

Multicultural literature and discussion as mirror and window?

Jocelyn Glazier, Jung-A Seo

Minority students in one U.S. high school class find their voices, but the majority students have a different experience.

In the United States, multicultural literature (here defined as literature that represents voices typically omitted from the traditional canon) and texts have made their way into language arts education-reform documents, onto classroom shelves, and ultimately into the hands of a diverse student body. The use of multicultural literature—coupled with dialogic instruction within a safe classroom context—can provide students with both a window to other cultures and a mirror reflecting their own (Galda, 1998). However, if practitioners (particularly white-majority teachers) assume a monoculture in which there are those like “us” and “others,” the use of multicultural literature may also reinforce notions of “culturelessness” among white European American student populations. This article documents the experiences of a group of high school students as they read and responded to N. Scott Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1996, University of New Mexico Press)—a multigenre text focusing on the Kiowa nation—and related texts. While the experience allowed minority students to find their voices in the classroom, in some ways it simultaneously stifled the voices of majority students.

Glazier teaches in the Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education at George Washington University in Washington, DC. She may be contacted there at 2134 G Street, NW, Washington, DC 20052, USA. E-mail glazier@gwu.edu. Seo is a doctoral student at the same university.

Multicultural literature is often touted as a tool that “helps children to identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 24); it is viewed as a resource for “promoting students’ inter/intra-cultural understanding and appreciation” (Fang, Fu, & Lamme, 1999, p. 259). However, similar to broader critiques of multicultural education, discussions of multicultural literature often omit explorations of “whiteness” within the larger discussion of culture. And yet “to read books by and about people of

color does not exclude Whites from the discussion of multiculturalism” (Cai, 1998, p. 315). Studies in multicultural education tend to examine those in the minority, in many ways avoiding a close interrogation of the white majority. This avoidance further perpetuates a notion of “them” (those perceived as having culture) and “us” (those perceived to be without culture). Because whiteness—often along with the notion of what it means to be an American—has been largely unexplored territory in U.S. school contexts in particular, majority students often feel “cultureless.” (See related examples in Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997.) In describing her work with pre-service teachers, Florio-Ruane (2001) wrote,

When I ask my [European American] students to write vignettes of their cultural experience as literacy learners, they are usually nonplussed. “I don’t have a story,”

they say. "I'm not anything." Responses like these lack a sense of history or place. The normal or "unmarked" form is the bland, commonsense one. It is the water the fish would be the last to discover. (p. 24)

As a result, majority readers of multicultural literature are left "mostly looking in from outside" (Singer & Smith, 2001, p. 13). Thus, while we vigorously applaud the use of multicultural literature in the classroom setting as both a way to encourage students who are most often voiceless in schools to find voice and a means by which multiple cultural experiences can be explored, we also encourage teachers, more than 80% of whom in the United States are part of the majority population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004), and teacher educators alike to consider ways to bring all students to examine their cultural voices—a necessary goal if we are to ever view cultural diversity as a resource rather than a deficit.

Canonical curricula and silent spaces

Curricula in schools are far from neutral. Rather, the curriculum is always part of a selective tradition: someone's selection or some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. School knowledge most often manifests itself as a particular representation of the dominant (read as white, middle class) culture (Giroux, 1989). Accordingly, the languages and texts that support and perpetuate dominant ideals and practices continue to be valued in a majority of schools. School curricula confirm and privilege students from the dominant culture while excluding and often disconfirming the experiences of subordinate groups. Ultimately, "school knowledge disables to the extent that it silences students" (Sleeter & Grant, 1991, p. 52), particularly those who are not part of the culture of power (Delpit, 1988). In the case of the literature curriculum, canonical literatures and stories representative of white, male, middle class perspectives are privileged still (Applebee,

1993). Left on the margins—silenced—are the stories of other cultures.

Just as curricular choices often privilege majority students, a teacher's discourse—indeed, what he or she says and does not say and what he or she allows students to say—may lead to further marginalization of minority students. Talk is central to the work of teaching and learning in U.S. classrooms (e.g., Cazden 1988; Nystrand, 1997). Indeed, discourse is the means by which we come to acquire and create knowledge of the world and of our lives (Bakhtin, 1986). And yet, for all the talk resounding in classrooms, much remains unsaid. Silence about certain issues is often a salient characteristic of schools and classrooms. Silencing most often occurs around stories that conflict with the grand narrative of school curriculum. Official knowledge in schools practically necessitates silence because "silencing removes any documentation that all is not well with the workings of the U.S. economy, race and gender relations, and public schooling as the route to class mobility" (Fine, 1992, p. 153). It is most often those students who are silenced for whom these topics and stories are most critical and central; silence renders "irrelevant the lived experiences, passions, concerns, communities, and biographies of low-income, minority students" (Fine & Weis, 2003, p. 155).

