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Culturally Responsive, Transformative Pedagogy in the Transnational Era: Critical Perspectives

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This article addresses challenges of multicultural education in the context of increasing transnational mobility and growing diversity in schools, and suggests ways to convert these challenges into new resources in education. We start with a brief overview of the contemporary transnationalism and new understanding of space and culture (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004), and how they pose special challenges in multicultural pedagogy. Specifically, we examine the misleading conceptualizations and practices of culture and identity in multicultural education (Hoffman, 1996). Then, we redefine the culturally responsive, transformative pedagogy with focuses on its multidimensional and empowering aspects. Multiliteracy practices (New London Group, 1996) of students from culturally and linguistically diverse families are acknowledged as a new pathway to allow a wider range of learning opportunities, transform the interactive patterns between students and teachers, and empower students to critically reflect on, and share their identities.

As the world becomes more globalized, people's experiences and relationships reach beyond the national borderline. The increasing mobility of the contemporary world enables people to live in multiple spaces at the same time, although not necessarily physically, but virtually with the help of information and communication technology (Lam, 2007; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Luke, 2003). People, (im)migrants in particular, traverse regularly across borders of languages, cultures, and nations, constantly negotiating their roles, practices, and identities responding to the shifting contexts (Lam, 2004a; New London Group, 1996). Inevitably, these border-crossing experiences have reconfigured people's concepts of space and culture (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Culture is no longer conceptualized in reference to the distinct border—whether ethnic, national or geographical—as it used to be. Cultures are now conceived as constantly changing and intermingling.

With this contemporary transnational backdrop, the increasing diversity of students' cultural backgrounds in schools has posed special challenges to the educational field with questions of how to teach about culture(s), particularly multiple cultures, from a culturally responsive approach (Asher, 2008; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Hoffman, 1996; Nieto, 2010). To address these challenges, first, we identify the misleading conceptualization and practices of culture and

identity in multicultural education, and second, redefine the culturally responsive, transformative pedagogy with specific focuses on its multidimensional and empowering aspects. As a working model, we showcase a classroom practice that draws on the proposed pedagogy and how it connects multiple spaces in this transnational era.

MISLEADING CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CULTURE AND IDENTITY

The 2003 US Census Bureau reported that, throughout the nation, 47 million people use a language other than English at home (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006). By 2025, it is estimated that one-fourth of students across the nation will be classified as English learners and the distribution of them will not be concentrated in certain areas, but spread all over the country (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006). As the number of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds increases, teachers in the United States are increasingly expected to teach students whose first language is not English and whose cultural diversity poses a greater challenge for their classroom interaction.

To meet this challenge, many US schools have adopted multicultural education. Despite its proposed aim and practice of acknowledging diversity, however, multicultural education has received much criticism as contradicting its own essential theme of openness and flexibility by essentializing cultural differences (Hoffman, 1996). For example, the way students' diverse cultures are displayed in collages along the hallway by themes of ethnic foods, clothing, and holidays reflects how the practice often reifies cultural diversity as categorized and commodified differences (Banks, 2001). Cultural differences represented in such a stereotypical manner reinforce the idea that such differences are immutable and fragmentary rather than changeable and challengeable (New London Group, 1996). Moreover, the theme of *all are special* is criticized due to its overly complacent resolution of differences as it often discounts and perpetuates existing power relations (Hoffman, 1996; Lam, 2006). Cultures in these multicultural practices are viewed as consumable images and practices of each distinct group (Giardina, 2008). In this view, the politically charged world is often well masked with the discourse of cultural equality and uniqueness. Therefore, the multicultural education at this surface level does not engage students in critical inquiry and reflection of one's own culture or culture of others to help them reach a fundamentally transformative learning about self and others (Hoffman, 1996). Teacher education programs are not much better in meeting such challenge (Nieto, 2013). Rather than offering opportunities to investigate issues in cultures and identity by examining broader socio-political contexts, many programs provide preservice teachers with only superficial frames of diversity such as demographic diversity (Slapac, 2013)

This misleading multicultural education often complicates the relationship between teachers and students. When teachers depend on a narrow concept of culture and identity, they tend to classify students according to pre-developed categories, sometimes stereotypes such as *model minority* Asian American students, or *academically lazy* African American and Hispanic students (Asher, 2008). Cultural characteristics of a group such as kinship patterns, parenting styles, time-space orientations, language patterns, and communication behaviors are overgeneralized (Bloom, 2009; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). In this culture-as-trait model, students' behaviors and skills are evaluated largely based on the membership in a certain group regardless of their actual experiences and identifications. Such group-based classifications not only disregard intra-group differences,

but occasionally lead students to internalize and act on such representations as a destructive self-prophecy (Wu, 2002). In addition, the deficit perspective places students under the teachers' notion of remediation (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Lam, 2004b, 2006; Slapac & Kim, 2014; Zamel, 1997). English learners, for instance, are viewed as less capable of the same level of cognitive tasks than their mainstream peers (Binaco, 2000; Zamel, 1997). With the "converting the natives" stance (Zamel, 1997, p. 349), teachers, by focusing on fixing perceived defects of students, may be further away from the meaningful connection with students' intercultural skills/perspectives which could otherwise translate positively into the classroom learning.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY

