

Transforming My Curriculum, Transforming My Classroom: Paulo Freire, James Banks,
and Social Justice in a Middle School Classroom

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The future isn't something hidden in a corner. The future is something we build in the present.

Paulo Freire

A literacy education that focuses on social justice educates both the heads and hearts of students and helps them to become thoughtful, committed, and active citizens in their nation and the world.

James Banks

Introduction, Purpose, and Rationale

This research project is the beginning of a process to radically transform my curriculum and pedagogy. As Donaldo Macedo (2000) has mentioned in the introduction to the 30th anniversary of the book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, pedagogy has Greek roots, meaning to lead a child (p. 25). He continues, “Thus, as the term “pedagogy” illustrates, education is inherently directive and must always be transformative” (p. 25). I have decided to embark with my students on a process of transformation. I have decided to move my curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching toward a goal of emphasizing social justice in the classroom and including ethnic content in my curriculum. I have asked my students to join me in a process that includes activism and working toward creating a more just, humane, and peaceful world. I have also asked myself to transform my curriculum to reflect the diversity of this nation.

The project is centered around the writings of Paulo Freire and James Banks. Their writings are the underlying philosophy, purpose, and rationale for this project. One purpose of this project is to move away from what Freire (1970) calls “banking education” (p. 72). Under this type of system, education becomes “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 72). The aim

is to move toward an education that provides students opportunities to share their experiences, identify important social problems (and/or problems that are oppressive), and take action (instead of memorizing and regurgitating information). Another purpose or rationale of this project is to begin a process of curriculum transformation that would include integration of ethnic content in lessons and units. James Banks (2003) argues that most teachers in the classroom or in teacher education programs are likely to have students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups in their classrooms (p. 6). Thus he believes teachers will need to “acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 6). It is an aim of this project to begin a process to include and center my curriculum around ethnic content in order to reflect the growing diversity of the United States.

Finally, two broad goals have centered this project over the last school year. They include getting the majority of students involved in some form of social activism and using data to outline a plan for curriculum reform. They are followed by a series of secondary goals (see the description section). The difficulty of reaching these goals is not important, but rather starting a process of transformation is the most significant.

Literature Review

In order to reach these goals, I have relied on two main sources: Paulo Freire’s, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (POTO) and James Bank’s, Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies (TSES).

Paulo Freire has often been cited as one of the most influential thinkers on the topic of education during the late twentieth century. His POTO is currently one of the most quoted educational texts and his ideas continue to influence many educators throughout the world.

Freire was born in Recife, Brazil on September 19, 1921 and he died in Sao Paulo, Brazil on May 2, 1997 ([Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). He worked briefly as a lawyer until he became a Portuguese teacher in a few secondary schools from 1941-1947 ([Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). He also became active in adult education and workers' training, and became the first Director of the Department of Cultural Extension of the University of Recife from 1961-1964 ([Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). Freire gained international recognition for his work and experiences in literacy training in Northeastern Brazil ([Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). After the military coup of 1964, Freire was jailed by the new government and forced into exile for fifteen years ([Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). In 1969, he was a visiting scholar at Harvard University and then he moved to Geneva, Switzerland to become a special educational adviser to the World Congress of Churches ([Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). In 1979, he was invited to return to Brazil where he became a faculty member at the University of Sao Paulo ([Rage and Hope: Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). Finally, in 1988 he became the Minister of Education for Sao Paulo ([Rage and Hope: Paulo Freire](#), n.d.). This position enabled him to institute educational reform throughout most of Brazil ([Rage and Hope: Paulo Freire](#), n.d.).

Freire's work mainly concerned literacy and the desire to help men and women overcome their sense of powerlessness by acting in their own behalf. The oppressed, as he called them, could transform their situation in life by thinking critically about reality and then taking action. Freire believed that the educational system played a central role in maintaining oppression and thus it had to be reformed in order for things to change for the oppressed.

Freire used the concept "banking education" to explain the framework for curriculum delivery that he believed existed in schools. Freire (1970) defined this type of

education as “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72). He argued that the extent of action allowed to the students “extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p. 72). Freire also asserts that knowledge is a gift given by those who consider themselves knowledgeable to those whom they consider to know nothing (p. 72). In this type of educational system, students (whom Freire called patient, listening objects) are not asked to think critically about the world in which they live (p. 71). They are merely asked to regurgitate information to the teacher (whom Freire called the Subject), which may have little or nothing to do with their lives (p. 71).