Silenced topics in U.S. classrooms are usually "hot lava" topics (Glazier, 2003), including social class, culture, and race, that are generally avoided rather than explored (Fine & Weis, 1993; Frankenberg, 1993; Landsman, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Morrison, 1992). Other silenced topics include politics and religion (Black, 2003; Haynes & Thomas, 2001), particularly post-September 11, 2001. These topics are too often omitted, at least in part, to avoid the difficult dialogues and "dangerous discourses" (Bigler & Collins, 1995, p. 10) that might accompany them. As a result, "smoothed over or ignored [are] the social contradictions [and complexities] that students' daily lives present" (Fine, as cited in Bigler & Collins, 1995, pp. 20–21). What emerges is not only a

silencing around certain topics but also a silencing of certain individuals. The questions remain of (a) how to provide voices for all within the classroom; (b) how to allow the “discursive undergrounds of students” (Fine & Weis, 1993, p. 2) to move above ground; and (c) how to “fill baffling silences” (Morrison, 1993) about racism, inequality, difference, and culture, thus validating the lives and stories of all students.

If we are to move to a more culturally affirming reality, teachers need to develop a curriculum and pedagogy for transformation, one that is characterized by an ongoing effort to create new space for dialogic discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to allow for discussion of multiple literatures and perspectives.

Transforming curriculum and pedagogy

Multicultural literature...can provide opportunities for meeting many goals of multicultural education, where voices interact and students reflect, think creatively and critically, increase cultural awareness, decrease ethnocentrism, and create a global perspective. (Cliff & Miller, 1997, p. 1)

“Multicultural curricula have the potential to challenge the ‘silences’ that exist in schools around issues such as race and class” (Bigler & Collins, 1995, p. 3). Much research in the area of multicultural language arts curriculum has focused on “the importance of using multicultural literature for understanding cultural differences, building community, and preparing students for the twenty-first century” (Willis, 1997, p. 139). The hope persists that this inclusion of oft-marginalized voices will “positively affirm student identities, empower students, and challenge popular stereotypes in the larger society” (Bigler, 1996, p. 4). Indeed, the Standards for the English Language Arts (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996) require the incorporation of diverse texts repre-

senting a variety of cultural experiences into the language arts curriculum. A common reading of these standards is that the inclusion of multicultural literature in one’s curriculum provides the means through which language arts teachers can help students achieve understanding of and respect for their own culture and those of others.

While it seems apparent that literature has the power to open eyes and change lives, it is also apparent that this does not happen merely by reading a piece of culturally diverse literature in a classroom. The multiple voices brought to our interpretive communities make the use of literature as a vehicle for cultural understanding quite complex. (Desai, 1997, p. 175)

Clearly, the text cannot stand alone to achieve desired ends. Adding multicultural texts to the curriculum will not by itself create respect for cultural differences or an understanding across cultures. The reason for this is in part because

readers resist texts and readings...because of their cultural memberships and various identity positions: as female, as African American, as homosexual, as white students who resist challenges to their own privilege, or as Americans who cannot grasp the cultural meanings and values in stories of other countries. (Rogers & Soter, 1997, p. 3)

The text must instead be interrogated from multiple perspectives and act as a comparison point for students’ own lives in order for it to be transformative, or life—and culture—affirming. As a result, it must act as both mirror—allowing students to reflect on their own experiences—and as window, providing the opportunity to view the experiences of others. Thus, the text becomes central to a conversation *across* cultures. This requires changing the nature of instruction from monologic to dialogic, thereby opening a way for student voices to be heard in the classroom. “Dialogically organized instruction provides public space for student responses, accommodating and promoting the refraction of voices representing differing values, beliefs, and perspectives, and ideally including the

voices of different classes, races, ages, and genders” (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001, p. 4). Dialogic instruction requires a teacher to assume a stance other than the “all-knowing” one that, too often, teachers believe they need to assume. Certainly the teacher’s role in encouraging dialogue around text is critical. Moller and Allen (2000) commented on their study of multicultural texts, “Although the text was an important catalyst, so was the space that was created...[and] the teacher’s role in encouraging and supporting students as they engage[d] in open dialogue on difficult and uncomfortable issues” (p. 177).

The following question inevitably arises. What might make the dialogue productive—and capable of “promoting students’ inter/intra-cultural understanding and appreciation” (Fang et al., 1999, p. 259), ultimately allowing “voices [to] interact and students to reflect,...[leading to] increase[d] cultural awareness, decrease[d] ethnocentrism” (Cliff & Miller, 1997, p. 1)? According to literacy researchers, students need to make multiple connections to the text being studied, exploring it as a piece in and of itself (making text-to-text connections) and as a connection to self. Of particular importance, given the goals associated with the use of multicultural literature, is the students’ “need to be able to connect text to self in order to promote greater meaning” of the text (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 24). This concept dates back to Rosenblatt’s (1938/1983) work on reader response and the notion that the individual creates his or her own meaning through a “transaction” with the text based on personal associations. Because all readers bring their own emotions, concerns, life experiences, and knowledge to their reading, each interpretation is subjective and unique. Rather than relying on a teacher or critic to provide a single, standard interpretation of a text, students learn to construct their own meaning(s) by connecting the textual material to issues in their lives, describing what they experience as they read. As Sleeter and Grant (1991) reminded us, “no matter who the students are, their power to learn and act begins with

knowledge generated within their own lived experience” (p. 66).