In this section, we address how schools and teachers can promote a culturally responsive and transformative pedagogy. Gay (2002, 2010) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as utilizing students' previous experiences, cultural knowledge, and diverse forms of performance to enhance learning. She claims that culturally responsive teaching is fundamentally comprehensive, multi-dimensional, empowering, and therefore transformative. Because the pedagogy is teaching to and through students' strengths, it acknowledges various cultural and linguistic heritages of students as valid resources and vehicles through which to teach the formal curriculum. By having students work with others from diverse backgrounds, teachers help students view issues, concepts, and problems from multiple points of view, instead of from one dominant perspective (Banks, 2010). In other words, through culturally responsive and transformative pedagogy, students can develop skills and knowledge that are necessary to become critical thinkers who can make and implement reflective decisions in personal and social actions.

Building on this conceptualization of culturally responsive and transformative pedagogy, we highlight two pedagogical goals to meet the challenges of multicultural education in the context of transnationalism where many students are affiliated with multiple cultural and linguistic orientations. In describing the *multidimensional* pedagogy, we emphasize the importance of acknowledging diverse ways of learning especially attending to students' multiliteracy practices. We suggest that teachers create spaces where students are allowed and encouraged to draw on multiple funds of knowledge to make meanings and, therefore, the transformative pedagogy is achieved in the context of interactive collaborations between students and teachers. In describing the *empowering* pedagogy, we argue why it is important for teachers to critically reflect on their own cultural identities to create a classroom environment where students can share diverse cultural narratives of multiple identifications and have opportunities to critically reflect on identities of their own and others. Finally, we showcase a classroom in which the proposed pedagogy is in action and demonstrate how such a classroom brings students' life contexts into the curriculum so that they see the meaningful connection between school and other social worlds to establish a mutual community of learning for youth.

Multidimensional Pedagogy—Multiliteracies in Third Space

The potential danger of the perfunctory multiculturalism is its tendency to view differences as fixed and fragmentary pertaining to the specific group (New London Group, 1996). In this frame,

diversity is “not necessarily indicative of the acceptance of difference” (Asher, 2008, p. 16), much less of its utilization. Beyond this superficial recognition of diversity, the pedagogy should be based on a new epistemology of pluralism that not only acknowledges, but also builds on, the students’ own experiences, discourses, and languages (New London Group, 1996). Thus, as the first pathway to the culturally responsive and transformative pedagogy, teachers need to recognize and utilize diverse ways of learning and literacy.

In language education, the nation-state’s animosity to multilingualism has been rationalized under the claim of national unity, which turned bilingual education into an enemy, leading to the fragmentation and discord of the nation (Binaco, 2000). Educational policies have endorsed the standardization of national language to serve the dominant ideology that the nation-state should be built on a homogenous (language) identity (Pavlenko, 2002). As the main public institution to produce such homogenous national citizenry, schools have favored English-only policy and subscribed to the narrow version of literacy as the written skills of reading and writing (New London Group, 1996). Whereas such literacy education is in line with the norms of White middle-class socialization, it has been frequently in disjunction with the linguistic and cultural practices of minority groups (Cummins, 2000; Lam, 2004b). Predominantly, educational policies have defined literacy practices of minority groups as defective and devalued their contexts of socialization in which minority student’s draw on different language experiences both in and out of school (Lam, 2004b). An affluent world of resources within these students has been closed to society, leaving the intellectualism in their bilingual/multilingual skills unrecognized and unutilized. Thus, a teacher with the standardized norms of linguistic interaction would underestimate or not be able to recognize such diverse literacy practices (Pratt, 1991).

