, 2004b; Grant & Sleeter, 2006; McLaren, 1995). On one end of these spectrums are approaches that support dominant hegemony, such as Banks' (2004a, 2004b) "Contributions" approach or McLaren's (1995) "Conservative Multiculturalism." On the other end are those that call for educators to work toward socially just, liberatory, and democratic schools and societies, such as Banks' (2004a, 2004b) "Social Action" approach or McLaren's (1995) "Critical and Resistance Multiculturalism."

I initially intended to group the MTE syllabi using a typology constructed by Grant and Sleeter (2006). But as I analyzed them, I found that an abbreviated version of McLaren's (1995) framework, as used by Jenks et al. (2001) to describe approaches to multicultural preservice teacher education, lent an additional layer of sociopolitical complexity to the discussion. I summarize these two typologies below.

#### 2.1.1. Approaches to multicultural education

Among the available typologies, the one that appeared most prevalently in the MTE literature was Grant and Sleeter's (2006) typology of "teaching approaches for addressing human diversity" (p. 7). Their model describes five approaches.

The first of these—*teaching the exceptional and culturally different*—is assimilationist, focusing, in the words of Grant and Sleeter (2006) on enabling "students to succeed in learning the traditional curriculum in traditional classrooms and to be successful in the existing society" (p. 12). The job of the teacher is to help students of color, English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, and students from other disenfranchised groups adjust and "achieve" to a dominant norm.

Teachers who adopt Grant and Sleeter's (2006) second approach—*human relations*—believe that multicultural education's chief concern is interpersonal harmony. The goal of this approach is to "improve feelings and communication in the classroom and in the school as a whole" (p. 57) through interpersonal relations and prejudice reduction.

The basis of Grant and Sleeter's (2006) third approach—*single-group studies*—is the examination of a single culture or identity group. It transcends the *teaching the exceptional and culturally different* approach, calling on teachers to examine an identity group beyond surface-level stereotypes in order to understand its experiences with oppression. Those who take this approach are concerned with improving social conditions for a particular group of people.

According to Grant and Sleeter (2006), their fourth approach—*multicultural education*—"rests on two ideals: equal opportunity and cultural pluralism" (p. 163). This approach calls on teachers to address power and privilege in the classroom—to subvert

dominant hegemony, purposefully teach about injustices, and ensure educational equity for all students.

Grant and Sleeter's (2006) final approach—*education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist*—prepares students to help construct a world without oppression; a world that meets the needs of the full diversity of humanity. This approach requires democratic schooling, the nurturance of critical consciousness through the examination of injustice in relation to students' lives, and the development of social action skills.

These approaches describe multicultural education theory and practice in a P-12 context. Expanding this context across the wider landscape of education, Jenks et al. (2001) overlaid Grant and Sleeter's (2006) model with McLaren's (1994) frameworks for multiculturalism. The resulting typology of theoretical frameworks for preservice MTE became the initial basis for my analysis of MTE syllabi.

### 2.1.2. Theoretical frameworks for multiculturalism in preservice teacher education

Jenks et al. (2001), informed by McLaren (1994) and others, identify three theoretical frameworks of preservice MTE: (1) *conservative multiculturalism*, (2) *liberal multiculturalism*, and (3) *critical multiculturalism*. The core value of *conservative multiculturalism*, like Grant and Sleeter's (2006) *teaching the exceptional and culturally different* approach, is assimilation. Its central questions, according to Jenks et al. (2001), are, "How do we Americanize minorities? How do we prepare them for a competitive economy?" (p. 91). Conservative multiculturalists see themselves as committed to equality, but apply that commitment only to those willing to adopt "mainstream culture and its attending values, mores, and norms" (p. 90). They justify this focus with a deficit ideology, suggesting that equality comes through social mobility, which is facilitated only when the "culturally different" acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for participating in mainstream, market-driven society. Such an ideology ignores systemic inequities, requiring marginalized groups to conform to the very systems that marginalize them.

Jenks et al. (2001) describe how *liberal multiculturalism*, like Grant and Sleeter's (2006) *human relations* approach, "accents the need for diversity and cultural pluralism and the acceptance and celebration of difference" (p. 92). *Liberal multiculturalists* transcend *conservative multiculturalists* in that they appreciate difference instead of demanding conformity. However, liberal multiculturalists pay insufficient attention to power, privilege, and control. They support diversity programs which encourage an appreciation of difference, but only in ways that ignore the access implications of difference.