Reader response encourages students to become aware of what they bring to texts as readers; it has the potential to help them recognize the specificity of their own cultural backgrounds and strive to understand the cultural backgrounds of others. Often students read and respond to texts with an eye toward the first goal *or* toward the second, but not toward both. However, multicultural literature is capable of doing both simultaneously, promoting intercultural *and* intracultural understanding. Bakhtin (1990) advised us that the only way to truly know ourselves is with and through the “other”; wholeness emerges in and through that dialogue, that interaction. Therefore, one might argue that multicultural literature must work to serve as both mirror and window; one without the other is simply not sufficient.

Changes in value stance are unlikely to occur merely from responding to multicultural literature alone, or only from discussion with diverse peers, or only in responding to challenges from a teacher or peer, but rather from a combination of all three factors. (Beach, Parks, Thein, & Lensmire, 1991, p. 19)

In the remainder of this article we explore what happens when text and talk come together in a ninth-grade language arts classroom, which leads us to consider further roadblocks to the use of multicultural literature as a bridge across cultures. While the use of multicultural literature raises multiple voices, in this case it creates different sorts of silences at the same time.

Context and methodology

Julie (all names are pseudonyms) was a teacher in a school we’ll call Curie High School, which is in a suburb of a major metropolitan area. Curie’s student body comprises diverse demographic groups: 41% white, 19.2% black, 21.6% Hispanic, 15.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3% other. The demographics of this particular institution resemble

those of many other high schools within the school district and elsewhere. During the 2001–2002 school year, Julie’s classroom was typical of the diverse classrooms encountered throughout the United States (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1999; Latham, 1999; Yasin & Albert, 1999). Of the 16 ninth graders in her secondary language arts class, 5 hailed from Central America, 1 from the Philippines, 2 from Afghanistan, 1 from Iran, 1 from West Africa, and 1 from the former Soviet Union; the remaining 5 were European American. These students ranged in age from 14 to 18, as a number of them had only recently been mainstreamed, having previously been assigned to “sheltered” English as a second language classes.

Two researchers (including one of the authors) observed Julie’s class 27 times, each consisting of a full class session, over three months. Observations were most intense as Julie taught a six-week unit based on Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, which contains mythical, historical, and personal accounts of the Kiowa. The latter section consists of Momaday’s autobiographical description of his family’s Kiowa ancestry. The focus of the research on this segment of the course arose from Julie’s involvement in a yearlong professional development project in which she and other language arts teachers read and discussed multicultural literature that they would subsequently present to their students. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* was one of the multicultural texts the teachers chose to read together. Data collected in Julie’s classroom included audiotapes and videotapes of classroom events, audiotapes of teacher and student interviews, artifacts of student work, and researcher field-notes. Audiotapes were then transcribed.

Ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods of analysis were used to analyze the data in an effort to determine what unfolded during the process as students—in conjunction with their teacher—engaged in conversations prompted by multicultural texts. The research questions framing this detailed review of Julie’s class included

these three: What happens when students from diverse backgrounds talk about texts that include discussions of cultural differences? What or who “impacts” these discussions and how? Does multicultural literature and discussion of that literature lead to “inter/intra-cultural understanding” (Fang et al., 1999, p. 259)?

Julie and her teaching

During the study, Julie was in her fourth year of teaching and her first year at Curie, where she arrived in her mid-20s with a master’s degree in creative writing. Earlier, she had taught at an all African American high school, and she often reflected on her experience working as a white teacher in that context. Identity, culture, and faith were topics of deep concern and interest to Julie and clearly had an impact on her teaching. Most likely—and perhaps inevitably—“the assumptions that teachers bring to the classroom are shaped by their own cultural, biographical, and institutional experiences” (Bigler, 1996, p. 34). Julie herself commented, “As teachers, you always bring what’s important to you into the room. And for me...that’s...a lot of faith and spirituality. So I tend to feed that into my room” (transcript, November 2002). Julie often asked her students to assume a critical stance, particularly when issues of culture were involved. This pattern is evidenced, among other factors, by comments she made in the classroom, such as “We see things in particular ways because of how we’re raised. That’s what’s dangerous, because we then judge these characters [in texts] for being a certain way” (transcript, March 14, 2002). Thus, she often asked students to examine their own ideas and opinions in light of those of others.

Julie’s classroom accurately reflected her philosophy. The following describes what one researcher noticed upon first entering her room.