Whereas literacy education has focused mainly on teaching mechanics of reading and writing, a growing body of studies started to recognize the multiplicity of literacy practice in a broader social context by defining literacy(ies) as a socio-cultural practice and central feature of identity (Gee, 2000; Kress, 2000; New London Group, 1996; Pennycook, 1996; Yi, 2009). This view of literacy as sociocultural identity work acknowledges that children enter the world of textuality through multimodal routes and that a complex mixture of new and old media—print-based literacy and digital literacy—is part of daily experiences of current childhood and adolescence. However, once schooling starts, students do not have many opportunities to bear on such daily experiences because schools operate mainly with a narrow version of literacy (Luke, 2003; McCarthy & Moje, 2002). Students from (im)migrant families, in particular, have even less opportunities to draw on their transnational literacy experiences in which they connect to multiple communities, cultures, and languages. This is a not a small loss given that these youths regularly engage with new media and diverse literacy practices in multimodal ways through mixing and matching different styles, languages, modes and registers to express their ideas and identities (Luke, 2003).

The concept of *multiliteracies* refers to these literate abilities to coordinate and negotiate divergent text forms and discursive practices (Lam, 2009; New London Group, 1996). In these practices, differences become essential ingredients for designing and mediating meanings depending on who the audience is. From this perspective, many (im)migrant youth and English learners are equipped with the “literate abilities to navigate and negotiate across diverse social practices and text forms,” because they have access to a broader set of knowledge and resources within their transnational relationships (Lam, 2009, p. 378). They often have a wider range of transnational/transcultural literacy options, as shown in their digital literacy practices of hybridizing multiple modes (Yi, 2009). Multiliteracy practice also provides (im)migrant youth with a better sense of English capacity. Whereas classroom English instruction may increase their

sense of marginalization with its focus on fixing what they are not capable of, the English they command outside school, especially in new media space, often enables them to develop a sense of achievement as well as connectedness to a wider English speaking audience (Lam, 2008). In that space, youth are capable of drawing not only on the standard English that they learn in school, but also diverse linguistic tools to complement the intended meaning, such as different dialect forms, their native language, images, sounds, embedded links, streamed videos, and paralinguistic codes.

When school curriculum adopts this broader view of literacy that includes multimodal ways of meaning making, teachers can connect to a greater set of students' linguistic and cognitive resources. Students are unlikely to bear on their everyday experiences for their in-school learning unless they are explicitly invited to express and link to those experiences. They are aware of the divide between academic and everyday space, and schools usually do not validate the modalities and discourses of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Moje, Ciechanowski, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). To counteract the deficit perspective, teachers need to create a space where students feel their differences are valued, welcomed, and invited to share. Such discursive space is essential to achieve the goal of transforming differences and conflicts into rich resources of learning and collaboration (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999). This zone of development is often called *third space*, in which "learning contexts are immanently hybrid, that is, poly-contextual, multi-voiced, and multi-scripted," and where "hybridity and diversity serve as the building blocks" of learning (Gutierrez et al., 1999, p. 287). The major assumption in this classroom is that hybrid practices building on students' diversity do not impede, but foster language and literacy development. Instead of privileging any one language or register, the classroom makes use of a larger repertoire of students' various languages to create meaning and enhance participation.

Moje et al. (2004) defines third space from a more educational perspective, that is, a space merging "the first space of peoples' home, community and peer networks with the second space of Discourses in more formalized institutions such as work, school or church" (p. 41). In this merged space, dichotomous categories work together to engender new knowledges and new forms of literacy by incorporating divergent text forms. As a navigational space to cross boundaries and create successful communication, third space brings competing knowledges and modes of communication into a conversation by challenging and reformulating the current academic literacy practices and discourses in youths' lives.

In this regard, multiliteracy practices are a representative form of hybridity in third space. As described in youth digital literacy practices, youth are already dexterous in intertextuality by constituting meanings through linking to and embedding other texts, narratives, and modes within their own text form (Luke, 2003; McGinnes, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, & Saliari 2007; New London Group, 1996). Through such multimedia representation, youth are not just literacy learners or consumers of existing systems, but remake, and transform resources of representation (Kress, 2000). In sum, design becomes the new principle of textual production and pedagogic goal, defined as a process of best representing one's interest, intention and identity through utilizing available resources in a transformative way (Kress, 2000).

Empowering Pedagogy—Critical Reflection on Self and Others

By empowering pedagogy, we refer to the educational practices through which teachers and students create an environment of collaborative empowerment and critical inquiry of cultural

