Guests of the Journal

Interview with Carl A. Grant (March 2016)

1   In what way is the multicultural society in the USA different nowadays than it was twenty or thirty years ago?

Thirty years from the time you sent me the list of interview questions, would be 1985. Changes in the multicultural society since 1985 would include the "browning" of America. Immigrants from Asia and Latin America have added a large measure of cultural and phenotypic diversity to the country, and the boundaries between racial and ethnic group are continually blurring because of intermarriage. In addition, according CNN (2012) white women are having fewer children. In 2000, nearly 13 percent of Americans (35.2 million) claimed Hispanic ancestry; the idea that America is a melting pot is no longer a popular perspective as attention to diversity increases. Economic contexts have been shown to define social relations; a poor economy in the US has brought on bitter competition between racial group over jobs. Since 2000, there has been a severe economic recession, unemployment past 10 percent for people of color. The poverty rate for whites, is 9%; Asians Americans, 12%; blacks, 25%; and Latinos 23%. The poverty rate for blacks and Latinos in many urban areas (e. g., Chicago) remains particularly high. Schooling for black and brown students, often in high-poverty areas, continues to be far behind, in every important factor (e.g., quality of teaching force, resources, relevance of curriculum).

The election of President Obama didn't usher in a post-racial society, as some predicated. And, although he won his second term by more than five million votes, there is a hateful racial element in the US that continually contends that he cannot be an American and that a black man should not be president of the US. In addition, this is not only a US phenomena. Globalization (e.g., economic, movement of people, world wide communication, the rising up of poor and disenfranchised people, the awareness and demands of the "other") is challenging and frightening the status quo and those who want things to return to the way they were decades ago, when they were often white, or "strong" men controlled all without respect, mercy and/or regard for others.

For, me the 1980s were the best of times and the worst of times. I was gratified to travel all over the country to lecture on university campuses and to conduct workshops in schools to help school districts across the nation who were asking for multicultural education and seeking to understand multiculturalism. Student demographic changes in the classroom, the browning of America and the movement of the country into a have and have-not society caused teachers to demand information (e.g., curriculum, teaching strategies, etc.) that would help them respond to these changes. This however was bittersweet, because as an educator, I was sad and disappointed that so many educators did not understand how to teach people who didn't look like them or who were poorer than they were and that university-based teacher educators, teachers, and school administrators blamed the children and their families for most of the problems and were reluctant to see themselves as part of the problem and/or contributing to the problem. Finally, increasingly I have graduate students, whose research is taking them to locations outside of the US, not to study groups as anthropologists once did but to understand the people in a multicultural global context in order to speak to the world community about the peoples' humanity.

2   What are the main philosophical (ideological) foundations of contemporary multicultural education in the USA?

The main philosophical foundation of contemporary multicultural education in the USA, from my perspective and the perspective of a number of multicultural scholars I know, is the acceptance and

appreciation of the humanity of each and every person/student – throughout the world – regardless of skin color or wealth or any other human/social characteristic and the desire for them to have a flourishing life. Implicit within having a flourishing life is the same regards for others throughout the world. Article 26 – the Right to an education – of the Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child are ideas that I champion. In addition, the philosophical foundation includes the acceptance and appreciation of each person's culture, language, and identity and the equal acceptance of the humanity of ALL people. That said, much like democracy in many places, including the US, where democracy is a grand experiment, multicultural education is a work in progress; it is a notable experiment that I am pleased to be a part of. Arguably, the main philosophical foundation based upon democratic tents and taken from the first few words of the US Constitution "We the people…" are slowly, but surely coming to be as I look out at social and political advances in the country.

3   What do you consider as a core of successful multicultural education?

The core of successful multicultural teaching are equity and equality and the appreciation and affirmation of the humanity and cultural background and knowledge of each and every person throughout the world. Included here is an acceptance, appreciation and recognition of their cultural identity and their group's historical legacy. Years ago, I used the phrase, "Education that is multicultural education and social reconstructionist (MCE-SR)." By that, I meant that all of a student's education should be multicultural: the staffing in the school, the curriculum and experiences, the school vision statement and the policies and practices that guide the school; within the context that society is changing (e.g., becoming more diverse but also more controlled and defined by neoliberal discourses and practices) therefore MCE-SR must remain fluid. Simply put MCE-SR refers to ALL of Students' Education. When I think of a successful multicultural school, one that my granddaughter and her friends – and other kids though out the world – attends, I am thinking of a school where they are receiving an "education that is multicultural" that prepares them to have a flourishing life in a national and global context.

4   Has the role of the multicultural education teacher changed during last years? Can we still consider the teacher as a key factor of multicultural education?

Indeed, teachers are a key factor of multicultural education and their knowledge of the significance of their role is growing in a positive way. In both my undergraduate and graduate classes, the students are much more aware and responsive to racial, economic and cultural diversity than students ten years ago, and close to a majority of the students warmly accept learning about their future as a teacher in a multiracial, socioeconomic challenged classroom. The role of the multicultural education teacher has changed over the past 10-15 years. Society's awareness of diversity is an accepted, but resisted reality; therefore, the need to explain the reasons for multicultural education have shifted somewhat to one of helping schools and teachers to educate the diverse students body; taking agency against people who try to undercut multiculturalism, not being alone in the implementation of multicultural education, but instead having colleagues.

5   How much is the application of research findings in the area of multicultural education to school practice successful?