*Critical multiculturalists*, according to Jenks et al. (2001), insist that educational equity can be achieved only when we consider deeper questions:

Under what conditions and by whom are concepts of equity and excellence constructed? What do they look like for different groups and in different circumstances?... How can equity and excellence be achieved in a society in which historically the dominant culture has determined their meaning? (p. 93)

These questions uncover power relationships, forcing educators to understand their work within a larger sociopolitical context. It is the job of multicultural education, according to critical multiculturalists, to expose these relationships and reconstruct schooling in ways that dismantle, rather than reify, social stratification, as in Grant and Sleeter's (2006) social reconstructionist approach.

These approaches—conservative, liberal, and critical—differ from those described by Nieto (2004), Sleeter (1996), Banks (2004a), and Grant and Sleeter (2006) in that they do not describe one's orientation to multicultural practice so much as one's sociopolitical

philosophy regarding the purpose of multicultural education—the values and orientations that *inform* one's practice. As a result, they, in addition to Grant and Sleeter's (2006) typology, provided an important theoretical frame for my initial analysis of syllabi.

## 3. Methods

Using qualitative content analysis, I analyzed 45 syllabi from multicultural education classes, focusing on the ways in which multicultural education is conceptualized in course descriptions, course goals, course objectives, and other conceptual and descriptive text.

### 3.1. Data collection

I collected these syllabi through a sort of snowball sampling. I posted electronic mail to several listservs to which many people interested in multicultural education subscribe, including those hosted by the National Association for Multicultural Education, Rethinking Schools, and EdChange. I requested, as well, that people forward my message to friends and colleagues who might be willing to share their syllabi. I chose this method, rather than a more targeted one, because I felt that it would give me the broadest possible range of data by helping me reach the most possible people.

I specified three eligibility conditions, each based on a desire to limit my analysis to courses focused explicitly on MTE, making cross-course comparison more meaningful than it might have been with a broader selection of syllabi. The conditions:

1. The course's *primary focus* is multicultural education or a directly related topic (cultural diversity in education, intercultural education), so that a general foundations course with a partial focus on educational equity is not eligible.
2. The course is offered in an undergraduate or graduate *education* program.
3. The syllabus has been submitted by the course instructor with explicit permission for me to use it in the study.

Initially I received 51 syllabi, but disqualified six of them because they were not eligible under these conditions.

Two-thirds (30 out of 45) of the syllabi analyzed were from undergraduate courses; 15 were from graduate-level courses. Sixteen (36%) were from private 4-year institutions, 27 (60%) were from public 4-year institutions, and two (4%) were from community colleges.

The syllabi represented a regional cross-section of the U.S. Based on the division of regions as adopted by the Equity Assistance Centers in the U.S., five syllabi (11%) came from Region I; three (7%) from Region II, six (13%) from Region III; six (13%) from Region IV; six (13%) from Region V, two (4%) from Region VI, seven (16%) from Region VII, three (7%) from Region VIII, six (13%) from Region IX, and one (2%) from Region X.

### 3.2. Data analysis

I limited my analysis to course descriptions, goals, objectives, and other contextual or descriptive text for two reasons: (1) this content best captured the theoretical and philosophical frameworks informing the course development; and (2) these aspects tend to represent *official* and *consistent* aspects of courses. I was interested in the official curriculum—the ways in which approaches to MTE were codified in more or less permanent parts of course syllabi.

After analyzing the syllabi using Grant and Sleeter's (2006) typology, then turning to the typology introduced by Jenks et al. (2001) only to find that neither captured the intricacies of the syllabi with sufficient complexity, I decided to allow a more

detailed typology to emerge out of the analysis itself, adding a dimension of grounded theory to my study.

I began, then, by examining the data for key words or phrases that would suggest theoretical or philosophical orientations consistent with conservative, liberal, or critical multiculturalism. Because most syllabi included at least some framing consistent with two or all three of Jenks et al.'s (2001) approaches, I sought to identify patterns in overall language and framing. For example, one syllabus contained a goal statement that was consistent with a liberal or even critical approach to multiculturalism: “recognize and deal with dehumanizing biases such as sexism, racism, prejudice and discrimination.” However, the overall pattern of language throughout the syllabus reflected a conservative approach, with text such as:

- “develop sensitivity to and understanding of the values, beliefs, lifestyles, and attitudes of individuals and groups”;
- “be aware of and understand the various values, lifestyles, history and contributions of various *subgroups*” (my italics);
- “relate effectively to *other* individuals and various *subgroups other than one's own*” (my italics).