identities of one's own and others. Critical pedagogy interrogates differences in terms of how they are socially constructed based on the power dynamics (McLaren, 1995). Critical analysis of social realities bases the exploration of diverse positionalities, identities, and subjectivities of different groups of people in relation to a larger social, cultural, and historical context. Therefore, critical pedagogy recognizes how certain groups of people are represented and even stigmatized in the dominant discourses, and affirms multiple voices that are often unheard by creating an empowering, dialogical space (McLaren, 1995). Dunlop (1999) states that the goal of the critical pedagogy is: "deconstruct dichotomizing and pervasive polarizing tendencies by positioning thinking in the borderland or on the fault line between cultures, 'third space' by engaging students and teachers in dialogues about diverse forms of cross-cultural narratives" (p. 57). He argues that students need to be exposed to various forms of literacy and discourse to develop the skill of self-reflexivity. As the first step, recognizing multiple voices, narratives, viewpoints, and literary forms is required to realize that we construct multiple identities that are played out contextually. Listening to and accepting multiple voices enable students to develop "heightened consciousness and awareness of the multiple modalities of words" (p. 59). However, increased knowledge of different cultures, classes, and groups that are marginalized, is not automatically transferred to the transforming experiences. Rather, it is through the critical inquiry and deconstruction of the taken-for-granted subject positions that a process of recognizing the *other* within oneself takes place (Dunlop, 1999). Although the classroom practice seems all about language and literacy, beneath the surface of language there occurs a process of creating new understandings of ourselves and others. This is why literacy practices include the process of developing self-knowledge as well as intercultural awareness.

A critical pedagogy, then, needs to create curricula that do not rely on categorized and fixed images of identity and culture, but reflect the multiplicity and fluidity of students' identifications (Asher, 2008; Burk, 1997; McLaren, 1995). In particular, such curricula should be designed to destabilize the widespread stereotypes about minority people and cultures by incorporating "a close reading of written narratives, autobiographies, and case studies to foster dialogues across differences, towards a narrative space where conditions may be created where students can tell their own stories, listen closely to the stories of others" (Asher, 2008, p. 17). Narratives used in this way promote cross-cultural understandings of students in general, while at the same time providing cultural and linguistic minority students with a space of exploring and voicing their identities. Furthermore, the space within the formal curriculum will offer them new opportunities to resist the hegemonic language and cultural narratives, and to transform their experiences of multiple relationships across borders into a useful repertoire of learning and identity development.

To apply this critical pedagogy in classroom, teachers should ensure that they reflect on their own identity and practices as teachers before they have their students reflect on their identity. As Kincheloe (2011) notes, teachers—in/pre-service teaching—are rarely encouraged to critically confront "why they think as they do about themselves as teachers" (p. 202–3). Moreover, fewer teachers are willing to learn about and from their students (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Slapac & Kim, 2014; Bartolomé, 2004). Too often, teachers take their cultural values for granted and thus become unknowing transmitters of their own values, knowledge and learning tools. Unfortunately, these teachers' apolitical assumption of teaching as neutral is likely to endorse the assimilationist view of learning for their culturally and linguistically diverse minority students.

This maintains the dominance of certain ideologies (e.g., language/national identity) and power dynamics (Bartolomé, 2004; Osborne, 1996). Thus, the critical inquiry of identity should be based on teachers' own self-inquiry and willingness to allow students to explore and express diverse realities and identities. For this reason, teacher education programs should engage prospective teachers in critical self-inquiry through which they can challenge their own beliefs and values, thus preparing for a wider range of cultural narratives and identities of their future students and empowering those unheard, misrepresented voices.

From Disjunction to Connection

The new pedagogy in the transnational era needs to be aligned with the shifting ideas of space, culture, and identity. Beyond the border-centered conceptualization of space, educators need to recognize the connectedness of multiple life spaces across national, cultural, and linguistic borders. Students, (im)migrants in particular, traverse such borders in their daily life to communicate with, learn about, and draw from people and events in multiple places including home and host country, and local and global society. Through incorporating such daily experiences of crossing borders and connecting over distances, schools can lessen the gap between in-school and out-of-school practices. Students will then experience the school space as more relevant and meaningful located within the continuum of their life spaces.

For a mutual community of learning, schools need to move beyond the traditional schooling mode where print-based literacy activities and standardized language policy is dominant. By validating and utilizing what students bring with them from other spaces, multiliteracy practices and diverse narratives of identity for instance, schools can create a space where students can relate to and share multiple communities, resources and identifications. Differences, then, are resources, rather than impediments, to adaptation and learning in a new country. The new media technology helps people enhance their leaning of new language and culture without sacrificing their own. Instead of the binary paradigms of assimilation or acculturation, we need to understand the process of transculturation where youth creatively synthesize differences into something new and productive (Pratt, 1991; Suárez-Orozco, 2004).

