Of Kwanzaa, Cinco de Mayo, and Whispering: The Need for Intercultural Education

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Multicultural education aims to improve understanding among students of different ethnic groups, but it can lessen intergroup conflict only if it is implemented systematically. In multiethnic school settings, the relationships among students of different "minority" groups are problematic; conflicts need to be both understood and addressed if multicultural education is to succeed. In one inner-city California high school, the celebration of Kwanzaa leads to exclusion and isolation, and the speaking of Spanish in the classroom sparks conflict and resentments.

Throughout much of the world, racial/ethnic tensions and conflicts grow unchecked; schools are a key site for the enactment of these tensions (Macias 1996).[1] Multicultural education attempts to address and alleviate these tensions. The movement toward multicultural education began in the United States after World War II, flourished in the late 1960s, and has continued through the 1990s. Advocates of multicultural education envision a global transformation of the schools. Teacher education texts (Diaz 1992; O'Hair and Odell 1993) call for a true re-visioning of the school, from the curriculum to pedagogy, from extracurricular activities to discipline. A truly multicultural education would teach the histories, literatures, and contemporary experiences of "other Americans" as integral parts of the curriculum. Moreover, because the "hidden" curriculum is just as important as the official curriculum, and the tone and content of interactions are just as important as the demographics of the school (McCarthy 1993; Sleeter and Grant 1988), multicultural education necessitates reforming pedagogy and discipline so that they are culturally sensitive as well.

Proponents of multicultural education affirm that it will improve interethnic relationships (ASCD 1977; Hanna 1994; Sleeter and Grant 1988) as well as educational outcomes for students of color (AACTE 1980; Cummins 1986; Rushton 1981). It is unclear, however, how profound the reforms have to be in order to reap the benefits of multicultural education. In this article, based on ethnographic data from one high school in California, I propose that *superficial* multicultural programs can actually exacerbate interethnic conflict. My evidence suggests that multicultural education must be implemented intensively and systematically, rather than gradually.[2]

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I agree with Wallace that we should "view multiculturalism not as an obdurate and unchanging ideological position but as an opportunity for ongoing critical debate" (1993:252). The debate has to include observations and evaluation of (supposedly) multicultural education as it exists in schools today. My critique of multicultural education rests on the contrast between the ideal of multicultural education and the extremely superficial version that I observed.[3]

Token multicultural reforms can intensify ethnic group conflict if they neglect the power relations among the oppressed—between "minority" groups—as well as if they neglect the power relations between the dominant and the oppressed. Discussions of multicultural education usually revolve around the relationship of students of color to European American students, staff, curricula, and pedagogies (McCarthy and Willis 1995). But racial tensions, fears, and hatreds also exist between different "minorities" in many multiethnic schools (Foley 1990, but see Grant and Sleeter 1986 for an exception).[4] In this article I will describe how, at one California high school, interethnic tensions are aggravated by educational reforms that highlight each ethnic group both sequentially and in isolation.

Although at some schools multicultural education *is* implemented intensively, many more schools are quick to claim that they provide multicultural education. "Many well-intentioned but superficial school practices parade as multicultural education, such as food fairs, costume shows, and window-dressing contributions by people of color" (Sleeter 1991:9).

I observed interethnic relations and the attempts at multicultural education at one inner-city high school, King High, in Pineview, California.[5] The Pineview school district and community activists, in their 1990 "Agenda for Positive Change," espouse a thorough multicultural reform.[6]

> [Pineview] is a community rich in cultures, ethnicities, and languages. The schools must promote and reflect that richness. This means:
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> - School personnel are educated about the cultures and histories represented among the children they teach.
> - School personnel are as diverse as the student body, providing the sensitivity and language skills to bridge school with home.
> - Textbooks are infused with the contributions of all peoples.
> - Diverse values and traditions are integrated in every aspect of the educational program.
> - Education is no longer presented from an exclusively European-centered point of view.
> - Instruction and programs are designed for students to interact harmoniously across racial, ethnic, cultural, and language differences.

Three years after this impressive outline was published, multicultural education at King High was still limited to posters on the wall and special assemblies. Like King High, most schools go no further than a superficial

addition of multicultural events and heroes, even though scholars agree that multicultural education should be much more than "add cultures and stir" (Arvizu and Saravia-Shore 1990). At King High, these very superficial attempts at multicultural education actually exacerbated group conflict, but I suggest that a truly multicultural education with a focus on process and boundaries *could* alleviate interethnic tensions.

