Healing Systemic Fragmentation in Education Through Multicultural Education

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Introduction

On November 8, 2016, Donald Trump became the forty-fifth president of the United States. In one of his candidacy speeches Trump announced:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime. They're rapists and some, I assume, are good people.

While Trump's words are certainly problematic, false, and hateful, in this article I focus in particular on his use of *othering* as a means for setting a context for understanding systemic fragmentation in education and what it is that we as educators can do to heal that fragmentation.

Clearly, Trump spoke from a Eurocentric perspective, an outlook that situates the idea of an "us" (i.e., Whites) versus a "them" (i.e., Mexicans). The *other*, the *them*, is deviant, immoral, wrong, and criminal. The *other* brings problems that we did not previously have, and only some of *them* are good people.

It is within this political climate that Latinx[1] students attend schools in an educational system that typically reinforces these negative ideas and stereotypes about their communities. Too often the educational system disregards and dismisses the reality of students' lived experiences. As a result students learn that their experiences, languages, and histories hold little or no value in the educational setting.

The dismissal of students' backgrounds by the educational system has a deep effect on communities of color, perpetuating a system that sets them up for academic failure. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) created terminology for the process of systematic fragmentation, which she describes as an act of dismissal on a macro-level. She eloquently stated:

> It was a process of systematic fragmentation [of indigenous peoples] which can still be seen in the disciplinary carve-up of the indigenous world: bones, mummies and skulls to the museums, art work to private collectors, languages to linguists, 'customs' to anthropologists, beliefs and behaviours [sic] to psychologists. (p. 29)

Tuhiwai Smith has used this term in reference to the way Europeans have rewritten the history of Indigenous peoples through a biased European lens. Europeans had a specific worldview, their own way of seeing and ordering the world, along with their own ideologies which places other peoples as inferior or not human. This view became the justification for the European practices of taking land and language away from Indigenous peoples. The European worldview denied the fact that Indigenous peoples also had their own systems of ordering the world and recording their history.

Applying Tuhiwai Smith's notion of systematic fragmentation to education, it is evident that education has the power to dismiss, disregard, and erase students' languages, histories, and other embedded aspects of their cultural backgrounds. Education also has the power either to include or ignore students' exploration and growth toward using multiple perspectives to examine the world. Education can oppress students in ways that continue to reiterate negative stereotypes about their communities, stereotypes which are well-ingrained in society.

This article examines systematic fragmentation and how the concept applies to education in three specific ways. The first two examples focus on the ways in which education has systematically fragmented the Mexican American cultural legacy both historically and presently. The third example addresses how the American history curriculum, which reflects society's master narrative, systematically fragments communities of color by disregarding their histories and experiences, those of indigenous peoples specifically. This oppressive master narrative is framed as society's norm. Therefore people of color's histories are often not placed at the center but instead at the margins, if present at all. The center maintains the status quo and furthers society's narrative, leaving it unquestioned. This narrative can be traced back through history and continues to thrive in our educational curriculum today.

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Americanization Programs

Looking back to the 1900s through the 1950s, a process of systematic fragmentation occurred in Mexican and Mexican American communities throughout the southwestern United States. The Americanization program, supported by both the government and State Boards of Education, was in essence a way to fragment the community through forced assimilation, with the ultimate goal being to assimilate Mexicans and Mexican Americans into U.S. society. González (1990), who has studied Americanization programs, most notably in the states of Arizona, California, and Texas, points out that the essential aim of these programs was to assimilate Mexican and Mexican American children to the so-called American way of life, rid them of their culture, and force them to acquire English language skills.

Mexicans and Mexican Americans were seen as inferior and not fitting into modern U.S. society. The education of Mexican and Mexican American youth was viewed as a problem, ultimately addressed by intelligence testing, tracking, and pushing students into vocational career tracks (González, 1990). González articulated the view of Americanization programs by affirming that:

> Americanization programs based upon academic and popular literature tended to reinforce the stereotypes of Mexicans as dirty, shiftless, lazy, irresponsible, unambitious, thriftless, fatalistic, selfish, promiscuous, and prone to drinking, violence, and criminal behavior. (p. 32)

This view of Mexicans and Mexican Americans is deeply embedded in U.S. society and continues to shape the educational experiences of Mexican and Mexican American youth today.