Once the syllabi were grouped using this typology, I began a deeper examination, trying to identify the more subtle intricacies at play. During this phase of the analysis I relied heavily on Strauss' (1987) four basic guidelines for open coding: (1) ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions, (2) analyze the data minutely, (3) frequently interrupt the coding to write a theoretical note, and (4) never assume the analytic relevance of any traditional variable until the data show it to be relevant. The questions I asked the data were: (1) what theoretical or philosophical groundings are evident, implicitly or explicitly, in the text? (2) what theoretical or philosophical groundings are suggested by what is absent from the text? and (3) what does the text suggest, implicitly or explicitly, is the purpose of multicultural education?

Although I was analyzing text, I held fast to Potter and Wetherell's (1994) notion of “texts as social practices” (p. 48) in which the researcher's relationship to the text is social, not linguistic. In other words, I was not looking for the linguistic patterns, but for patterns of thought and meaning. I was less interested in the words themselves than in what individual texts suggested about the ways in which multicultural education was being codified in the courses.

#### 4. Findings

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze the ways in which multicultural education was being framed in related coursework. An unintended product was a new typology of approaches to MTE. I summarize these findings here, then discuss their implications for MTE.

##### 4.1. Distribution of approaches

Close to 16% of the syllabi analyzed were found to be consistent with Jenks et al.'s (2001) notion of “conservative multiculturalism.” These syllabi tended to frame multicultural education in assimilationist terminology and often included “othering” language when referring to non-dominant groups. They were marked, as well, by what they did not include—most notably, explicit attention to systemic inequities and how these inform individual practice.

A majority of the syllabi—58%—were dominated by elements of “liberal multiculturalism.” These syllabi described courses in which difference and self-awareness were celebrated. Although these courses transcended an assimilationist ideology, they failed to consider systemic inequities in education.

Approximately 29% fit Jenks et al.'s (2001) description of “critical multiculturalism.” These syllabi suggested courses in which education was discussed in sociopolitical context. Participants explored power relationships, oppression in society and schools, and the ways in which educators reify or dismantle inequity.

This distribution alone uncovers important points for discussion—the fact, for example, that 71% of the syllabi describe “multicultural education” courses that appear inconsistent with basic theoretical principles of multicultural education. However, the introduction of a more layered typology presents opportunities for more detailed discussion.

#### 5. A New typology of approaches to MTE

After several rounds of coding and analysis, five approaches, each more nuanced than those described by Jenks et al. (2001), emerged. I named them (1) Teaching the “Other,” (2) Teaching with Tolerance and Cultural Sensitivity, (3) Teaching with Multicultural Competence, (4) Teaching in Sociopolitical Context, and (5) Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice.

##### Approaches to multicultural teacher education

	Approach	Contextualizing frameworks	Objectives	Course organization
Conservative	I. Teaching the “Other”	Group-specific studies (e.g., the culture of poverty framework, teaching Latino students, and so on); “contributions” approach	To prepare teachers to work effectively with a diverse student population by studying the cultures, values, lifestyles, and worldviews of individual identity groups and how to assimilate them into the education system	Most often organized by identity group, so that students focus on learning about “the” culture, value system, lifestyle, and worldview of a particular group (e.g., African American students, students in poverty, and so on) each class period
Liberal	II. Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance	Human relations, intergroup relations, tolerance education, cultural sensitivity, celebrating diversity	To prepare teachers to tolerate difference and to be aware of and sensitive to diversity, particularly through an examination of personal biases and prejudices	Most often organized by identity dimension (e.g., race, gender, class, and so on), so that students focus on their biases and prejudices related to one of these dimensions each class period
	III. Teaching with Multicultural Competence	Multicultural competence, culturally relevant instruction, culturally responsive teaching, culturally appropriate pedagogy	To equip teachers with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to implement multicultural curricular and pedagogical strategies, enabling them to meet the diverse learning needs of students	Most often organized by “competency” (e.g., multicultural curriculum development, culturally responsive classroom management, and so on), so that students focus on practices related to one of these competencies each class period

(continued)

	Approach	Contextualizing frameworks	Objectives	Course organization
Critical	IV. Teaching in Sociopolitical Context	Critical theories, liberatory education, critical multicultural education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy	To engage teachers in a critical examination of the systemic influences of power, oppression, dominance, inequity, and injustice on schooling, from their own practice to institutional and federal education policy	Most often organized by dimension of systemic oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, and so on), so that students focus on the ways in which one of these dimensions contributes structurally to an unjust and inequitable educational system
	V. Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice	Those listed under “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” as well as postcolonial theory	To prepare teachers to be change agents through the sort of critical examination described under “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” and through studying strategies for, and engaging in, counter-hegemonic teaching and social activism	Most often organized as described under “Teaching in Political Context,” but with an emphasis on deconstructing and <i>acting against</i> oppression

### 5.1. Teaching the “Other”

Seven (15.6%) of the syllabi—those consistent with *conservative multiculturalism*—reflected the “Teaching the ‘Other’” approach to MTE. These syllabi framed multicultural education in ways that supported hegemony and existing power relations. They did so by (1) using *othering* language, (2) presenting non-dominant groups as homogeneous, and (3) defining multicultural education through a market-centric or capitalistic lens.