Twenty years ago, Cortes said that although multicultural education should be more than isolated events and units, their addition was a positive first step.

> The recognition of ethnic groups through school events and the study of single ethnic groups through special units and courses has been a valuable and long overdue addition to our educational process . . . they have intrinsic value and . . . they provide the cutting edge of multicultural educational reform. [Cortes 1977:39]

Most schools have not gone beyond this first step. Moreover, this first step, in isolation, is not only inadequate, but it is actually dangerous. As Hanna warns, "Besides the lack of evidence that multicultural education programs do what they are supposed to do, multicultural programs may have unintended consequences" (1994:72). Token multicultural education can inflame interethnic resentments, surely an unintended consequence. In her case study of the implementation of a multicultural "school within a school," Ulichny found that multiculturalism in practice meant "different foods, festivals, and 'foreign' languages," instead of "an exploration of societal patterns of discrimination and inequality that are based on class, race, and place of origin" (1996:343). The emphasis on cultural heritage worsened interethnic relations because students of some ethnic groups were resentful of those who seemed to have a monopoly on "culture."

I suggest that instead of *starting* from the "special events" approach, we rework the model of multicultural education. Successful multicultural education requires an analysis of the dynamics of student relations across all ethnic groups—"minority" and "majority"—and must begin with the particular culture of each school, as well as encompass broader societal patterns of access to power and privilege. Some scholars have argued for a deepening of multicultural education toward what McCarthy calls "critical multiculturalism, . . . a process that goes beyond 'inclusivity' and emphasizes relationality and multivocality" (1993:290). As I will explain later, I prefer the term *intercultural education* to foreground the relationships between and the diversity within ethnic groups.

Ethnographic Setting and Research Methods

King High is located in Pineview, a large city in California. Pineview is a poor city, and King High has the highest concentration of low-income students of any Pineview high school.[7] The ethnic makeup of the students

is 80 percent African American, 10 percent Latino, and 10 percent other ethnicities. Approximately 1,500 students are enrolled at King High, but on any day only about half of them are present.

My analysis of interethnic relations and the multicultural efforts at King is drawn from a larger ethnographic study of teen mothers and their school experiences (Lustig 1997). King High has a largely self-contained program to enable teen mothers to finish school (the School-Age Parent, or SAP, program). During the year-and-a-half that I spent at the SAP program, about 80 percent of these students were African American, 10 percent were Latina, and 10 percent were Asian American. In the course of the school year over one hundred students enrolled in the SAP program, but only about 25 students attended more or less regularly.[8] I was at the school four full days a week, spending most of my time with the teen mothers in the three classrooms used by the SAP program. Some SAP students were mainstreamed into "regular" (non-SAP) classes, and I occasionally accompanied them there as well. The quotes from students, teachers, and administrators are from my field notes and taped interviews. In the school setting, it often seemed natural to take my field notes during classes and assemblies. During lunch, support group, and other times when it would have been intrusive to take notes, I took notes as soon as possible afterwards, either during the next class period or that afternoon at home.

While my main concern in this article is interethnic relations among students, teachers and administrators could play a vital role in ameliorating those relations. I will address teachers' feelings about interethnic conflict, multicultural education, and their responsibilities as teachers. Although I did not conduct formal interviews with teachers and administrators, I had long conversations with ten teachers (all of the academic and "support services" teachers in the King High SAP program as well as some of the SAP teachers at other Pineview schools) and briefer interactions with several of the administrators. I took notes on these conversations shortly after they took place. I also attended most staff meetings at the King High SAP program and several of the districtwide SAP meetings, including the orientation at the beginning of the year and the midyear retreat, and I took notes during these meetings.

In the SAP program in Pineview and at King High, almost all the administrators are African American. In the SAP program, almost all the academic teachers are European American, while almost all the "support services" teachers, who teach nutrition, parenting, prenatal education, health, and career planning, are African American. This distribution is problematic for four reasons: first, the alignment of European Americans with academic subjects reinforces the association between academic success and "acting white" (Fordham 1988); second, the European American teachers, because of their ethnicity, feel particularly inadequate to deal with the ethnic conflicts that arise; third, the Latinas are left

with no Latino adults at school; and fourth, the ethnic makeup of the staff is not seen as problematic by the administrators.

According to one teacher, Ms. Wells, the academic teachers were concerned about the patterning of diversity among the staff and told the administrators that they thought academic teachers of color should be hired. The director downplayed their concerns by referring to the diversity among the staff as a whole and pointed to the undeniable fact of budget cutbacks, which were leading to layoffs, not hiring.