It is often believed that Americanization programs no longer exist. However, these programs have simply assumed a different form. A look at the initiatives passed in many states, such as Arizona, demonstrates a modern-day version of attempting to "rid" Mexican American and other Latinx students of their language. In Arizona Proposition 203, known as "English for the Children," was passed by voters in the year 2000. "English for the Children" was an anti-bilingual education initiative that drastically changed the way English Language Learners in the state were instructed (Combs, 2012).

Similarly, California voters passed Proposition 227 in 1998, which was rooted in the same ideology that English Language Learners should only have access to content instruction in English. These actions have taken away the opportunity for Latinx youth to learn in Spanish and to learn in an environment that, for many, reflects the reality of the bilingual world they live in daily.

In Arizona, students who are learning English, those who have been identified by the Arizona English Language Learners Assessment (AZELLA), are mandatorily placed in what is called an English-language development block (ELD). The Arizona Department of Education claims this ELD model is based on research, however, the research has not been identified or presented (Combs, 2012). An ELD block requires that students are placed in these English-learning classes for four hours per day, at minimum. Instruction in the ELD block is comprised of three main components: reading, writing, and speaking. As part of this block students also learn grammar and vocabulary.

Focused specifically on language skills, ELD instruction often does not include other academic content, such as social studies or science, for example. Students are essentially learning English without any context to help them scaffold their language learning (DaSilva Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2012). Students in these blocks are not receiving content instruction, a factor with sets them up to fail state standardized tests. Further, ELD blocks do not provide students with the tools needed to be successful in academic programs as they progress in school.

It is important to underscore that students in ELD blocks are separated from their English-speaking peers. This separation may be viewed as segregation. In fact, DaSilva Iddings, Combs, and Moll (2012) stated "several studies raised serious concerns about the increasing segregation in Arizona school classrooms, comparing the blocks to the infamous 'Mexican Rooms' of earlier years" (p. 503).

These ELD blocks, where instruction can only be provided in English, can be traced and linked back to Americanization programs and systematic fragmentation. The goal of the ELD blocks is to, in a sense, "rid" students of their Spanish language, similar to the goals of the earlier Americanization programs. Instead of drawing on the rich linguistic resources students bring to the classroom in their first language, resources that can be transfered to English, ELD blocks deny students the opportunity to use Spanish as a foundation to develop English language skills. The fact that students are not able to draw on and expand their linguistic resources demonstrates how the education structure continues to systematically fragment Mexican American communities.

Subtractive Schooling

Through subtractive schooling Mexican and Mexican American students continue to feel the effects of systematic fragmentation in their communities. Education scholar Angela Valenzuela (1999) is credited with introducing the notion of *subtractive schooling*. Through Valenzuela's ethnographic study of Mexican and Mexican American students in a high school in Houston, Texas, she proposed that school is a "*subtractive* process… [which] divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 3). Schools are structured in a way that essentially sets students up to fail by taking away both the linguistic and cultural resources they possess, thus furthering the effects of systematic fragmentation. The following are three examples of *subtractive schooling*.

Denying Reciprocal Relationships

The first example refers to Valenzuela's (1999) study and how teachers did not foster reciprocal caring relationships with their students within a high school setting. These student-teacher relationships are imperative for students as they represent something deeply rooted in the Mexican cultural concept of *educación*. *Educación* goes beyond its English equivalent of education specifically related to academics. *Educación* includes the role the family plays in instilling in children particular values, such as respect and caring for others, responsibility, morals, and appropriate behavior (Valenzuela, 1999).