#### 5.1.1. Othering language

*Othering* language defines a person or group as being outside the realm of normalcy. Such language helps maintain hegemony, attaching negative value to identities or ideologies that differ from the hegemonic norm.

These six syllabi were replete with implicit and explicit *othering* language. Several referred specifically to learning about “other cultures.” For example, one syllabus explained that students would

develop skills and knowledge necessary for communication with people from other cultures and co-cultures. Co-cultures include African American, Asian American, Native American, Latino/a, women, gays and lesbians, the disabled, and social class.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, three of these syllabi referred to groups of color and other disenfranchised peoples as “co-cultures” or “subgroups”—explicit *othering* language. One noted that participants would “be aware of and understand the various values, lifestyles, histories, and contributions of various subgroups in our society.” Another referred to the “communication styles of various American subgroups.”

A somewhat less explicit way several of these syllabi *othered* was by drawing lines of distinction between particular groups. Two of the syllabi, for example, distinguished between “white” and “multicultural” by using the latter to mean “people of color.” According to one syllabus,

By the year 2010, *multicultural groups* [my italics] in the United States will collectively out-number European Americans. The changes in these demographics will bring about new challenges and frustrations for institutions that serve a diverse population.

Similarly, the authors of many of these syllabi seemed to assume that all of their students would be white. One syllabus from a large urban university asked,

Can we effectively translate what we do as professionals to those who may need our assistance, or will we fail at bridging the gap?

How will we understand acculturation stress and what can we do to help ourselves and others to adjust?

Such questions *othered* by suggesting a we/they or us/them dichotomy. But they did so, as well, by assuming that all students were part of the hegemonic “us.”

#### 5.1.2. Homogenization of non-dominant groups

Another feature of these syllabi was a tendency to homogenize identity groups. Several suggested homogeneity within non-dominant groups—but none did so within dominant groups. For example, one syllabus explained that students would “study the socio-cultural worldviews of several racial/ethnic groups of American minorities.” The primary objective of another course was “to develop sensitivity to and understanding of the values, beliefs, lifestyles, and attitudes of individuals and groups.”

In one syllabus, students were charged with participating in the homogenization. They were instructed to choose “one culture different from your own and explain how people from this culture communicate when they interact with people from the predominate culture of the U.S.” Earlier in the syllabus, “cultures” were described as non-dominant identity groups: African Americans, women, and so on, insinuating that African Americans, women, or people from other identity groups communicate homogeneously.

In addition, several of the syllabi focused on a “contributions” approach to multicultural education. These designs essentialized identity groups, referencing them primarily in terms of surface-level traits and contributions. One course description explained that students would examine “the contributions of different ethnic groups to customs and traditions ... in the United States.” In a few instances, the language describing the organization of these courses was essentializing. One such syllabus began with a “brief outline of course content”:

(1) African Americans (Blacks, People of Color), (2) Asians, (3) Hispanics (Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, North, South, Central Americans, Caribbeans, Jamaicans, etc.), (4) Native Americans, (5) European Whites (Anglos), (6) other National and ethnically represented groups in America... (9) Gender Issues, (10) Religious Differences (Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Baptist, Buddhist, etc.)

The language here was confounding—using “People of Color” as a synonym for “African Americans” and conflating identities such as nationality, race, and ethnicity. But of equal interest was the organization of the course, built upon an assumption of homogeneity within each of these groups. This sort of organization was another shared feature among these syllabi.

#### 5.1.3. Market-capitalist lens

Market ideology—including the notion that the purpose of education is to prepare students for the global marketplace—was

<sup>1</sup> I have chosen not to cite specific syllabi as sources in order to protect the identities of those who allowed me to include their work in this study.

common among these syllabi. One syllabus explained the importance of multiculturalism in distinctly market terms: “Consumers (clients) are demanding that we be knowledgeable about their worldview, similar in experience and/or characteristics, and able to translate our services to meet their needs.” According to another syllabus, students would “explore ways to use American social experiences and multicultural heritages as sources of corporate strength.”