At the SAP staff orientation before the school year began, the director lauded the program for having such an ethnically diverse staff: "Now we can really serve the diverse population of this city and this program." She overlooked the staff distribution and assignments: the few Asian American and Latino staff members were in the district office or the other teen mother programs in the district; the European Americans were all academic teachers; and the African Americans were primarily child care staff, support services teachers, and administrators. Furthermore, her assumption that a diverse staff would automatically make the SAP program culturally sensitive proved to be unfounded.

I conducted taped interviews with 75 teen mothers, of whom half were or had been SAP students at King High. The interviews covered a wide range of subjects, but the questions relevant to this article were, "What has it been like for you growing up [black/Latina/white/Asian]? Have you ever experienced racism or prejudice against you in school? What do you think about how the different groups get along at school?" I also asked about the ethnic makeup of the schools the informant had attended and asked other questions relevant to each informant's particular situation. For example, if the young woman had a child with a partner of a different ethnic background, I asked about that; if she had been present at one of the problematic events or incidents I had observed, I asked about that.

At best, the relationships between the Latino and African American students at King are characterized by indifference and self-segregation, and at worst, by violence and hostility. In the teen mother program, indifference and self-segregation predominate. I observed that students would not even ask to borrow a pen or a ruler from someone of a different ethnic group. In one instance, a student shared a bag of candy with everyone in the room except the one student of a different ethnic group. When the students group themselves for work or lunch, they almost always self-segregate by ethnicity. In the school at large, there are occasional fights across ethnic lines that sometimes escalate into feuds. At times the principal puts requests in the school bulletin pleading with students of one ethnic group not to respond to an incident in which members of their group have been attacked by another.

The teachers at King High are no less vulnerable to racial tensions than the students. According to one of the SAP teachers, at one volatile faculty meeting teachers openly called each other racists. Moreover, he told me

that some King High teachers sit in the staffroom and make racist comments about other teachers and students. (There are 61 teachers at King High; the two full-time and four part-time SAP teachers at King have little to do with the other teachers). I felt this tension when I introduced myself at a King High faculty meeting. In contrast to my warm reception in the SAP program, other King teachers were quite hostile, not to me personally but to the prospect of another study. One African American teacher exclaimed, "They'll approve rat studies, but they won't approve black studies!" Although the school district has approved "black" studies and offers it as an elective, the teacher's comment indicates that she felt that the "black" studies program was inadequate; she saw a parallel between the dearth of African and African American studies and the potentially colonial implications of a European American researcher at a predominantly African American school. She was metaphorically suggesting a contrast between African American studies, which ideally provides students with a view of African Americans as subjects or agents, and educational research that portrays African Americans as "research subjects" or "rats."

The school situation is a reflection, although not a perfect mirror, of the community, where ethnic conflicts frequently erupt in local politics and on the streets. Ethnic groups battle with each other over shrinking resources: everyone seems to feel that if one group advances, the others lose ground. Conflicts over bilingual education illustrate this general pattern: Latino and Asian American parents struggle to reform inadequate bilingual programs, while African American parents resent the extra funding and attention that their children are not getting. "The battle over whose culture counts, particularly from the perspective of students and the communities they come from, is becoming more *visibly* a battle among so-called minority cultures and only *invisibly* one of white versus other" (Ulichny 1996:334, emphasis in original).

Strength in Numbers

At King, where most of the students and administrators are African American, the African American students appear to be in a position of dominance over the Latino students. This "dominance" is only relative, of course, and does not negate the racism that African American students experience outside school. Moreover, their dominance is not absolute, but rather varies from situation to situation. King High's multicultural efforts overwhelmingly favor African American culture, suggesting that multicultural resources are committed in proportion to the number of students of each group. Kwanzaa and Black History Month are celebrated, African dance is taught, rooms are decorated with posters celebrating Africa and African Americans, and Africa is emphasized in social studies. The school, however, is by no means Afrocentric; rather, it is quite traditional and Eurocentric: the teaching methods are based on individual achievement and competition, and the history books are

largely peopled by European and European American men.[9] As one student in U.S. history remarked, "I'm already to page 142, and I haven't read about a single black person." As one teacher remarked, "[Administrators] say we should make the curriculum multicultural, but they never do anything. They never come see what I'm teaching." She was pointing out that there is no follow-through to the rhetoric used by administrators. For example, the SAP mission statement refers to "excellence through diversity," but I saw no concrete manifestations of this philosophy.