Examining the student-teacher relationship through a critical lens, Valenzuela suggested that when teachers deny students these reciprocal relationships and do not embrace the concept of *educación* they demonstrate a way in which schools and teachers reject an essential element of the students' Mexican culture. By not acknowledging an embedded cultural aspect, such as *educación*, the process of systematic fragmentation continues when students realize what they have been taught at home does not hold value in school. There is an apparent disconnect between the two, resulting in the subtracting of the students' cultural resources.

Tracking

A second example of *subtractive schooling* is the tracking of Mexican American students in high school as well as in the nature of the curriculum offered to students. Education scholars Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009) highlighted the

ways in which tracking and curriculum can set students up for failure, Latinx youth in particular. Gándara and Contreras (2009) asserted that students living in higher socioeconomic communities have more access to curriculum that will prepare them for college, such as honors or Advanced Placement courses. Students living in areas with a lower socioeconomic status do not have the same access to these courses.

Writing about a study conducted in Los Angeles schools by Solórzano and Ornelas (2004), Gándara and Contreras (2009) stated "as an example, Latinos constituted 78% of one school's enrollment, but only 13% of Advanced Placement class enrollment" (p. 98). It can be assumed that Latinx students are tracked into lower-level courses which do not sufficiently prepare them for entrance into college.

Revisiting Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) process of systematic fragmentation, the deliberate act of tracking and only offering students lower-level courses undermines the skills, resources, and knowledges that students need to have to reach their academic potential.

Instead of using students' backgrounds and funds of knowledge as a strength to build upon in the curriculum (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), education for Latinx students continues to be subtractive. Students, for example, may experience intentionally constructed educational barriers that ensure they will fail or do poorly in academics.

As part of the larger societal context, these practices continue to further negative stereotypes, reflected in the view of some teachers that Latinx students and their families do not value education. In fact, these stereotypes are quite the opposite as Latinx students and their families strongly value *educación*. Valencia and Black (2002) asserted that the myth about Mexican Americans not valuing education is rooted in society's deficit thinking about communities of color. Mexican Americans have been battling since the 1930s, both in and outside of the courts, for equal educational opportunities for their children. This serves as only one example of the falsehood of this myth and how the Latinx community, on the contrary, does indeed value education (Valencia & Black, 2002).

The Use of Language

The use of language is a critical component to one's understanding of the world. The fraught environment around the use and learning of language offers a third example of *subtractive schooling* leading to further systematic fragmentation of Latinx communities. For many Latinx youth both the Spanish and English languages play a role in their understanding and learning. However, educational policies and schools often do not draw on this rich linguistic resource. This is yet another example of *subtractive schooling*.

Within the school environment minority languages (i.e., languages other than English) are framed in a way that situates language as a problem or handicap to overcome (Ruiz, 1984). Often people who speak minority languages are viewed negatively in U.S. society (see Gándara & Hopkins, 2010) and are seen as being at a disadvantage. Ruiz (1984) affirmed:

> The important of this coincidence lies in language issues being linked with the [social] problems associated with this group [a language minority group]—poverty, handicap, low educational achievement, little or no social mobility. (p. 19)

Viewing languages other than English as a problem within the broader society has obviously extended to education, leading to, among other things, the English-only policies mentioned earlier.

Designating language as a problem that should be solved in schools by denying and erasing students' first language from being a crucial component of the school curriculum is part of the process of systematic fragmentation. Ruiz (1984) suggested viewing language-as-resource instead of language-as-problem. Having schools recognize language as a resource that can be cultivated within students would be one way to honor and acknowledge the importance of languages other than English. This approach would also demonstrate to students that their culture, language, and lived experiences are valuable in the educational setting.

These examples emphasize how students' cultural, linguistic, and social resources are too often not acknowledged or enriched in a way that sets the foundation for academic success. Instead these resources are subtracted and further situate students for academic failure (Valenzuela, 1999). By extension these actions within the educational system continue to systematically fragment Mexican American and other Latinx communities.