Freire does not think that this is an accident. In fact, he believes that banking education allows the oppressors to maintain the system of oppression. He wrote, “the capability of banking education to minimize or annual the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed” (p. 73). In Freire’s view, students under this system do not have the opportunity to question or critically evaluate the world in which they live and thus have no opportunity to change their lives for the better.

What did Freire propose as an alternative to banking education? He proposed a “liberating education” or “questioning education.” Liberating education involves a process of “humanizing” people who have been oppressed. Humanization is politically subversive because it empowers oppressed people to question their lives and their position in society. Freire believes that the “great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed” is to “liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44). In order for

the oppressed to become “more fully human” they will need to fight dehumanization. Dehumanization involves the “injustice, exploitation, oppression, and violence of the oppressors” (p. 43-44). The system of education is crucial in whether or not the oppressed will be able to move toward humanity or continue to experience dehumanization.

Freire laid out many components of a liberating education in POTO. One central component would be the concept of dialogue and how it is tied to becoming “more fully human” or ending dehumanization. Freire wrote, “to exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it” (p. 88). To name the world one must identify problems that oppress by unjust use of force or power. Dialogue is an important process in which problems are named and solutions are proposed. Dialogue, in essence, is “the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 88). Dialogue is useful because it allows individuals the opportunity to share their experiences in a supportive and constructive atmosphere. In this situation, participants or students specifically identify what is oppressive and how one might take steps to end that oppression. This however must done carefully. Freire argued that dialogue must include the following traits: “profound love for the world and for people,” humility, hope, and mutual trust (p. 89-91). Freire does mention that dialogue alone will not help participants become “more fully human,” but can only be fruitful if it is coupled with critical thinking. And in turn critical thinking will lend itself to transformation. Freire writes:

True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking-thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them-thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity-thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risk involved (p. 92).

At the center of dialogue is the important and valuable process of critical thinking.

Critical thinking or what Freire called *conscientizacao* refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (p. 35). In other words, critical thinking involves a process of identifying what is oppressive and how someone is oppressed. It also involves taking action to fight that which is perceived to be oppressive. Freire believes that dialogue and critical thinking are intimately linked. He wrote, “only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking” (p. 92). In order for students to be able to confront oppression, they must first become critical thinkers.

Freire believes that critical thinking is not possible in a banking education framework, but only in a problem-posing educational framework. In the banking system of education students are primarily asked to memorize and regurgitate often meaningless and disjointed facts; whereas in a problem-posing framework, students are asked to use critical thinking skills to investigate various problems that exist in the world. Freire made the distinction between these two types of educational frameworks in POTO. “Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (p. 81). Students under this framework would pose problems and then critically investigate why those problems exist. (For example, students may ask: Why does poverty exist in the United States?) Freire believes that a problem-posing education will not only allow students to become critical thinkers, but reveal that the world is constantly undergoing change. “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which*

they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 83). Problem-posing education helps students become critical thinkers.

Once students have become critical thinkers they will be able to begin a process that could lead to their humanization. Freire referred to this process as *praxis*. He defined this process as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). This process would involve constant reflection and evaluation. (Students would focus or think about something that oppresses them and then presumably flush it out in a dialogue.) Eventually during reflection an action would be identified and then carried out. Freire believed that reflection and action were inseparable. He thought that reflection without action is merely “verbalism” and action without reflection is only “activism” (p. 87). In other words, you cannot act without thinking and reflection without action will not change reality. *Praxis* is at the heart of transforming the world and thus becoming “fully human.”

Also at the heart of an education that is aimed at achieving humanization is the idea that teachers are also students and students are also teachers. Freire believed that in order for a liberatory education to take place the teacher-student contradiction would have to be reconciled. He argued, “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (p. 72). Freire does not think the solution to this contradiction can be found in banking education. He believed that banking education maintained this contradiction through a number of attitudes and practices, which he thought mirrored oppressive society as a whole (p. 73). A few that he mentioned were:

- (a) the teacher teaches and students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing (p. 73).

The process of dialogue is essential for Freire in ending this contradiction. He argued:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow (p. 80).

In an educational setting that has a teacher-student with students-teachers, it is possible to begin a process in which the world can be named and solutions can be devised.

Freire believes that in order for an educational experience to be relevant and important, the teacher-student and the students-teachers need to work together to identify the themes to create the program content or educational units of study. Freire argued that the starting point for organizing the program content of education “must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (p. 95). It is important, Freire mentions, that the people feel like “masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades” (p. 124). In this view of education, program content must be searched for dialogically with the people (p. 124).