In other words, multicultural education at King was a veneer of cultural relevance over a Eurocentric educational system. This veneer was not directly tied to the lives and experiences of the students. For example, most of the African American students did not celebrate Kwanzaa at home, so while they may have enjoyed learning about it, it was not *their* (inner-city African American) culture that they saw reflected as part of the curriculum.[10] Moreover, the African American veneer excluded the Latino, Asian American, and European American students. The Latino and Asian American students did not see their heritage celebrated as the African American and European American students did. The non–African American students were further excluded because it was never clear that the Afrocentric events and materials should be for all the students, although students may have engaged with the activities differently, depending on their own background.

To a large extent—and paradoxically—the exclusion stemmed from the failure of teachers to explicitly acknowledge that they have students of different ethnicities. Race and ethnicity were rarely discussed in classrooms, so during an event like Kwanzaa, there was no discussion of how non–African American students could or should relate to the proceedings. The assumption of exclusivity and the resultant hostility surfaced most clearly during special events that were nominally multicultural but were actually monocultural.

Kwanzaa

To celebrate Kwanzaa, an African theater group came to work with the teen mothers to prepare a performance that included acting, dancing, and a rite of passage for the participants. The production was a major undertaking, involving about two months of preparation. It was a remarkably positive experience for the performers: the directors were skilled at encouraging the students to do their best, and they and the audience were pleased by the results. Rehearsals took place during class time and included frequent references to African women and their strengths and roles. When rehearsals first began, all the students in the SAP program had to go, and everyone participated. Yet as the weeks went by, a few of the African American students and all the non–African American students stopped coming to rehearsals.[11] One of the African American students who stopped participating was pregnant and felt the

dancing was too strenuous; perhaps the others were uncomfortable about performing in front of an audience, or did not like the demands placed on them by the directors. The Latinas and Asian Americans stopped because, as one said, "It's all about *African* women—it's not for me." Through this attrition, the nonparticipants missed out on a valuable experience. Since the nonparticipants included some African Americans, the pattern of ethnic separation was less obvious;[12] nevertheless, the process tacitly told everyone involved that African American culture was relevant only to African Americans.

Cinco de Mayo

Up until Cinco de Mayo, no assemblies or special events had celebrated Latino cultures. Just before Cinco de Mayo, the teen mothers went to a conference on African American women. None of the Latinas went. One of them explained, "I'm tired of African American this and African American that. They never have anything for us. I feel left out. Cinco de Mayo is coming and they haven't planned anything." Notice her conviction that an event based on a particular culture is "for" students of that culture.

King High did have a Cinco de Mayo assembly, which included the singing of the Mexican national anthem. Most of the African Americans refused to rise for the singing, although they were repeatedly told to do so. While their reluctance stemmed largely from apathy and a generalized resistance to authority, Latinos interpreted their refusal as hostile and disrespectful. The following year, during the Cinco de Mayo assembly, the Latino students dancing on stage went into the audience and invited other students (mostly African American) to dance with them. They joined in willingly, and the positive and upbeat mood corroborates my intuition that the African American students were unwilling to stand for a national anthem, rather than unwilling to participate in a celebration of Latino cultures.

Cinco de Mayo was the only time I saw an example of truly multicultural education—paradoxically, it took place out of school. The case managers organized a Cinco de Mayo/Mother's Day celebration for teen mothers from the entire county.[13] The event consisted of speeches and performances about Cinco de Mayo and Mexican culture, performances addressed to urban teens in general (skits about violence and safe sex), and performances by African American rappers. In general, the students enjoyed the event, which was more *multi*cultural than others. In particular, one speaker made the only attempt I saw in a year-and-a-half to show how the history or culture of one ethnic group could be relevant to students of other ethnicities. A Latino community leader, talking about Mexican history and Cinco de Mayo, described how the small, underequipped Mexican army had defeated the seemingly more powerful French army when it invaded Mexico in 1862. He explained, "All of you, whether you're Latina, black, white, Asian, you're facing a lot. You're

trying to bring your kids up right. You're up against drugs, violence, poverty. But you can do it. Just think of the Mexican soldiers—no one thought they could win, but they did, and you can too." The audience responded with cheers and clapping. This speaker was unusual: he acknowledged the presence of different ethnic groups in the room, pointed out to them their common problems, and suggested that they could *all* be inspired by Mexicans of long ago.