Education has the power to carve up and subtract aspects of students' cultural backgrounds, as Tuhiwai Smith suggested, if the language, histories, values, and lived experiences of students that are part of the home are not respected and valued in the school environment. The educational system often disregards the embedded cultural aspects of students' life, omitting these resources and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) which, if appropriately valued, could build a strong foundation for future academic success.

American History Curriculum

The prevalent acceptance of "The" American history curriculum is a third way that education furthers systematic fragmentation of communities of color in the United States. By dismissing, erasing, and disregarding the communities' stories, these histories, when framed by a Eurocentric perspective, are seen as minor and a side note.

Education scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) views curriculum through a critical race theory lens which suggests that curriculum is "a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script" (p. 29). Curriculum has the power to either silence or give voice to certain groups of people. When students are actually taught an alternate perspective, it is viewed as an add-on or designated to one month out of the year. Students who identify as Mexican American or Native, for example, rarely see themselves in the history curriculum. If they do, most likely it is situated negatively or as a stereotype, for example representing Indigenous peoples as savages and uncivilized until the arrival of Europeans who "saved" them.

The study of a historical event may provide further context for how a Eurocentric perspective can dismiss and erase voices, particularly the voices of communities of color. The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ended the Mexican-American War. Most likely students learn that the treaty benefited the United States when 525,000 square miles of Mexico, most of which today is known as the Southwest, became part of U.S. territory.

The history of the treaty is typically taught in a single clear cut version: the expansion of the United States by land acquisition was regarded as a victory for both countries because Mexico received 15 million dollars in exchange for the land. It also established the Rio Grande as the border between Texas and Mexico. Yet it can be argued that this perspective represents a White (Anglo) male view of history and is never problematized or questioned.

An alternative perspective would highlight what the effects of the Treaty of Guadalupe were for Mexicans, and that disputes over land and the border continued. Even to the present day the border continues to be a highly-disputed area and immigration has become a human rights issue. What was the experience of a family living in California (at that time Mexico)

as their land became part of the United States? What about their citizenship status? Students probably rarely learn about these perspectives which would provide a more balanced view of the effects of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Indigenous Peoples in the Americas

A Eurocentric perspective is problematic particularly in its approach to the histories of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Throughout history Indigenous peoples have been viewed as savages, not fully human, and uncivilized. The master narrative, that of Columbus "discovering America" is deeply embedded in American history. Journalist and Ethnic Studies scholar Roberto "Cintli" Rodríguez (2014) underscored the power that the 1492 master narrative has on American society when writing that "Euro-Americans have proclaimed their story to be official history, or the universal story of humanity" (p. 65-66). This "official history" dismisses the stories of Indigenous peoples and at the same time sends a powerful message that Indigenous peoples are not part of the human story. There has been no acknowledgment in this European view of the rich oral traditions and different forms of literacy that Indigenous communities possessed.

Literary theorist Mignolo (2003) offers a historical perspective that discusses the ways in which being civilized was viewed by the Europeans: by the need to have and use writing. Writing refers specifically to alphabetic letters in the Western perspective and this type of writing is viewed as the writing used to write history. In other words, a different form of writing other than alphabetic letters was viewed as invalid for writing history (Mignolo, 2003). This framing led Europeans to believe that Indigenous communities, because they used different forms of writing and recording, could not have a history. The Europeans measured all other people according to their own epistemologies which were rooted in Greek and Roman ideas. Mignolo asserted:

> The fact that this regional record-keeping [Western historiography] maintains a complicity with empire and imperial expansion gave it its universal value and allowed imperial agencies to inscribe the idea that people without writing were people without history and that people without history were inferior human beings. (p. 127)

During colonization Europeans used the notion that Indigenous peoples were not fully human to justify their violent practices (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

American history written from a European perspective has historically been viewed as the "True" history of the United States and thus the only one valued. This master narrative has the power to dismiss and erase the histories of Indigenous peoples and other communities of color. This erasure is still evident in the history curriculum taught in the majority of American classrooms today. The curriculum is rooted in a Greco-Roman worldview (Rodríguez, 2014). Alternative approaches to curriculum that humanize the experiences of Indigenous peoples and connect with students in ways that reflect their lived experiences are often met with resistance, and will be considered next in this article.