The walls of Julie’s classroom are covered with students’ work. On the back wall are posters titled “The American Dream.” “What does it mean to be an American?” is written atop one poster. The students

did this activity in groups earlier in the semester. Along the same wall are smaller posters—"My Name" posters—typed neatly and then adhered to colored construction paper. The names identify the diversity in the school more broadly, in this classroom in particular Mada, Jose, Abdallah, Danielle, Nancy, John. On the wall to the right...are more "My Name" posters, underneath which are collages with images from all sorts of magazines representing how students illustrate who they are. On the front wall, covering the chalkboard, are long sheets of paper on which *modernism* is defined in green marker. Next to these posters are sayings including "Fear is what yields hate" Atop other pieces of paper are the questions "Who am I?" "Where am I going?" Over the board is the quote "Your mind is like a parachute. It works best when it's open." The room is colorful and busy. Students' work is evident and displayed. An easel at the front of the room lists the day's agenda. (Fieldnotes)

Evidence of the importance of culture and identity appeared not only on the classroom walls but also in and through Julie's curriculum and pedagogy. During the course, she introduced students to a variety of texts representing several genres and authors, both canonical and multicultural. She also used a number of different pedagogical approaches in her classroom, ranging from whole-class discussion to small-group work to individual journal writing.

A roundabout way to *Rainy Mountain*

In setting out to teach *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Julie created an environment that enabled each student to share his or her interpretation of the text with the other students in the class. She taught the text as part of a larger unit that she described as follows:

[Before teaching *Rainy Mountain*], I took a good three and a half weeks to let my students get to know one another, get to know their cultures. They gave presentations about their backgrounds...they would bring in stuff from their culture [and talk about it]. Then I started bringing in multicultural pieces, pieces from

Sandra Cisneros, pieces from Langston Hughes, and I let students discuss how they were split in their own identities. And they learned what it meant to be us versus them, how the selves are split essentially.

And then we did kind of a long process with myths. And I thought it was important for them to study myths and learn about myths, to recognize that the truth is perspective, that when we say "This is real, this is my experience," that it is just your experience. What's your religion may not be someone else's religion; what's your truth or history may not be somebody else's.... And then we sort of felt safe, and that's when I started teaching *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.

In teaching *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Julie used a number of diverse pedagogical approaches and resources. For example, students often worked in small groups to gain an understanding of various chapters of the book. Students presented their interpretations to their peers in a large-group forum, pointing out important quotations and a rationale for their interpretation. Another of Julie's approaches was to provide opportunities for whole-class discussion of the text and related topics. Finally, she often asked students to state their personal connections to the text, ending the unit by encouraging class members to tell their own stories in three voices, similar to Momaday's approach. Like Rosenblatt (1938/1983) and others, Julie believed that establishing text-to-self connections was critical in enabling students to cross boundaries not only between themselves and the text but also among themselves as members of diverse cultures. To achieve this goal, she often supplemented students' reading of the Momaday text with related textual materials and encouraged students to make connections across these texts and the texts of their lives.

Students finding authentic voices in the classroom

Conversations in Julie's class took two basic forms: small-group talk (generally emerging as students worked together on a project) and

whole-class talk. Julie played a significant part in whole-class conversations, asking students questions designed to encourage responses. In many ways, the conversations were typical of traditional classrooms, in which the teacher initiates the questions, students respond, and the teacher evaluates the responses. Close analysis of a whole-class conversation under her guidance helps to establish how and when students participated, as well as Julie's impact on their participation. Dialogic episodes stood out as worthy of particular scrutiny because they were less common across the transcripts.

The conversation analyzed below occurred midsemester, after students had become familiar with one another and with the patterns of Julie's class. This conversation arose from a discussion of text, although not specifically *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Although we analyzed other conversations across the unit, we have included a close description of this particular discussion to give readers a more vivid picture of the conversational events that occurred in Julie's classroom. The patterns here are similar to those in other whole-class conversations across the dataset. Furthermore, Julie identified this exchange as one that interested her and that she subsequently chose to discuss in the company of her teaching colleagues in their professional development seminar. The following analysis highlights the topics of the conversation, the amount of time spent on topics, and student participation patterns. Finally, it focuses on the points at which students made text-to-other and text-to-self connections—allowing students the opportunity to form both intercultural and intracultural understanding and empathy.

April 5, 2002, conversation analysis

On April 5, Julie showed her students a documentary that highlighted the Battle of Wounded Knee and the Ghost Dance. The battle occurred in December 1890 when members of the Sioux nation, camped on the banks of Wounded Knee Creek, were surrounded by U.S. troops. Refusing

to relinquish their weapons, the Sioux donned “ghost shirts” they believed would protect them from the troops' bullets. More than 150 Sioux were killed. One motive for the massacre was the military's fear of the Native Americans' religious fervor, manifested in the Ghost Dance (Public Broadcasting Service, 2002; Robertson, 1996).