The success of the Cinco de Mayo/Mother's Day event provided a model of "something for everyone." Some of the teachers and administrators of the SAP program had been concerned about the relatively heavy emphasis on African American culture throughout the year, discussing at staff meetings their desire to include other cultures. As one administrator said, "We have to do something for the Latina girls." But they did not discuss how the non–African American students could or should relate to African American material, nor did they ever express a concern that the African American students were missing out by not being exposed to Latino cultures. They, like the students, work on the assumption that curricula focusing on one culture are "for" students of that culture.

In an attempt to be more inclusive, the following year's winter holiday event was not only a Kwanzaa celebration. Instead, it was called Winter Holidays Around the World. The event consisted of tabletop displays of different cultures and their holidays and a brief introduction to each one by teachers and community members. The affair was a dismal failure: the students were inattentive and rude during the presentations. The format provided a microcosm of the token multicultural education practiced at King High: the achievements and culture of each group were presented in isolation from other groups, even when they were all included in the same event. In contrast, at the Cinco de Mayo/Mother's Day celebration, connections were forged across ethnic lines.

Teachers and the "Comfort Zone"

I have identified three major weaknesses in the token multicultural education at King High: (1) the allocation of multicultural resources in proportion to the ethnic makeup of the student body; (2) the implication that an event based on one culture is only for members of that ethnic group; and (3) the presentation of different cultures in isolation from each other. These factors combined to drive wedges between the different ethnic groups at the school. True, they did not cause these tensions, but they reflected and reinforced problems that exist in the society at large.

The teachers and the school are culpable, however, for their failure to address ethnic conflict. A problem at King, one that is not addressed by existing multicultural efforts, is that interethnic conflict is quelled as quickly as possible without addressing the underlying tensions that provoke conflict. A classroom incident illustrates how the teachers handle

ethnic conflict. The students were all supposedly working on their assignments. The only two Latina students in the room were talking in Spanish and laughing. An African American student, Tasha, asked Lucila, "Do you like talking Spanish more than English?" Lucila replied that she did, and then Tasha said, somewhat aggressively, "Well, I wish you wouldn't. I think it's really rude." The Latinas seemed to want to defuse the situation, perhaps from a fear of conflict. Lucila's response was very conciliatory: "I know what you mean, okay." Her friend Olivia, normally quite outspoken, did not say anything and busied herself with her books. Two other students, both African American, reproached Tasha for her request and defended the rights of Latinos to speak in Spanish. One said, "That's their language. If they didn't speak English, would it be rude for you to speak English [in front of them]?" The other defender took a different tack: "You make them feel bad when you say that. It's disrespecting their language." The interaction among the African Americans almost led to a fight, and the teacher, a European American, responded by taking each of the three African American students outside to talk to them individually. Mr. Gallagher (the teacher) did not talk to the Latina students, nor did he address the class as a whole or open up a class discussion on the subject.

Mr. Gallagher feared that the conflict among the African American students would lead to a fight. The students were not inherently uncontrollable, but there had been several violent fights that year, and a group discussion about ethnicity could have exploded. His primary concern was to maintain order, not to facilitate the students' discussion of ethnicity, language, and exclusion so that it could be conducted in a respectful way. After reading an earlier version of this article, this teacher was upset by my portrayal of him. "I've tried so hard not to be a typical white male, but that's how it makes me seem."[14] I reassured him that I do not think his actions (and inactions) suggest that he is a typical white male, but rather that he, like many teachers, is afraid of conflict in the classroom and reluctant to address ethnic tensions in group discussions. He had no training or preparation in mediating interethnic conflict; an open discussion of Latina/African American relations would have been risky, and he was playing it safe.

In the SAP program, teachers have a heavy administrative and teaching burden. For example, they have to teach different levels of the same subject simultaneously. They may teach remedial math, pre-algebra, and algebra at the same time in the same classroom. They use these constraints to explain and excuse the absence of discussion and innovative teaching in their classrooms. They see discussions of any topic as a luxury that they cannot afford. As one teacher put it, "I want to do well by these girls, but I'm not even able to do the basics [because of the constraints of the program]."[15] Given the challenging nature of their job and the superficial nature of multicultural education as it is implemented at King High, some teachers see multicultural education as a frill, a

luxury they cannot afford. When asked whether she was in favor of more multicultural education, one teacher responded, "I don't want to water down the basics."