Mexican American Studies

One such example where a humanizing curriculum has been implemented was the Mexican American Studies (MAS)/Raza Studies program in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) where a curriculum that recognized the experiences of marginalized communities was created. The foundation of the curriculum was embedded in Indigenous philosophies, such as the maíz-based concepts of In Lak'ech, Panche Be, Hunab Ku, Men, K'ochil, Et P'iz, and Yaxche-Baalche (Rodríguez, 2014).

In addition, the curriculum was rooted in the teaching philosophy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who proposed the education of individuals through a critical pedagogical approach. Cammarota and Romero (2014) asserted:

> Thus, Freire thought that the primary emphasis of education should be to liberate people from oppression in order to attain a true sense of themselves as creative and intellectual beings who realize and engage the significance of their cultural agency in the world. (p. 5)

In addition, Freire believed that education must involve problem-based learning where students engage in their world as opposed to banking education which essentially treats students like objects—passive, empty vessels—waiting for a teacher to fill them with knowledge (Freire, 1970). Most likely this banked knowledge is disconnected from the lived experiences of students. As active participants in their own learning, by examining the world with a critical perspective, students are humanized instead of treated as passive objects. In this manner, liberation against oppression and self-transformation are achieved through reflection and dialogue.

Education using Freire's approach destabilizes society's status quo and empowers students—students of color in this case—to take an active role in fighting oppression. Any time students (i.e., students of color) realize their agency, potential, and resiliency, there is backlash. Those in power, most often White heterosexual men with a Eurocentric worldview, resist in one form or another any other perspective. Well-embedded in society is the narrative that if people of color act against this power structure, the action is both threatening and subversive.

One of the concerns of Tom Horne, Arizona's superintendent of public schools at that time, was that the MAS courses were actually teaching students to hate White people and how to overthrow the government, when instead students were learning their own histories which are often left out of the textbooks. MAS courses provided students with a non-Eurocentric narrative of history. As mentioned earlier the only "True" history of the United States is the one provided through a Eurocentric lens and anything else becomes a site of contention.

Duncan-Andrade (2014) spoke to this claim stating:

> But according to Horne and some members of the Arizona legislature, by engaging this same narrative [European focused history of America] through the lens of the Mexican in America, the MARS [Mexican American and Raza Studies] was breeding revolutionaries on the road to sedition. (pp. 162-163)

An additional concern of Horne's was that the program "was un-American and that Arizona children should be exposed to Greco-Roman culture, the foundation for Western civilization, not the culture being taught in MAS" (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 173). The MAS curriculum, according to Horne, was outside of Western civilization and threating. Rodríguez (2014) pointed out that this statement is accurate but that the MAS curriculum was in fact indigenous to the Americas. The rejection of a curriculum connecting students to their own sense of what it means to be human is a way to disregard people's identities. The value placed on Greco-Roman culture spreads an ideology that it is the only story of humanity and that non-Greco-Roman cultures are less than human, leading again to the systematic fragmentation of communities of color.

On May 11, 2010, resistance to MAS came in the form of the passage of Arizona's HB 2281 which banned the program. This occurred despite a significant increase in the graduation rates and state standardized test scores of Mexican American youth who participated in the program compared to those students who did not participate (Cabrera, 2014). This fact was

simply ignored by the legislature. The passage of a law banning a program such as MAS demonstrates the devaluation of Mexican American history, as well as the histories of other communities of color, and continues to systematically fragment these communities.

Multicultural Education as the Glue

The question becomes obvious––if systematic fragmentation is occurring in education, what is a possible solution? How can education glue the fragments back together? How can education acknowledge and affirm the histories, lived experiences, languages, and cultural assets of communities of color? Multicultural education is one solution that aims to return these fragments to a unified state of wholeness. It is time to shift the discourse toward the possibility of education as an act of healing.