Finally, Freire emphasizes the importance of an educator to stand at the side of the oppressed in solidarity. “Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture” (p. 49). He argues that “true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these “beings for another”” (p. 49). In other words, Freire argues that an educator cannot tell the oppressed how to fight oppression, but must enter the situation as partners in the struggle. He or she must “proclaim [their] devotion to the cause of

liberation” and must be able to “enter into *communion* with the people” (p. 60-61). Educators must stand at the side of the oppressed, undergo a conversion of sorts, and constantly re-examine themselves to stay focused and committed (p. 60). This may perhaps be one of the most important pieces of an education based around Freiren thought: without devotion, solidarity, reflection, and action the oppressed cannot begin to fight dehumanization.

Another educator that is interested in education and social change is James Banks. He is widely regarded as one of the most important thinkers and advocates of multicultural education. He is currently Russell F. Stark University Professor and Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle ([James A. Banks](#), n.d.). He is a past President of the American Educational Research Association and a past President of the National Council for the Social Studies ([James A. Banks](#), n.d.). He has written many articles and books in the fields of social studies education and multicultural education. One of the most influential books that he has written is titled, [Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies](#). In this book, Banks lays out a rationale, a few trends, and goals for a multicultural curriculum. He also includes information on how to develop and plan a multicultural curriculum. Finally, he examines a number of different ethnic groups in America (American Indians, Native Hawaiians, European Ethnic Groups, Cuban Americans, Arab Americans, Asian Americans) by giving a short history of each group and then provides educators with concepts, teaching strategies, and a list of materials that they can use to transform their curriculum.

In the beginning of the book, Banks talks about a few rationale for why schools and nation-states need a multicultural curriculum. He claims that current demographics

point toward America becoming more and more ethnically diverse. “The U.S. Census projects that ethnic minorities—including African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and persons of Hispanic origin—will make up 47% of the U.S. population by 2050” (p. 6). He argues that because of these changing demographics there are major implications for all of the nation’s institutions, including schools, colleges, and the workforce (p. 6). “These institutions must be restructured and transformed in order to meet the needs of the diverse groups who will work in and be served by them” (p. 6). Finally, he asserts that the nation’s student population is also changing greatly. He cites census data that shows that the percentage of white students in the nation’s schools is decreasing while the population of students of color is increasing (p. 6).

Banks argues that most teachers now in the classroom or in teacher education programs are likely to have students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups in their classrooms (p. 6). Because of this reason and the census data he cited, he believes that teachers will need to “acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 6). In other words, teachers will need to know how to structure and operate in a multicultural classroom.

Another rationale for having a robust multicultural curriculum in the schools is that it will benefit the nation-state. Banks argues that the cultural, ethnic, racial, and language diversity that the U.S. and other Western nations are experiencing is both an opportunity and challenge to their schools, colleges, and universities (p. 8). He states that challenges arise in the form of ethnocentrism and bigotry when groups with different religions, cultures, and languages interact within a society (p. 8). It also is an opportunity

because ethnic, cultural, language, and religious diversity can “enrich a society by providing novel ways to view events and situations, to solve problems, and to view our relationship with the environment and with other creatures” (p. 8). Finally, Banks argues that a multicultural curriculum that reflects the cultures, values, and goals of the groups within a nation will “contribute significantly to the development of a healthy nationalism and national identity” (p. 8). Banks believes that a multicultural curriculum would be the glue or cement that helps keep a country together.

After discussing the rationale for a multicultural curriculum, Banks talks about three prevalent assumptions that currently exist in multicultural education and he gives an expanded definition of ethnicity. He argues that many educators assume that ethnic studies only involves certain groups of color, such as African Americans, American Indians, and Asian Americans (p. 13). Banks asserts that this is a narrow conceptualization of ethnic studies and is thus mainly due to the “social forces that gave rise to the ethnic studies movement in the 1960s” (p. 13-14).

The second assumption that is discussed involves educators and their view that only students who are members of a specific ethnic group should study that group (p. 14). Banks argues that many lessons and units focus merely on the ethnic group that is either present or dominant in the student population (p. 14). He believes that all students need to study a variety of ethnic groups. “[Students] regardless of their race, ethnicity, or social class, should study about the cogent and complex roles of ethnicity and cross-ethnic relationships and interactions in U.S. society and culture” (p. 14).