Even teachers who like to have discussions in their classroom often shy away from openly discussing race and ethnicity with their students (Foley 1990). As bell hooks observes, "The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained" (1994:39). Teachers' fear of conflict is understandable—I fight to overcome the same fear when I teach, the fear of leaving the "comfort zone," as Jackson and Solis call it.

> Comfort zones are those arenas where multiculturalism has been advocated from . . . essentially additive, procedural, and technical perspectives. The task before us, then, is to force the parameters of those comfort zones outward, pushing for broader and more liberating constructs capable of engendering a pedagogy for transformation in a real and material sense, and not merely a recognition and acknowledgement of difference. [1995:2]

The comfort zone is really not so comfortable when conflict simmers, ignored and unacknowledged.

In fact, confronting and examining conflict can ease tensions, as teachers find when they are willing to address interethnic conflict in their classrooms. Ms. Wells described the atmosphere at another SAP program. She explained that when she was teaching there, students of different ethnicities got along well together. When students made racial slurs, she and the other teacher always discussed those comments in class with all the students, which she saw as important in maintaining the positive atmosphere there. Her experience supports Ulichny's (1996) finding that airing grievances in a respectful way can reduce ethnic tensions. After Ms. Wells and the other teacher left the program, the situation rapidly deteriorated to the point of guarded hostility between the groups, suggesting that their interventions were helpful. As she puts it, "the culture of the program changed."

Ms. Wells and her colleague were unusual in their willingness to discuss interethnic relations with their students as a group. At the King High SAP program, the academic teachers were especially reluctant to intervene in conflicts among students of color because of their "whiteness." As Ms. Wells said, "It's a fear of meddling when you're perceived as an outsider, an oversensitivity [that the students will say], 'Who are you to push us together?'" Most teachers are afraid of conflict and unprepared to mediate interethnic conflict. A teacher described a major interethnic skirmish that had taken place on campus the previous year: "We felt horrible. We wanted to do something, but we didn't know what to do, so we didn't do anything. There was no assembly, no dialogue."

Language, Voice, and Power

Earlier, I said that African Americans are in a position of dominance over the Latino students at King High, and I described how Latinas feel left out of "multicultural" activities. African Americans do not always feel dominant. In the incident described above, Tasha was enraged when the Latinas spoke Spanish in front of her. Her anger is symptomatic of the attitude of many, but not all, African Americans toward Latinos. Listen to Tasha: "Where I used to go to school, the Mexican kids would always be talking and laughing, and I never paid any attention. But then a friend of mine who speaks Spanish told me that they were talking about me. They sit up there talking Spanish, and it's just like they're whispering."

The ability to speak Spanish gives the Latinas a dangerous power over the African Americans—"dangerous" because even if they are not talking about their classmates, they can always be suspected of doing so. Indeed, once the African American students learned that I speak Spanish, they frequently asked me what the Latinas were talking about. They did not ask the Latinas, even those who are bilingual. The African Americans assumed that the Latinas would never admit that they were talking about someone in the SAP program. Among high school students, being "talked about" has serious repercussions. A moment of gossip can lead to fighting, death, or being kicked out of school (Lustig 1994). So Tasha's concern should not be dismissed as adolescent vanity. She was expressing a real fear shared by many students in the SAP program and at other schools (Ulichny 1996).

The ability to speak Spanish gives Latino students a distinct advantage, but Latinos also have to be wary of how they conduct their conversations, lest they be misinterpreted.[16] Ulichny (1996) found that multicultural efforts made African American students quite jealous of Latinos (and others) who had their "own" language. A further danger is that by speaking Spanish Latinos are identifying themselves as foreign, non-American, "invaders." As one African American student said of Proposition 187, "Well, I think [the government] should limit the number of people they let in, I mean the [Latino immigrants] are coming in and taking over everything. They have all these businesses we don't have."

Common Ground

The students who defended Olivia and Lucila's right to speak Spanish are not threatened by the speaking of Spanish—a reminder that ethnic groups are far from homogeneous. To avoid stereotyping, any truly multicultural program must attend to the diversity within each ethnic group. The token multicultural efforts at King High define ethnic groups as homogeneous, unchanging, and in opposition to each other. The lived experience of students contradicts this construction of ethnicity, but the

school's institutional discourse of ethnicity does not recognize intraethnic differences or interethnic dialogues.