The students had watched part of the documentary the day before. They had also read through chapter 12 of the Momaday text and had begun to discuss related experiences and struggles of the Kiowa, including concepts such as death and spiritual beliefs. Julie's expressed goal in presenting the film was to enable her students to learn more about Native Americans, the Ghost Dance, and prayer and, through that, to better connect to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. The timeline in Table 1 illustrates the pattern of the day's events and conversations.

During the first segment of the conversation, Julie informed her students about an upcoming project. Class participation during this segment consisted primarily of students asking questions in order to clarify and confirm information. In the second segment, students responded to factual questions about the film section they had observed a day earlier. The film itself occupied the third segment, while the fourth consisted of general comments on the film, the fifth of talk directly related to the Ghost Dance material (which Julie describes as the “heart of the film”), and the sixth of discussion built on the fifth segment but framing the discussion more specifically. Julie initiated the conversation in this sixth segment by asking students, “Has anyone in here ever felt like their own faith was shaken?” Students responded by sharing their personal narratives. The final segment of talk, segment seven, consisted of students and Julie sharing their closing comments about the film.

Although all segments of talk were interesting in some respects, the data suggest that the degree of students' participation reached its highest points in segments five and six, with 51 and 45 utterances respectively, even though segment

Table 1
April 5, 2002, timeline

Segment	Minutes in segment	Student utterances	Topic
One	6:36	24	Organizational component
Two	2:00	7	Review of yesterday's film viewing
Three	35:20	0 (film watching)	Viewing part two of the film
Four	14:00	37	General remarks on film
Five	13:24	51	"The heart of the film": The Ghost Dance discussion
Six	10:20	45	Shaken faith discussion
Seven	9:00	15	Closing points

four, for example, was longer in length. What was it, we wondered, that prompted students to speak so often in these segments? It became evident that in segments five and six, students were making the highest numbers of text-to-self connections. Close analysis allowed us to discern who participated in these conversational segments, how the various students contributed, and the length of their turns.

In segment five, Julie initiated conversation about the film, specifically the Ghost Dance. The following excerpt from the transcript illustrates how the conversation began.

- Julie: The heart of the film was clearly what?
Citana: The Ghost Dance.
- Julie: The Ghost Dance. And what do you think was the most interesting *feeling* for you? Can you talk to me about what you *felt* when you saw what you saw today?
- Alita: The way that they were treated—how they treated the Kiowa—for example, when they were doing the—I *felt* sad.
- Julie: You *felt* sad? For the people?
- Alita: Yeah—for the people.
- Julie: What else? Anybody else *feel* something? I mean, I was watching your expressions—I know you were *feeling* something because

some of you had different expressions on your face so....

Siham: It reminded me of a time in my country.

Julie: So you've seen it yourself?

Siham: Well, when I was watching it, it reminded me of my government and a time in my country.

Julie's use of the term *feel* was one of the ways she invited students to make sense of their own lives in comparison to the text—in this case, the text of the film. Students—beginning here with Siham—drew parallels between the text and their own lives, making text-to-self connections, using text as mirror. Simultaneously, in this segment Julie asked the students to attempt some basic analysis of the text they watched, asking such questions as "Sitting Bull was going to be part of the Ghost Dance—and what was he?" "What were they fighting for?" and "What's the deal with the shirt?" She also urged them to engage in another level of analysis, one that asked them to think beyond—but not *too* far beyond—the specific texts to the lives of the Kiowa more generally, making text-to-other connections. She asked questions such as these:

What did the Ghost Dance teach the people?
Were they supposed to be violent?

What do you think happened to some of the Native Americans' faith at a massacre like this when they were dancing and believing that the ancestors were coming back and...that the new earth would regenerate and then this kind of a tragedy happens?

Do you think that this would shake a people's faith?

This multiple-level questioning allows Julie to involve more students in the conversation than otherwise might participate. Indeed, in this segment of talk, many students expressed their ideas and feelings.

In segment six, Julie began by asking "Has anyone in here ever felt like their own faith was shaken?" She invited students to make additional text-to-self connections. Students responded by sharing their personal experiences with faith. Whereas Julie's participation in segment five consisted primarily of asking questions, her role here was that of extender; she posed clarifying questions and reframed students' responses in order to extend and expand their personal narratives. In contrast to earlier segments, Julie's participation was less prominent; the students themselves asked each other for clarification and stepped in to challenge one another. This segment is more dialogic than previous segments. Julie appeared to establish the conversational floor, and then the students took it over. Julie reentered at various times, for various reasons, including to ensure that students felt safe within the conversation. (See her comment "That's OK—you don't have to" below.) The following transcript excerpt illustrates this type of student exchange:

Noya: So what's your belief?

Ciro: I mean, I believe in God, but it's different now. Like I—it's a bit different. It's different. I mean it's really complicated.