It is important to note that when we draw on our students' experiences/skills as resources, we are hiring unpaid cultural mediators who carry within them the intercultural capital that was developed from their constant experiences of mediating and bridging different languages and cultures (Orellana, 2007, 2009). For example, many (im)migrant children facilitate communication between people with their bilingual/bicultural abilities by paraphrasing and contextualizing messages for different audiences (Dorner, Orellana, & Jiménez, 2008). Having students recognize and reflect on their role and skills would be one way to acknowledge students' literacy skills that are left invisible by schools. This allows students to make a connection with school curriculum and activities as a relevant extension of their daily life experiences. The process of establishing a mutual community of learning will be facilitated by recognizing the mediating roles of these students between different spaces. As seen in their cultural and literacy practices, they are playing key roles in reformulating the concept of culture, identity, and learning. The experiences of traversing across different cultures, languages, and identifications enable these children to form a larger set of learning resources.

A Classroom With Culturally Responsive, Transformative Pedagogy in Action

Based on her dissertation research, the first author observed an 8th grade middle school classroom where students were allowed to create a media presentation called *V-log* on a topic of their choice as a starting point of the class unit, *identity and design*. Comprised of students from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the classroom was literally diverse. When allowed to choose the topic of their interest and the multimodal medium for representing it, students became actively engaged in thinking through what to share with the class and how to deliver it. Students chose various topics ranging from their hobbies and study habits to science questions and social relationships.

One focal youth that the researcher observed over time in class and at her home created several V-logs for this assignment. She was from an (im)migrant family with Korean ethnicity. Drawing from her daily life activities, the student first created a video about “flexibility” in which she demonstrated a few yoga and TaeKwondo poses with her verbal explanation of how to get flexible. In her next V-log about “cracking joints,” she combined many different modes including comic animation, photos, her own video shots, texts, and music to talk about her daily habit of cracking joints. At a later point when the class began an active discussion about “designing identity,” she created two V-logs through which she first posed some questions about how identities of people have evolved into the current ones, and then engaged the audience in a question regarding whether media technology helps people fake or constructively design one’s identity.

While observing her video creation process and products, the researcher noticed that the student gradually utilized the video tool not only for the school assignment, but also for other purposes, mainly to communicate with a diverse group of people and to represent her multifaceted identities. For example, this 8th grade (im)migrant student from South Korea made *friendship videos* to maintain relationships with friends in Korea to whom she sent the videos. She also created a comic video as a New Year’s holiday present for her extended family in Korea, using both written and spoken Korean language. For her local family and friends, she made several fun videos about songs of her own composition, family travels, and silly activities with her sister at home. One video was actually made for her class teacher who started the V-log project and was about her upcoming plans for the summer. She also used the presentation tool in her Social Studies class to criticize the racial stereotypes and advocate the importance of viewing people as unique and whole rather than as a misrepresented fraction of certain stereotypes. The multimodal video tool was an important way for her to learn, connect with people, critique, and represent her complex identities.

In the classroom, the teacher had students share several V-logs and discussed the implications of such video creation and presentation. As the teacher described the project, students’ own interests and exploration of their identities were incorporated into the unit, with the goal being to understand and construct a healthy adolescent identity while endorsing multimodal literacy development. In this semester long process, students were allowed to work with a broader definition of literacy which included not only the written literacy, but also multimodal representation. They were also encouraged to derive from their own daily funds of knowledge and thus able to connect to their home and transnational life contexts. Such a third space enabled both students and the teacher to coconstruct their learning, which then became more relevant to the students’ life. During such classroom activities, students could delve into and share their interests and identities

with others in a broader context, drawing on diverse cultural contents and language forms. In this pedagogical third space, students' differences became meaningful resources for learning, relationship, and identity construction. This example demonstrates how educators achieve a culturally responsive, transformative pedagogy by creating a third space in their classrooms where students are allowed to bring in their cultural identity; multiliteracy practices, which many youths are already familiar with in many digital spaces; and their reflective thoughts on the complexity of their identity.

CONCLUSION

Teachers face the challenges of multicultural education in this transnational age because of its utmost diversity across borders. However, we argue that these challenges can be translated as new resources in education; (a) The new conceptualization of culture, space, and identity expands the horizon of multicultural education from the mere celebration of differences to the critical self-reflexivity and empowerment of unheard voices. (b) By acknowledging multiple ways of learning, teachers can incorporate multiple funds of knowledge among diverse students into the curriculum. It not only encourages students—especially from culturally and linguistically diverse families—to see the meaningful connection between in-school and out-of-school spaces, but also creates an empowering third space where students can share diverse perspectives and identities. Instead of building on the deficit perspective on students, the culturally responsive, transformative pedagogy builds on the potentials of students as active designers of meanings, identities and cultures. This connective pedagogy will enhance a wider range of learning opportunities, transform ways in which teachers and students interact, empower students by developing critical reflexivity of self and others, and finally bridge schools and families through mutual initiative for educating our students.

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