If some students can bridge the gap between ethnic groups, more can as well. For example, a few African American students began asking me to teach them Spanish (no foreign language is offered in the SAP program). Their desire to learn Spanish, as well as the students' defense of Latinas' right to speak Spanish, shows that some students have internalized a respect for cultural difference. Unfortunately, I was only able to teach them a few words, but my microintervention did lead to a moment of rapprochement. Olivia was sitting with me and the African Americans who were "learning" Spanish.[17] Tyisha asked her, "Does your boyfriend speak English?"

Olivia: No, but I'm teaching him. I'm trying to anyway. It's hard.
Tyisha: Mhm, I'm teaching my boyfriend English, too.
Olivia: Does he speak—
Tyisha: —He speaks that jail English. I want to teach him to talk right.

The connection between Olivia and Tyisha was fleeting, but more and more of such moments would allow the students to know each other as people struggling with (some) similar issues.

I suggest that the best way to improve interethnic relations is to look closely at the few connections that form across ethnic lines and to expand them and develop others in the same vein. It seems clear to me that it is not enough to just put students of different ethnic groups in close proximity. The teen mother program I have been describing is very small—on most days fewer than 20 students spend all day together. Close proximity is simply not enough to break down barriers (Allport 1954). I interviewed most of the students, and they claimed that they got along with people of different ethnicities; many had friends of other ethnicities as children. Yet now in high school, most of them were no longer forming those friendships, nor were they even superficially friendly to students of other ethnicities.

I found an example of a successful interethnic friendship in a small group of Latinas and Asian Americans who attended English as a Second Language classes together two hours a day. Every day, their common experience of not being fluent in English was reinforced when they left the SAP program area and walked to ESL class. However, if common experiences were enough to overcome interethnic tensions, the students in the teen mother program would get along well, since they were all teen mothers. Clearly, this commonality did not, by itself, translate into interethnic friendships.

Nevertheless, when the students occasionally made conversational overtures across ethnic lines, they usually talked about children or pregnancy. If one student was returning from the nursery, she might initiate a conversation by saying, "Your baby is [sleeping/eating/crying]," or she might be asked, "How's my baby?" And then sometimes a more general conversation developed from the initial exchange. Students

rarely initiated these conversations without a stimulus such as someone returning from the nursery.

Teachers could build on this potential for communication by encouraging students to explore and discuss their similarities and differences. English and social studies teachers should help students make personal connections to the academic material, even if it does not reflect the experiences of their own ethnic group. This process would deepen students' engagement with the material and help them forge bonds with each other. Sometimes students make these connections on their own: while reading about Native Americans, one African American student exclaimed, "Whites just had to exploit everybody!" Unfortunately, the teacher did not pick up on this remark to start a discussion, and everyone just kept on with their reading. Ulichny (1996) suggests that students of color can recognize their similar experiences as adolescents and as members of oppressed groups. Clearly, students acknowledge these commonalities at times, but for these glimpses of shared experiences to transcend the divisions between ethnic groups, teachers must actively intervene to facilitate and build on the students' discoveries.

Conclusions

The hierarchy of power among "minority" groups is not clear. Even when one group apparently dominates another, the hierarchy may be only situational, not absolute. In this article, I have described the complexity of the power relations between African American and Latina teen mothers, a complexity that is not immediately apparent. If multicultural education is to bring students of different ethnicities together, it has to be more sophisticated than the current approach as it is practiced at King High. The "special event approach" can actually worsen existing conflict by encapsulating ethnicities. Instead of relying on posters of notable "other" Americans or textbook "boxes" that present decontextualized incidents and individuals, the curriculum should begin with the experiences of the students and an open examination of ongoing conflict at the school and in the community. Discussing Latino-Anglo relations at a high school in Los Angeles, Patthey-Chavez gives an example of how reluctant school administrators are to listen to students' voices and experiences, "It is much more likely that the district would piece together an in-service about Latino culture, during which a few 'specialists' . . . present their reflections on Latino culture, than it is that the school would ask the students to actually articulate and discuss their needs" (1993:55).