These syllabi shared many of the characteristics of Jenks et al.’s (2001) *conservative multiculturalism* framework. They focused largely on preparing teachers to manage diversity by gaining a surface-level understanding of people from various identity groups. An analysis of these syllabi uncovered little attention to power and privilege concerns, or even to a complex understanding of diversity.

## 5.2. Teaching with cultural sensitivity and tolerance

A total of 26 syllabi, 57.8% of the sample, were consistent with Jenks et al.’s (2001) liberal multiculturalism. A closer examination of these syllabi revealed patterns that enabled me to divide them into two more specific groups. The first of these, “Teaching with Tolerance and Cultural Sensitivity,” comprised 13 of the 45 syllabi, or 28.9% of the sample.

This approach to MTE was characterized by (1) a tendency to frame multicultural education as respecting diversity; (2) a focus on sensitivity and self-reflection; and (3) a failure to connect either of these to educational inequities.

### 5.2.1. Multicultural education as respecting diversity

One course description read, “This course will focus on...understanding, accepting, appreciating, and celebrating the complexity of diversity.” A majority of these syllabi identified the preparation of educators to respect, accept, or celebrate diversity as a central goal—if not *the* central course goal.

References to respecting diversity often were couched in an assimilationist sort of pluralism, sometimes in ways that actually problematized diversity. For example, the following was the second of three key questions addressed in one course: “How can we respect and recognize diverse identities, and still maintain a common American identity?” The third question: “Can we have equal opportunity without cultural assimilation?” Other syllabi reflecting this approach referred to developing a “commitment to human diversity,” “respecting human diversity,” and “celebrating differences.”

### 5.2.2. Cultural sensitivity and self-reflection

Notably, none of these syllabi connected a commitment to respecting diversity with eliminating educational inequities. Rather, the courses appeared designed to encourage sensitivity and self-reflection. For example, the ability to “tolerate” difference was an oft-cited competence addressed in these courses. According to one syllabus,

We begin the term by addressing questions such as...‘What responsibilities do educators and educational institutions have toward developing tolerance and what constraints do they face?’

Each of these 13 courses centered self-reflection—particularly regarding one’s biases—in the MTE process. One course description summarized,

This course takes an in-depth critical reflection and discovery of self and of the ways in which personal values develop form the integration of ... multiple dimensions that shape adult identity. Students will confront their own assumptions, bias, and values (both positive and negative) and see how these factors influence

interpersonal relationships. After self-reflection, students will use this knowledge to begin a journey of cultural understanding...

Another syllabus explained, “The class will be a reflection and discussion class that will examine personal prejudices, biases, and beliefs.” A third course in this group was designed to help teacher candidates “develop an awareness of their own stereotypes and biases.”

### 5.2.3. Lack of attention to educational inequities

A third shared feature of these syllabi was a lack of consideration for educational inequities. None of these syllabi named systemic inequities explicitly. None of them drew connections between respecting diversity or identifying one’s biases and larger contextual factors such as race, gender, or class inequity.

Instead, these syllabi suggested a very interpersonal focus to MTE—an approach less interested in systemic change than in human relations. For example, one syllabus included among its course objectives, “to become aware of the impact ... biases have on interpersonal relationships.” Even when these syllabi named dimensions of identity around which educational inequities exist, they did so in the context of relationship-building rather than inequities. The course description on another syllabus detailed how students would examine how race, gender, and other identities “influence the interplay between self and others,” but did not suggest any attention to the ways in which these identities affect one’s educational opportunities.

## 5.3. Teaching with multicultural competence

The courses I described as “Teaching with Multicultural Competence” differed from the “Teaching with Tolerance and Cultural Sensitivity” approach in that they focused less on self-reflection for personal awareness and more on skill development. They comprised 28.9% (13) of the syllabi analyzed.

These syllabi shared three characteristics: (1) the centering of multicultural competence, (2) a principal focus on pragmatic skills, and (3) a lack of attention to educational inequities.

### 5.3.1. Centrality of cultural competence

A majority of these syllabi named multicultural competence or cultural responsiveness as the central course goal. For example, the goal of one course was to “provide potential educators...with entry level knowledge about becoming culturally responsive teachers in culturally diverse inclusive, and inner city, urban classrooms.” Several included course objectives such as learning “culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies” or demonstrating “cultural competence.”

In each case, “competence” and “responsiveness” seemed to refer to enlarging cultural knowledge in order, in the words of one syllabus, “to meet the needs of all...future students.” The course description in another syllabus explained, “Multiple perspectives and more complete knowledge about our world and schools are necessary” in order to “see the world and the culture in which we live from multiple perspectives.” According to another syllabus, students were to “examine relevant teaching strategies and curriculum materials to meet the needs of widely diverse student populations...”