Before directly answering your question let me say that multicultural education as a concept has received very little big research money. Some research money has been invested in the study of race; the study of gender, the study of socioeconomic status, the study of disability, etc.—in other words single category research. But, research money that seeks to examine the intersection of multiple categories and social identities (e.g., race, class, gender) in different education spaces and in regard to different education topics (e.g., education of second language learners, aspiration based on gender, race and socioeconomic) is small or non-existent. However, it is significant to say that results from scholarly investigations into the different areas multicultural education have richly influenced

the field, including the way teachers think about teaching and teach. In 2008, Professor Thandeka Chapman and I developed a 6 volume *History of Multicultural Education* published by Routledge that included both empirical studies and scholarly investigations on multicultural education. The Volumes included research on multicultural education in the following areas: V. 1 Conceptual Frameworks and Curricular Issues; V. 2 Foundations and Stratifications; V. 3 Instruction and Assessment; V. 4 Policy and Policy Initiatives; V. 5 Student and Student Learning; V. 6 Teacher and Teacher Education. My good friend and colleague, Gloria Ladson-Billing's book, *Dreamkeepers*, which addresses culturally relevant pedagogy has been influential in helping educators adopt cultural relevant pedagogy. *After the School Bell Rings*, by Professor Christine Sleeter and myself, a three-year ethnography of a middle school that included four difference ethnic groups, students who were physically challenged, students whose first language was not English and our tracking of the students through the completion of their high school received favorable attention by teachers and other educators (See the follow up study: "Race, Class Gender and Abandon Dreams" Grant & Sleeter, in *Teacher College Record*, 1988). In sum, the US, including the teaching force, is ready for a well-funded major study of multicultural education in order to help educators and policymakers apply results and thereby help students learn and help teachers learn about teaching students different than they are.

6   What are the effective strategies of coping with socio-cultural diversity in the school environment?

There is not a strong research base, because of the absence of research data in multicultural education. That said, some effective pedagogical strategies based upon anecdotal evidence, classroom observations, and small research studies include: the importance of parent – teacher engagements; culturally relevant curriculum and culturally response engagements; establishing a democratic learning community, having teachers of color and administrators ; having teachers who teach the students first and the curriculum second and having school leadership that strongly supports multiculturalism, inclusion, and multicultural education.

7   What is a fundamental obstacle to achieving social justice (in a school environment, education or in the whole society)?

Years ago, (2003) W. E. B. Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folks* where he argued that the problem of the 20th Century is the color line. Today racial injustice continues to take many forms (e.g., in curriculum, staffing, expectation of students) and remains a major challenge. In addition, gender equality remains elusive; the glass ceiling remains in place and women and girls continue to receive secondary treatment in many areas; women continue to make less than men for doing the same job. Women and girls of color face triple oppression, and they continue to be denied equal treatment and or not granted the same opportunities professionally and commercially and their male and/or white peers; nor are they appreciated and celebrated in ways equal to white women/girls.). In terms of socioeconomic class, we are seeing grown inequalities with 1% of Americans owning and controlling 99% of the wealth of the country; the US has become a have and have-not society. 2015 saw historically high homicide rates with the murder of 21 trans people, the majority of whom were trans women of color, and none of which were prosecuted as a hate crime. Trans people in the U.S. experience hate-based violence and homicide at extremely high rates; face legal and social barriers and resistance to the recognition and respect of their gender identities; and transphobia continues to pervade our schools. Trans people/students are faced with fear and violence, which are barriers to living a flourishing life. The disregard of each human having a flourishing life are obstacle to achieving social justice.

8   What are the main challenges in the area of multicultural education and socio-cultural diversity in the future?

The main challenges in the area of multicultural education and socio-cultural diversity in the future, pretty much, remain those that we continue face today: acquiring the capacity (knowledge, skills,

and disposition) to accept and celebrate the humanity of each individual; developing within people a willingness to actively engage in creating and affirming ideologies and practices based in democratic principles that push back against a "have and have not world," eliminate the legacy of the disregard/disrespect for others because of a "me–first and only" ideology grounded in neoliberal philosophy and practice. Also, with religion, other than Christianity and the Jewish religion being questioned or causing concern in everyday society, learning how to include religion (writ large) within the context of multicultural education is necessary, and within that inclusion making certain that all religions are appreciated and affirmed. Further, believing that "common ground" can be found between groups of people where the meaning of multicultural education is shaped by the context.

9   What is your personal vision of education in/for the 21st century?

For there to be an education system that (1) completely recognizes the humanity, identity, culture and language of each and every child and educates children and youth to accept and appreciate the humanity of others; (2) educates students to work cooperatively with one another to solve the many natural and man-made problems that the world faces; (3) is given the human and material resources it needs to educate all of its children; (4) operates in the country/nation in ways that fully and completely value and celebrate all children; and (5) maintains an accountable system, with power and enforcement mechanisms to make certain that social justice takes place. Space, doesn't allow to fully define what I mean, by social justice, a term that too often goes undefined or under-defined, beside referencing my lecture: "Cultivating Flourishing Lives: A Robust Social Justice Vision of Education" that I delivered when I received the American Education Research Award (AERA) and published in the American Educational Research Journal (AERJ) 2012, 49, 5, 911. In this paper I fully explore the ways I imagine social justice. However, I will close this interview, with a statement on social justice that I made at the close of my lecture:

I have argued that to cultivate flourishing lives, a robust social justice education must include five core practices: (1) self-assessment, (2) critical questioning, (3) the practice of democracy, (4) social action, and (5) tools of adjudication. In sum, for each and every one of us, cultivating flourishing lives for our students in keeping with a robust social justice vision of education demands that we are clear (and have agency) about the meaning of "cultivating" and "flourishing"; that we acknowledge that our students are shaped by their histories; and that within this context the core values of self-assessment, critical questioning, practice (of) democracy, social action and (having) a criteria for adjudication must act in concert to ensure a robust social justice.

THANK YOU**!**
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