Finally, Banks argues that many educators assume that ethnic studies are primarily additive in nature. He asserts that educators think that “we can create a sound

multicultural curriculum by leaving the present curriculum intact and adding ethnic heroes and heroines such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Sojourner Truth, Pocahontas, and Malinche” (p. 14). Banks believes that only through a transformation of the curriculum will the goal of creating a truly multicultural curriculum be achieved.

In addition to these assumptions, there are a few problems that Banks mentions in teaching about ethnic groups. Banks argues that problems exist, in part, on how ethnicity and ethnic groups have been defined by teachers (p. 15). He points out that educators limit their definition of an ethnic group to an ethnic group of color or an ethnic minority group (p. 15). According to Banks, an expanded definition of ethnicity is greatly needed in order to conceptualize and implement a multicultural curriculum.

Banks offers an expanded definition of ethnic group that would include “individuals who share a sense of group identification, a common set of values, political and economic interests, behavioral patterns, and other culture elements that differ from those of other groups within a society” (p. 15). He would also add that members of an ethnic group share a “sense of peoplehood, culture, identity, and shared languages and dialects” (p. 15).

Although Banks does not think that schools or districts should try to cover all the ethnic groups in the U.S., it is important that “each curriculum focus on a range of groups that differ in their histories, values, and current problems” (p. 16). Banks argues that by studying a range of groups, students will be able to make valid generalizations and theories about race, ethnicity, and culture in U.S. society (p. 16). In order to transform the curriculum, a wide range of ethnic groups need to be examined and studied.

Before Banks begins his discussion of curriculum transformation, he outlines the four approaches that are commonly used by educators to integrate ethnic content into their curriculum. The four approaches are: The Contributions Approach (level 1), the Additive Approach (level 2), The Transformation Approach (level 3), and the Social Action Approach (level 4). Banks believes that many school districts and educators begin with the Contributions and Additive approaches (p. 17-18). He also mentions that many schools and educators do not move beyond these two approaches (p. 18). Banks asserts that moving through these approaches is a process of curriculum reform (p. 18). “Multicultural education as a process of curriculum reform, can and often does proceed from the Contributions and Additive approaches to the Transformation and Social Action approaches” (p. 18).

The Contributions Approach (level 1) is one of the most frequently used and it mainly focuses on “heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements” (p. 18-19). This approach is mainly characterized by the addition of ethnic heroes into the curriculum (p. 19). The heroes and heroines that end up in the curriculum are carefully chosen to fit mainstream perspectives. Banks argues, “The heroes and heroines added to the curriculum are viewed from a mainstream-centric perspective and are also usually selected for inclusion into the curriculum using mainstream criteria” (p. 19). One consequence of this is that ethnic heroes and heroines that are viewed positively by the mainstream society, such as Booker T. Washington and Sacajawea, are most often chosen for study rather than ethnic Americans who challenged the dominant class and social structure in society, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Angela Davis (p. 19). Thus the mainstream curriculum remains unchanged and students do not attain a comprehensive

view of the role of ethnic groups in U.S. society (p. 19). Ethnic issues and events come to be seen as additions to the curriculum. In other words, they become an “appendage to the main story of the nation’s development” (p. 19). Because of the consequences, the “mainstream curriculum remains unchanged in terms of its basic structure, goals, and salient characteristics” (p. 19).

In the Additive Approach (level 2), “content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its basic structure, purpose, and characteristics” (p. 19). The content, concepts, and issues are mainly viewed from mainstream perspectives (p. 19). Banks mentions that this approach is often accomplished by adding a book, a unit, or a course to the curriculum without changing it substantially (p. 19). Banks argues that this approach “allows the teacher to put ethnic content into the curriculum without restructuring it, which takes substantial time, effort, training, and rethinking of the curriculum and its purposes, nature, and goals” (p. 19). Banks believes that this phase could be the beginning of a more radical curriculum reform effort, but he also thinks that it shares several problems with the Contributions Approach (p. 19). Banks thinks that its biggest shortcoming results in the viewing of ethnic content from the perspectives of mainstream writers, historians, artists, and scientists, which does not involve a restructuring of the curriculum (p. 19).