Noya: What do you feel like—you say that you don't believe that the world was made in seven days, so now what do you believe in?

Ciro: I don't want to say it now.

Julie: That's OK—you don't have to.

Ciro: I would like to, but it's going to take me a lot of time.

Citana: Is it something in science?

Ciro: Yeah, it's science. I mean, they teach you how to apply it to—science.

Students like *Ciro* (above) and *Alita* later in the conversation took this opportunity to connect their personal experiences to their work and texts in English class and did so in extended narrative form. For example, *Alita* subsequently explained, "I was going to share something that happened. I was—before two years ago—I was a Christian. I always went to church...but some day, a temptation came to my life." She went on to describe her personal experience of "losing faith" (across seven speaking turns—interspersed with the turns of other participants who asked her for clarification), which was similar to *Ciro's* and to the characters in the text. Another example of a student's text-to-self connection was *Citana's* comment later in the segment,

Like when you were little, you were really religious because somebody told you to be, or they taught you to be. Then when you grow, you find out you're not really that religious. Like I used to wear a cross and I don't anymore. Like I found out that I'm not really religious. It was my grandmother—I was following her.

The length of *Citana's* turn here—61 words—was similar in length to turns taken by *Alita* (examples of turn lengths include 51, 146, and 41), *Siham* (e.g., 71 and 107), and *Ciro* (e.g., 43 and 57) during this segment.

Other participation during the same segment appears to be significantly different. Whereas *Alita*, *Ciro*, and *Citana* shared personal narratives as a way to connect to the text, *Nancy*, for instance, shared an example that did not emphasize a personal experience. She commented, "And then the priests go on and tell you how to act, and they go molest little children. Have you heard about that?" *Nancy's* contribution, although connected to her own Catholic religion, was removed from *Nancy* herself. This was in essence a text-to-other connection. Furthermore, although *Nancy* participated frequently in this segment

(9 times), none of her turns were longer than 31 words. Still other contributions were presented in entirely different forms. Twice during this segment of discussion, another participant, Mark, made it clear that he would prefer to talk about something other than “loss of faith.” After Ciro’s participation (noted above), he observed, “I thought we were talking about [the Kiowa].” Later, he commented, “Are we still on [this topic]?”

Close analysis across these two highly involved segments of conversation (segments five and six) suggests that those sharing personal narratives—making text-to-self connections, using text as mirror—were the minority students in the class. Furthermore, these were the turns that were longer than others and appeared to invite more dialogic involvement with other students. Although all students participated in conversation to clarify textual understanding as well as to make text-to-text connections, the European American members of the class did not make the text-to-self connections.

If one goal of multicultural literature and texts is to enable students to draw connections between self and other, for text to act as both window and mirror, one has to explore whether or not that process is actually occurring in the classroom. It was clearly happening in this classroom for the minority students who reflected on their own experiences and those of others, doing the latter by asking one another questions, for example. However, it did not appear to be happening for the European American students. An in-depth look at the participation of two class members—Mark, a European American student, and Alita, a Latina student—further illustrates this pattern.

Case studies of Mark and Alita

Mark, one of five European American, monolingual students in Julie’s class, was among the most talkative members of the classroom community, regularly participating in small-group and large-group discussion. Mark consistently scored well

on class assessments, understood the material, and raised thought-provoking questions. In small-group presentations, he was generally the most talkative member of his group. During the conversation described above, Mark took 23 turns, the third highest in the class. However, nearly half of his contributions occurred in segment four as the students attempted to make sense of the text of the film, making text-to-text connections. When given the opportunity to connect personal (inner) text to the text the students were reading or watching (text-to-self), Mark refrained from doing so. His turns during these segments of talk were brief, offering few clarifying or extending ideas (e.g., “A majority isn’t”; “Well, I don’t know”), or they were text-to-text contributions (e.g., “She was shot. She lost her faith”). Mark seemed eager to move away from these text-to-self conversations, asking such questions as “Are we still on [this topic]?” His contributions provide a contrast with those made by Alita.

Alita, from Central America, was one of the more talkative members among the minority students in Julie’s classroom. Even though this was her first mainstreamed English class, she contributed consistently. On April 5 she delivered 32 utterances, compared to 28 from the next most prolific student and then 23 from Mark. More than two thirds of her utterances occurred in segments five and six and were focused on text-to-self connection (text-to-self = 25 turns; text-to-other/text = 7 turns). Specifically, Alita provided the class with a personal account of the time that her faith was shaken. The following excerpt illustrates her personal connection to the text (i.e., the film the students are watching in segment five):

I was going to share something that happened. I was—before two years ago—I was a Christian. I always went to church...I always wear skirts, not pants or shorts. I was so deeply in the religion. But...some day, a temptation came to my life.... And so at this point, I don’t go to church. I believe in that and the Bible and all that but I don’t follow the religion. I think that I am not able to.