Listening to students' voices and acknowledging their conflicts would form a foundation of understanding on which to build a multicultural education that includes all the cultures of the United States and, even more importantly, includes an analysis of the interrelations among groups and the variations within groups. I suggest we return to the post–World War II term *intercultural education*. In the 1940s, this term was part of an assimilationist rhetoric that reflected an idealistic vision of

everyone getting along together (North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools 1946; Warren and Roberts 1945). Enough time has passed for us to reclaim the term (but not the rhetoric or programs) to breathe new life into "multicultural" education. "Inter/between" is preferable to "multi/many" because it calls attention to process and boundaries rather than to a collection of separate cultures. Intercultural education, as I envision it, is a more precise term for the most intensive methods of multicultural education (Banks 1996; McCarthy 1993; Sleeter and Grant 1988); yet intercultural education differs slightly from these approaches: it emphasizes the relationships between and within all ethnic groups instead of focusing exclusively on the oppression of minority groups by European Americans. Adopting this term would give some conceptual clarity to a muddied terrain. As it is now, the term *multicultural education* covers too broad a spectrum of programs and approaches. Twenty years ago, Gibson warned that "the vagueness of terms and assumptions [related to multicultural education] appears to be increasing" (1976:1), and her warning still holds true. But adopting the term *intercultural education* is less important than implementing intercultural education, whatever it is called.

The implementation of intercultural education depends on a clear understanding of the specific patterns of interethnic relations at each school and a willingness to investigate those patterns with students from their perspectives. Students, teachers, administrators, and researchers should begin with local ethnography (Carlson 1976; La Belle and Ward 1994) and then look beyond the school to the community and nation to examine inter-"minority" conflict in the context of overarching structures of racism, sexism, and social class. If teachers are to implement an intercultural education, they need training and support to help them acknowledge conflicts and lead students to resolve them. Students deserve more than a smattering of special events. They deserve an education that reflects their histories and experiences and helps them negotiate a society in which traversing cultural borderlands is the norm. "The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory" (Anzaldua 1987). Life in the borderlands can be fraught with tension and fear, for young people and adults, but intercultural education could ease the way.

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Notes

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1. Throughout this article, I will use *ethnic* as a shorthand for *racial/ethnic*, because it is less clumsy and more "anthropologically correct," although it does not adequately reflect the effects of centuries of assumptions of and about biological races.

2. The second claim of proponents of multicultural education is that it improves educational outcomes for students of color. A discussion of academic achievement is outside the scope of this article, but clearly a *pervasive* multicultural curriculum and pedagogy is more likely to result in greater academic engagement and achievement than a token multiculturalism. Ulichny (1996) found that even a poorly implemented multicultural program had (small) positive effects on students' performance; the program did, however, increase interethnic tension. Moreover, interethnic conflict itself can lead to poor educational outcomes if students become (further) alienated from school. For example, one of my informants dropped out of school because she was getting beaten up by a group of students of a different ethnicity.

3. My critique should not be confused with those who seek to uphold the "canon" of Western civilization (Bloom 1987; Schlesinger 1992); in contrast, I am calling for a more intensive and thorough multiculturalism and a critical look at what passes for multicultural education in (some) schools.

4. The terms *minority* and *majority* are problematic since in many schools and communities, people of color are in the majority and European Americans are in the minority. But I use the terms with their everyday meaning, especially since they reflect power more accurately than they do population.

5. Names of persons, programs, schools, and cities are pseudonyms.

6. This document was prepared by a local nonprofit agency in collaboration with district personnel and community members.

7. Nationwide, 13 percent of the population lives below the poverty line; in Pineview, 20 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

8. Attendance was poor, but not as bad as these numbers make it seem. The population is very transient: some students enrolled and only came for a short time, others enrolled and later transferred to the comprehensive high school. So there was usually a core group of about 25, out of about 50 who could be expected to show up.

9. As part of my research, I reviewed all the textbooks used in the SAP program.

10. I would like to thank Ms. Wells for drawing my attention to this point.

11. The teachers did urge the students to continue going, but felt they should not force them to participate, given how out of place the students felt.

12. The fact that students do not always split by ethnicity reflects the heterogeneity within each ethnic group, but it also sometimes obscures the divisions that do exist.

13. Case managers are similar to social workers.

14. I gave Mr. Gallagher a more recent copy of this article, and after reading it he e-mailed me that he did "not want to comment further on the incident or

topic(s) covered in the paper" and that he did not "have a desire to engage in a continued dialogue related to the paper." I am saddened by his unwillingness to talk with me, but since he *is* unwilling to talk with me about it, I can do no more than record his (implied) objection.

15. This teacher recognizes that she could do better even with the constraints and has requested a mentor teacher, but the program director has not responded to her requests.

16. I never had the opportunity to observe a classroom in which there was more than one student speaking the same Asian language, but presumably a similar situation could arise with Asian American students.

17. I had asked Olivia to help me "teach." I had thought that she could teach them, but then I saw that that would have underscored her greater power as a Spanish speaker.

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Notes

[2] **Cultures in Conflict**
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