With its roots in the 1960s civil rights era, multicultural education calls for a restructuring of schools and curricula to implement a goal of equitable learning. The assumption underlying multicultural education is that not all students have an equal opportunity to attain academic success (Banks, 1994). Several definitions of multicultural education exist (Au, 2014; Banks, 1999; Gay, 2010; Grant & Sleeter, 2011; Nieto, 2004; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) yet it is beyond the scope of this article to highlight each of these definitions.

Multicultural education, according to James Banks (2004), one of the foundational scholars in the field, is at least things:

> . . . multicultural education is at least three things: an idea or a concept, an educational reform movement, and a process. Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students—regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics—should have an opportunity to learn in school. (p. 3)

Banks (1999) described five key goals of multicultural education and its purpose in society. The major goals of multicultural education for students are as follows:

> 1. To better understand themselves through the lens of other cultures.
>
> 2. Offer students an alternative perspective to the mainstream Anglocentric curriculum. There are damaging consequences as a result of not including alternative perspectives in school curriculum for both White students and students of color. An important point that Banks (1999) emphasized is how "the Anglocentric curriculum negatively affects many students of color because they often find the school culture alien, hostile, and self-defeating" (p. 2). The curriculum in turn isolates students of color and erases or distorts their experiences which continues the process of systematic fragmentation in communities. For White students, they are not given opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for cultures different than their own.
>
> 3. Allow students an opportunity to learn the needed tools for interaction between ethnic culture, mainstream culture, and within other ethnic cultures.
>
> 4. Reduce the pain and discrimination that communities of color encounter in mainstream society.
>
> 5. Obtain the various skills for functioning in a diverse society.

Essential to Banks's view is the implementation of five specific dimensions and how they must all occur in school settings in order for multicultural education to take place. The first dimension is content integration. Content integration encourages teachers to include examples and content that represent diverse cultures within their subject area.

The second dimension is the knowledge construction process. Banks (2004) described this process as follows:

> The knowledge construction process relates to the extent to which teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it. (as cited in Banks, 1996, p. 20)

Students analyze knowledge construction and examine how a particular subject area, such as science for example, has disseminated scientific racism based on notions of intelligence among different races.

Prejudice reduction is the third dimension of multicultural education. According to Banks, prejudice reduction is the idea that teachers present content to students that enables them to form positive attitudes and understandings of diverse cultures and ethnic groups.

The fourth dimension, equity pedagogy, incorporates the idea that teachers must adapt their teaching styles in order for students from diverse backgrounds to be successful in the classroom. From personal experience, an example of equity pedagogy is to encourage group work and collaboration when working with Mexican American students, a process which reflects the many cultural values these students hold.

The fifth and final dimension is to foster an empowering school culture, in which a learning environment is created for students that promotes equity across the boundaries of gender, ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status.

However, in some schools and classrooms multicultural education has been reduced to an approach that simply celebrates diversity (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). On a surface level, the approach mostly centers on the celebration of holidays. For example, students may eat "Mexican" food on Cinco de Mayo, wear a sombrero, play maracas, and use other cultural props. Cinco de Mayo is usually falsely framed as Mexican Independence Day.[2] This holiday approach not only provides false information to students but also further perpetuates stereotypes about Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Another example is teaching and learning about the history of Indigenous peoples only in November when it is Native American heritage month. While it may be important to establish this kind of acknowledgment and appreciation, this approach limits to certain times of year when minority communities are given recognition on a national level. All histories and stories are essential threads in the fabric of the United States and should be valued every day of the year. In addition, the country's real history should not be glossed over or censored to highlight one singular romanticized view of the United States.

It should be noted that many misconceptions about multicultural education exist. Banks (1999) outlined three of these major misconceptions. First, that multicultural education is intended only for communities of color. Second, that multicultural education is antagonistic to the West. Third, that multicultural education seeks to divide the United States. These misunderstandings are similar to what opponents of the MAS program in TUSD claimed.