In segment six, Alita continued to make personal connections to the text. For example, later in the discussion she said,

I—my mom has told me. She always tells me, “Why don’t you go to church? Why have [you] changed?” And I say, “Mom—I feel like I cannot do it anymore. I feel like I cannot stand up again.” I don’t know.

Religion, a topic generally silenced in the typical U.S. classroom, is central to the discussion in which Alita played a major role, making text-to-self connections throughout.

In addition to providing her students with opportunities to share their personal narratives in conjunction and connection with texts, Julie also gave them multiple openings to explore aspects of their lives via other activities. During the unit on *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Julie invited students to share an aspect of their culture by bringing to class a symbolic representation or artifact and discussing its significance with their peers. In response to this request, Mark presented three pins: a U.S. flag pin, a U.S. Navy pin belonging to a relative, and a third one commemorating the September 11 destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers. During the presentation, when a classmate asked Mark about his culture, the following conversation ensued.

Malaya: How is this your culture?

Mark: I don’t know...it’s American. That’s all I have—that’s all the culture I know...I don’t know what my culture is.

Julie: Do you feel like you don’t have one? You said you’re American.

Mark: I’m American, but I don’t....

Julie: Does that mean there’s no American culture?

Mark: A melting pot—anybody that believes in freedom and believes in the right of free speech and the right of anything you can do that Americans do.

Malaya: Do you have a special kind of food or something?

Mark had significant difficulty here identifying his culture. A similar theme appeared in his closing interview. When he was asked how he defines himself, he said simply “I’m me—that’s it.” Mark’s analysis of what he had learned in the class, according to his self-report during the closing interview, was that he “learned things that I didn’t know about [my peers’] cultures”; thus the text was a useful window for him to Native American culture and the cultures of his peers. He did *not* reveal learning anything about his own culture, a culture he had difficulty naming. Mark instead identified himself as wanting to “hear what other people were doing in their lives.” When asked whether or not the book and related activities helped him to learn about himself, Mark had nothing to say.

On the other hand, Alita stated that, through reading and discussing *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, she had a chance to share her culture and express her thoughts. In her closing interview, she said that she felt very comfortable sharing her culture with classmates and that this classroom setting provided a very warm, receptive environment compared to her other classes, due in part to the inclusion of multicultural texts. She mentioned too that she had learned a great deal about her classmates. Moreover, she felt that

it is important for everybody to know about their cultures, where they come from, and it’s good to research...everybody’s cultures so we can respect their beliefs and acts. Even though we don’t need to practice the other person’s religion, still it is important to respect all of that.

Thus, while Alita could use text as window and mirror, Mark could only look out through the window; he was unable to bring himself to the text, and Julie (also a member of the European majority, similar to many of the teachers in the United States) did not press him to do so. We believe that teachers such as Julie should encourage students such as Mark to see themselves in the mirror of multicultural literature.

On the one hand...

By including multicultural texts in her curriculum, talk about text, talk about others in relation to the text, and opportunities for students to make text-to-self connections, Julie helped students learn to respect and understand the cultures represented in the text and those of classmates from various cultural communities. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is a good example of literature that provides the opportunity to develop respect for and understanding of cultural diversity. The use of different voices in this book offered students the chance to observe different interpretations of the same topic, resulting in part from the students' own diverse cultural knowledge and experience. All students in Julie's ninth-grade English class could interpret the meaning of text as perceived through the eyes of their own culture, their own experiences. The unit on *The Way to Rainy Mountain* enabled students to share their cultures and express their thoughts. Julie commented about this phenomenon: "In my classroom, I felt like so many walls were completely dissolved that I could not imagine ever happening" (transcript, November 2002).

Julie's minority students were identified as being accustomed to passivity in traditional classrooms dominated by teacher interpretations and silence around topics such as race and religion. In Julie's class, however, those who were formerly silenced were "not afraid to talk out" (student interview) in the class discussions. Julie fostered for some what one student called the "right atmosphere for discussion" (student interview) in her verbal and nonverbal behaviors by creating a space where texts were open to multiple interpretations and ways of knowing. In addition, she "modeled the process of making connections between lived-world experiences and the texts" (Beach et al., 1991, p. 15) by sharing some of her own experiences with students. She explained, "My students feel safe talking about things that normally, I think, we're not supposed to [talk about]" (transcript, November 2002). This was

particularly true for students like Alita, Ciro, and Citana. Julie went on to say this:

You need to break silences. When you have a classroom full of students that, especially some that have always had power, always had the say-so, and then you've got a group of students that have never had the voice and have never, their stories have never been valid or have never been looked at as being important—you need to make a safe place, you need to create a community, essentially where your students want to walk into that classroom and feel like, I now can take off the mask, I can be who I am, I can speak safely.

Indeed Alita, for example, was able to "speak safely."