### 5.3.2. Principal focus on pragmatic curricular and pedagogical skills

These syllabi shared a distinct focus on skill-building. They tended to connect everything—self-reflection, interpersonal relations, and so on—to curricular and pedagogical practice.

Several of these syllabi referred explicitly to culturally appropriate teaching strategies. The central goals of one course were to prepare teachers to “implement effective teaching strategies in

diverse classrooms,” to “prepare a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners,” and to “develop a caring and nurturing classroom where all students can and will learn.” Another was designed to focus on “age and culturally appropriate strategies for creating effective teaching-learning environments.”

Similarly, many of these syllabi emphasized the implications of diversity for curriculum and instruction. This emphasis was captured particularly well in the course goal described in one syllabus:

It is my goal that by successfully completing this course, you will have a better understanding of how social, cultural, and economic factors influence the processes of education. Understanding these factors will help you to develop classroom practices which better meet the needs of all of your future students.

Similarly, the course description in another syllabus stated that students would explore “responses to cultural diversity and their practical implications for education.” Another course was designed to present “a picture of the increasing diversity found within educational institutions and the implications it has for educators in developing both policy and practice.”

### 5.3.3. *Lack of attention to educational inequities*

These courses transcended the interpersonal focus of those that reflected “Teaching with Tolerance and Cultural Sensitivity” by drawing direct connections between personal awareness and multicultural practice. However, they shared an inattention to educational inequities. Although several of these syllabi described the need to strengthen teaching skills in order to reach a diversity of students, none named the amelioration of educational inequities as an aspect of multicultural competence. This feature of these syllabi distinguished them from those reflecting the “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” approach to MTE.

### 5.4. *Teaching in sociopolitical context*

Thirteen of the syllabi analyzed (28.9%) fit Jenks et al.’s (2001) critical approach to MTE. As with those that fit their conception of liberal MTE, a deeper analysis of these syllabi revealed two more specific approaches. I called these approaches “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” and “Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice.” The former shared three characteristics: (1) a focus on critical analysis of educational policy and practice at an institutional level, (2) consideration of this analysis in a larger sociopolitical context, and (3) the engagement of critical theories. They comprised 10, or 22.2%, of the syllabi.

#### 5.4.1. *Critical institutional analysis*

The outstanding way in which these syllabi differed from those reflecting previous approaches was their focus on a critical analysis of educational policy and practice at an institutional level. Many explicitly referred to the importance of moving from an interpersonal to a systemic level of analysis. For example, according to a course objective in one syllabus, students would learn to “differentiate between personal and institutional discrimination, as well as the forces which either promote or inhibit equity and cultural pluralism.”

Unlike most of the syllabi reflecting previously discussed approaches, which referred to race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on, in terms of identity, a majority of these syllabi connected them to systemic inequity. A learning outcome named on one syllabus declared that students would

establish a knowledge base about the dynamics and selected manifestations of social and school-based inequities and forms

of oppression such as racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, ableism, linguisticism, heterosexism/homophobia/biphobia/transphobia, religious oppression, and others...

Another course, according to its course description, was designed to engage students “in the critical examination of the psychosocial and sociopolitical relationships between teaching, schooling, education, and educational policy and leadership in the U.S.” Several situated such examinations in a historical context, as well. According to the primary course objective on one syllabus, “Learning colleagues will demonstrate an understanding of the multiple, often competing, goals of public schooling how these goals have evolved historically, and how they presently impact our democratic society.”

Most of the courses fitting into previously described approaches were designed to prepare teachers to understand student experience primarily through self-reflection and personal awareness. The courses fitting the “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” approach focused, instead, on deepening teachers’ understandings of educational inequities. A goal listed on one syllabus was,

To analyze the influences on learning of such sociocultural and sociopolitical variables as race, ethnicity, gender, social class background among others; and to gain an understanding of how structures, policies, and practices of schools tend to perpetuate discriminatory inequities by their effects on students and educators.

According to another syllabus, students would “consider institutional changes needed in schools and society for all children to have equal educational opportunity.”

#### 5.4.2. *Consideration of larger sociopolitical context*

Another characteristic of these syllabi was their consideration of schooling in larger social and political contexts. One course was described as a “study of cultural, historical, social, and psychological factors that either promote or diminish equal human worth and either empower or suppress linguistically and ethnically diverse groups of students...” Another was designed to engage students in a “critical analysis of social, historical, and philosophical dimensions of multiculturalism.” According to a third syllabus, students would learn “to apply knowledge of cultural characteristics and cultural change to a culturally-marginalized group in social, economic, legal, and political contexts.”