MAS was not a program strictly for Mexican American students; it was open to all students regardless of background. The program also received criticism that its curriculum was against the West. The curriculum instead provided students with an alternate lens in which to view the West along with histories and stories that often go unheard. Fundamental values such as freedom, justice, and equality were embedded within the curriculum. These are values typically held in high regard in the West.

Multicultural education is not limited to Banks's five dimensions. I believe that multicultural education encompasses a great deal more. Expanding the definition of multicultural education includes recognizing that there are elements of social justice and critical consciousness embedded within it. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) coined the term antiracist

education, which adds another important layer to multicultural education. Sensoy and DiAngelo declared that antiracist education "…centers the analysis on the social, cultural, and institutional power that so profoundly shape the meaning and outcome of racial difference" (p. 119). They further explained how antiracist education acknowledges that racism is deeply ingrained in all aspects of society.

By adding antiracist practices and approaches to multicultural education students can engage in a critical dialogue about power structures in the U.S. Examining racism and how it is entrenched in society provides an opportunity for students to further develop a critical lens that can be used in other aspects of their lives.

Multicultural education provides a space in which an alternate lens is presented to students, a space in which all histories, experiences, and stories are both valued and respected. Most importantly, students learn from the perspectives of peoples from diverse backgrounds. This knowledge can then be used to address the systematic fragmentation that has occurred in communities of color over time.

As a result, students' knowledge is informed by accurate representations of people and a history that does not erase facts or gloss over what some may see as insignificant. These steps can hopefully lead to change in schools as well as on a larger level and provide some closure to the wounds of systematic fragmentation.

Concluding Thoughts

In an attempt to counter negative stereotypes and respond to the racist language that is represented in the quote at the beginning of this article, everyone must be informed and have a strong foundation, knowledge, and understanding of communities that are "different" than their own. This knowledge and understanding has the potential to deconstruct negative stereotypes and reveal the diverse reality of people's lived experiences.

Multicultural education offers students an opportunity to do this—it prepares students who are knowledgeable and informed about the experiences of others. Multicultural education provides students with the necessary skills to connect and communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that these interactions are authentic and not framed within stereotypes.

I am not suggesting that multicultural education will solve all of the systematic fragmentation that communities of color have endured and continue to endure in the United States. However, I hope to begin a conversation about how multicultural education can serve as both a catalyst for societal change and collective healing. The power of acknowledging the experiences of people who were previously silenced can be transformational for everyone. Most importantly, these stories will provide a form of memory and a sense of hope for those with shared experiences.

In addition, students' can engage in critical conversations with others and gain a capacity to view the world through different perspectives. Students can in turn appreciate what multicultural education means in their lives and its significance today. Nieto (2004) affirmed that multicultural education must go beyond diversity and needs to be situated within the larger historical, personal, social, and political context. Examining this larger context demonstrates how personal experiences and identities have been shaped and continue to be shaped by the larger societal structure.

I conclude with a quote from the influential Chicana queer feminist scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa, whose work I greatly admire. She asserted "*caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar*" which loosely translates to "voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks." When applied to multicultural education, Anzaldúa helps us recognize that bridges are constructed through education as we gain knowledge and understanding of people from all walks of life. This must be a joint effort—the bridges will not form on their own. Through multicultural education we can begin to construct these bridges.

Notes

[1] I use the term Latinx here to refer to individuals who identify as Latina or Latino and trace their ancestry back to Latin America (Mexico, Central America, South America) and/or the Caribbean. I include an x in the term to be inclusive of people situated along the gender spectrum.

[2] Mexican Independence Day is on September 16; celebrations begin on September 15. Cinco de Mayo marks when the Mexican Army won over the French in Puebla on May 5, 1862. This was an unlikely victory for Mexico and is commemorated every year. Cinco de Mayo is celebrated in the U.S. more than in Mexico.

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