Nelson-Barber and Meier (1990) stressed the need for teachers to create classroom environments that "grant voice and legitimacy to the perspectives and experiences of those who are different from themselves—communities that do not require students to surrender personal and cultural identity in exchange for academic achievement" (p. 5). Julie created this environment for her minority students, using multicultural literature as the catalyst. Her classroom became a third space (Guitierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejada, 1999), a place where questions appeared to be easily asked, and where concepts and difficult ideas are explored rather than ignored. It was a place where it was not uncommon to hear students speak Spanish or Urdu. It was a place where, to cite an example, a Muslim student in a post-September 11 classroom could sing an Islamic hymn to demonstrate what music is like in her culture. And in this classroom space, students were asked to "link this myth to your cultures" (Julie, transcript, March 21, 2002). The students demonstrated an implicit understanding—apparent in their comments during class as well as in their interviews—that "in this class, we are trying to get to know one another" (Carlos, transcript, March 19, 2002). However, what does it mean to experience the context of this class when you consider yourself cultureless, or when your culture is hidden, not as apparent as the cultures of your peers? How might Julie further

complicate the experience for someone like Mark?

On the other hand...

As literature teachers begin to incorporate more multicultural literature into the curriculum, they are encountering some resistance from majority students (Jordan & Purves, 1993). When asked to explain their resistance, students cite their difficulties in understanding the linguistic and cultural practices portrayed in the text. They also feel uneasy discussing issues such as racism, particularly when these discussions challenge certain students' privileged perspectives on the world. These students may respond negatively to literary texts perceived as challenges to their privileged stance, leading them to apply negative stereotypical portrayals of cultural differences and avoid thoughtful discussion of cultural issues. As in the case of Mark and his European American peers, majority students simply may not readily see themselves written into the pages of a text. They may view the text as being about the "other," far removed from themselves, and dismiss it.

To counter such problems, teachers like Julie need to create opportunities for all students to "read, write, and talk about themselves, their family and peers, and their communities and cultures" (Moller & Allen, 2000, p. 149). Students like Mark must learn, with a teacher's help, to perceive themselves as an integral part of the conversation rather than as apart from it. Julie and other teachers need to openly explore with their students such previously unexplored cultural territory as whiteness and to invite majority students—along with minority students—to consider not only different cultures but also their own. Others have argued similarly (e.g., Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998). As it was, Julie's own stance, her discourse, in some ways "othered" Mark. Her questions at times privileged the cultures of her minority students. For example, in a March conversation, Julie asked, "Is anybody else here from any other cul-

tures that are represented in the room?" and "Does anybody else here represent other cultures in this room...[have] anything else to add?" Despite efforts to be inclusive, to encourage conversation across cultural borders, Julie's comments made visible the cultures of her minority students but made invisible in some respects her own culture and that of Mark.

What could Julie have done differently? Rather than ask, "Is anybody else here from any other cultures?" she needed to ask, "How does your culture connect to or differ from the text?" and thus help her students realize that they all have culture and can make cultural connections to the text. She needs to help her students understand that culture is multifaceted. She needs to help them mark the majority culture(s) that too often remain unmarked (Florio-Ruane, 2001). Rather than looking at culture only when reading and responding to multicultural literature, thus perpetuating the notion that culture exists only outside canonical literature and the so-called mainstream, Julie must invite her students to read all texts multiculturally. This will bring discussions of culture to conversations not only about *The Way to Rainy Mountain* but also about other works of literature. "The multicultural stance provides the reader with an instrument, a magnifier if you will, to expose assumptions about race, class, and gender hidden in a story" (Cai, 1998, p. 321). If students can explore these assumptions in a text, perhaps they can do the same in their own lives and the world in which they live.

We caution, however, that it is imperative to not simply maintain the same canonical bookshelves, simply reading these works multiculturally. While one can both look through the window of canonical literature and use it as a mirror, the mirror image may at times be distorted. What is in the reflection is highly dependent on the text. Multicultural literature can reflect back to majority readers a picture of themselves as part of a larger system of oppression. This literature, in many cases, sheds light on minorities whose lives have often been affected by racism and other

forms of discrimination. Multiple opportunities to view others and oneself across a set of different mirrors—by reading multiple texts—might ultimately increase cultural awareness, decrease ethnocentrism, and create a global perspective (Cliff & Miller, 1997).

Finally, Julie needs to be aware of how and whether students participate in particular conversations. A close analysis of her students' discourse may help her to discern patterns, particularly patterns of silence, that she might not have noticed otherwise, recognizing perhaps her own complicity in creating those silenced spaces.

For multicultural literature to be an effective tool that helps young people learn about cultural diversity and improves intercultural and intracultural understanding, teachers must use it skillfully. And if multicultural literature is to realize its full potential as mirror and window for all students, teachers must conceive of culture more broadly so as to include talk about whiteness, an unaddressed topic in many U.S. schools today.

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