Most of these syllabi included course goals focused on drawing connections between educational inequities and parallel inequities in larger society. Such a focus was captured by a question posted on one syllabus: “Are social inequalities within the larger U.S. society reproduced in schools, and if so, how are they reproduced?” An objective of another course was to

examine from different theoretical and ideological perspectives the nature of pluralism and intergroup relations in the U.S. society in order to elucidate the basic causes and complex dynamics of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination...

A third course was characterized as “an examination of the socio-historical, political, and philosophical forces which influence the institution of schooling in the United States.”

#### 5.4.3. *Engagement of critical theories*

The third distinguishing characteristic these syllabi was the incorporation of critical theories into the MTE process. Several of these syllabi named their uses of critical theories explicitly. They referred to queer theory, feminist theory, and critical multiculturalism.

In addition, several of these courses appeared to be concerned centrally with engaging students in critical analysis, drawing on

critical pedagogy and critical theories. Each of these syllabi referred to applying critical thinking and analysis to social and educational inequities. A learning outcome for one course was to “enhance critical thinking skills” as applied to “contemporary issues in the field of multicultural education.”

A majority of these courses appeared to draw upon critical pedagogy, not simply as a content area, but as a *process* for MTE. One course was described as the “study of diversity in educational settings and practices with emphasis on processes of inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and critical analysis.” Another syllabus detailed how students would “apply methods of critical analysis to an examination of the socialization process and to the systematic maintenance of oppression.” According to a third syllabus, students would be engaged “in the critical examination of the psychosocial and sociopolitical relationships between teaching, schooling, education, and educational policy and leadership in the U.S.”

### 5.5. Teaching as resistance and counter-hegemonic practice

The final three syllabi (6.7%) shared many of the features of Jenks et al.’s (2001) conception of critical MTE. Like those that reflected the “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” approach, these courses appeared to be built largely on critical theories, to frame education in a larger sociopolitical context, and to use a systemic rather than (or in addition to) an interpersonal level of analysis. But one characteristic distinguished them: a determination to prepare teachers to resist, and to prepare their students to resist, oppression.

Whereas the “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” courses appeared to be designed to nurture critical consciousness, preparing teachers to understand the sociopolitical nature of their work, these courses appeared to be designed, at least in part, to *apply* critical consciousness to counter-hegemonic teaching. The “Course Overview” of one of these courses contained characteristics similar to the “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” courses: “The premise that guides the course is that education is a set of political, economic, and cultural relationships that reflect the dominant social arrangements in society.” It continued, though, by connecting this sociopolitical context to teacher resistance: “Issues of power and powerlessness are central to the course as they illuminate how social arrangements are imagined, constructed, and *challenged*” (my italics). Another syllabus alluded to a resistance pedagogy, explaining that students would “demonstrate ways to teach critical multicultural content using transformative and constructivist techniques.”

Moreover, these courses were designed to help teachers or teacher candidates imagine themselves as change agents within and outside schools—and to nurture this spirit in their students. For example, the conceptual framework for one of these courses named the importance of “critical consciousness on the part of both educators and students,” but connected this explicitly with the need for students and teachers to “engage in the liberatory process of social change.” Another referred specifically to the use of arts in counter-hegemonic practice, calling them “dialogic and agentive” means for education and social change. Unlike the syllabi categorized into the other approaches, these raised social reconstruction as a key project of multicultural education.

## 6. Discussion

These findings, particularly the distribution of the syllabi across the emerged typology of approaches to MTE, largely support existing scholarship on MTE. Consistent with this scholarship (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gorski, 2006; Vavrus, 2002), most of these syllabi appeared crafted to prepare teachers with cultural

sensitivity, tolerance, and multicultural competence. Most of the courses were not designed to prepare teachers to identify or eliminate educational inequities or to create equitable learning environments. In fact, only about a quarter of them—26.7%—appeared designed to prepare teachers in ways consistent with the defining principles of multicultural education (see Gorski, 2006). In other words, most of the syllabi failed to frame multicultural education as a political movement concerned with social justice, as an approach for comprehensive reform, as a critical analysis of power and privilege, or as a process for eliminating educational inequities.

Considering this disparity, one might find hope in the fact that a fairly small percentage of the syllabi—15.6%—were grouped into the “Teaching the ‘Other’” approach. Although 27 of the 39 other course designs failed to reflect basic principles of multicultural education, they, at the very least, did not appear to be built upon values that directly contradicted these principles. Still, despite the relatively low number of syllabi constituting the “Teaching the ‘Other’” approach, the idea that any teacher might be educated to adopt oppressive philosophies or practices under the guise of multicultural education is cause for concern.

On the other end of the spectrum, the syllabi reflecting the “Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice” approach—those that most fully encompassed the key principles of multicultural education—comprised the smallest number of the syllabi analyzed (three out of 45). Even if we grouped these with the “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context” syllabi, which drew on the key principles but did not position the teacher as a counter-hegemonic agent, only twelve syllabi (26.7%) seemed designed to prepare teachers to be what might be called *authentic* multicultural educators.

A majority of the syllabi, 57.8%, fell somewhere in-between, drawing on approaches which were neither distinctly anti-multicultural nor distinctly critical multicultural in nature.

To be sure, the values (an appreciation for diversity) and skills (culturally competent teaching) promoted in each of these approaches (other than the first) are important to a holistic MTE. Effective teachers need to be multiculturally competent (Constantine & Sue, 2005; Luiquis & Pérez, 2006; Milner & Ford, 2007). They need pragmatic curricular and pedagogical strategies (Sleeter, 2005). They need to reflect on their biases and how these inform practice (Bannick & van Dam, 2007; Boyle-Baise, 2005). This is an important point related to typologies such as the one introduced in this study: we might assume that the goal is to transcend the first four approaches in an attempt to achieve “Teaching for Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice.” But a loftier goal might be to draw on the skills and competencies focused upon in each approach (excepting the “Teaching the ‘Other’” approach), adding layers of complexity and proactiveness as we strive toward the latter approaches. For example, shifting from “Teaching with Cultural Sensitivity and Tolerance” to “Teaching with Multicultural Competence” need not require us to stop encouraging teachers to respect or celebrate diversity. Instead it requires us to help teachers understand that respecting diversity means little if this respect does not inform practice. Similarly, one need not desert multiculturally competence to shift to “Teaching in Sociopolitical Context.” Instead, she or he must recognize that multicultural competence can be achieved only when one understands her or his practice in a larger sociopolitical context. As I reported earlier, many of the syllabi that reflected the “Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice” approach contained elements of other approaches.

Unfortunately, most of these syllabi represented courses that did not appear to be created with this sort of scaffolding in mind. Or the scaffolding crashed before it reached the “Teaching in

Sociopolitical Context” approach. Overall, this study suggests, like the literature preceding it, that most multicultural education courses are not designed to prepare teachers to do the full work of multicultural education.

## 7. Conclusion and moving forward

Education programs—particularly licensure programs—face a myriad of pressures that affect course design. These include individual program and institution governance processes as well as the expectations of accreditation agencies (Honawar, 2008). They also include the limits of faculty expertise. These challenges and pressures highlight the multi-faceted approach—changes in consciousness, policy, and practice—required for any systemic shift toward more authentic MTE.

One point of departure might be NCATE, the most popular accrediting agency for U.S. teacher education programs. An analysis of the language embedded in its Diversity standard (NCATE, 2008) reveals patterns consistent with the “Teaching with Multicultural Competence” approach described earlier:

The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and provides experiences for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates can demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity. Experiences provided for candidates include working with diverse populations, including higher education and P-12 school faculty, candidates, and students in P-12 schools. (par. 5)

Although most of the syllabi did not appear to be designed to prepare teachers to practice authentic multicultural education, they did appear designed to meet this NCATE standard.

In addition, the introduction of models or guidelines that draw upon the five common principles of multicultural education (as discussed earlier) might mitigate the lack of faculty expertise in MTE at some institutions. Organizations such as the National Association for Multicultural Education and the Center for Multicultural Education could lead such an effort in the U.S., translating the abundance of theory and philosophy in the field into clear suggestions—not proscriptions, but guidelines—for course development.

A concurrent push for more research on approaches to and practice in MTE is warranted—research that looks beyond this or that strategy within one’s own courses. This study uncovered several points related to MTE which are ripe for scholarly attention: the ways various approaches to MTE translate into teacher practice, multicultural teacher educators’ perceptions of their preparation for teaching these courses, and actual MTE practice—what happens when the classroom door is closed? I hope to expand this line of inquiry, as well, to coursework outside the U.S. in order to broaden the discourse regarding effective MTE practice.

Meanwhile, the typology that emerged from this study provides one lens through which teacher education programs can consider their multicultural education course offerings. The typology itself must be strengthened and refined through additional inquiry and more purposeful processes for methodological credibility and validity. In the meantime, it can be used to raise important questions about the institutional intentions behind MTE. What, exactly, do these courses intend to teach teachers to do and be? And what are the implications of this for educational equity and social justice—the roots of multicultural education?

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