The Transformation Approach (level 3) is fundamentally different from the Contributions and Additive Approaches. The key curriculum issue involves not just adding ethnic heroes or heroines, but the use of different perspectives, frames of reference, and content from different ethnic groups (p. 19). Banks believes that this approach will help to extend “students’ understandings of the nature, development, and

complexity of the United States and the world” (p. 19). This approach involves looking at insider and outsider perspectives. For example, a lesson that illustrates this approach would involve an examination of Columbus’s arrival in the Caribbean from the perspectives of both the natives and Columbus (p. 19). This approach emphasizes the need at looking at all perspectives in order to create a sound multicultural curriculum.

The final approach, the Social Action Approach (level 4), includes all of the elements of the Transformation Approach and components that require students to make decisions and take actions. These decisions and actions are directly related to the concept, issue, or problem they have studied (p. 20). For example, one exercise that illustrates this approach can be used after a unit on the Civil Rights Movement (p. 20). This exercise could involve having students make a list of actions they could take to help reduce discrimination in their personal lives, school, and community (p. 21-22).

These four approaches to the integration of ethnic content into the curriculum can be mixed and blended in actual teaching situations (p. 21). The levels move from the lower to higher levels of ethnic content and integration into the curriculum will probably be gradual and cumulative (p. 21). Banks believes that there is an important goal in teaching about racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity: “[It] should be to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to participate in civic action that will help transform our world and enhance the possibility for human survival” (p. 22).

In addition to the goal of requiring students to develop their decision-making and social action skills so they can take personal, social, and civic action, Banks also lists a number of other goals of the multicultural curriculum. Banks believes one goal of the multicultural curriculum should involve helping students to “develop the ability to make

reflective decisions on issues related to race, ethnicity and culture” and to “take *personal, social, and civic* actions to help solve the racial and ethnic problems in our national and world societies” (p. 24). He also argues that another important goal should include an effort to help students view history and current events from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives (p. 25). Furthermore, this type of curriculum should help to reduce “ethnic and cultural encapsulation” and “help students develop a better understanding and awareness of their own cultures” (p. 26). Finally, Banks asserts that a multicultural curriculum should also help students master essential reading, writing, and math skills (p. 26). He believes that students will be more likely to master skills when teachers use content that deals with relevant and significant human problems, such as race, religion, and power (p. 26-27).

In the middle of the book Banks explains how to develop a multicultural curriculum. The first thing that should be done when planning a multicultural lessons and units is to identify a list of key concepts (p. 91). Concepts, according to Banks, are “words or phrases that enable us to categorize or classify a large class of observations and thus to reduce the complexity of our environment” (p. 38). For example, racism, power, immigration, migration, acculturation, and perception are all examples of concepts that could be used to organize a multicultural curriculum. After a series of concepts have been identified, at least one generalization that is related to each concept should be identified (p. 91). Banks defines a generalization as containing “two or more concepts and states the relationship between them” (p. 43). Each organizing generalization should be a higher-order thinking statement that explains a few aspects of human behavior that can be found in all cultures, times, and places (p. 91). After an organizing generalization has been

chosen for each key concept, an intermediate generalization should be chose for each organizing generalization (p. 92). This type of generalization would apply primarily to a “nation, to regions within a nation, or to groups comprising a particular culture” (p. 92). Finally, once key concepts and organizing generalizations have been selected, low-level generalizations should be chosen for each ethnic group that is to be studied (p. 96).

Banks gives many examples of how to put his framework for a multicultural curriculum into practice. For example, he identifies a concept, an organizing generalization, a low level generalization, and a few activities and resources that could be used to teach a unit on Japanese Americans and internment camps during World War II. The key concept that was chosen is immigration-migration (p. 101). The organizing generalization, intermediate generalization, and lower level generalization are listed below:

Organizing Generalization: In all cultures, individuals and groups have moved to different regions in order to seek better economic, political, and social opportunities. However, movement of individuals and groups has been both voluntary and forced (p. 101).

Intermediate-Level Generalization: Most individuals and groups who have immigrated to the United States and who have migrated within it were seeking better economic, political, and social opportunities. However, movement of individuals and groups within the United States has been both voluntary and forced (p. 101).

Lower-Level Generalization: During World War II, Japanese Americans were forced to move from their homes to internment camps (p. 101).

In addition to the concepts and generalizations, Banks also includes a list of activities and resources that could be used by educators. For example, students could read aloud selections from Takashima, A Child in Prison Camp or they could view and discuss photographs of interned Japanese Americans (p. 101). Students could also hypothesize

about why Japanese Americans were interned or compare textbook accounts of the event with accounts in Executive Order 9066 and Within the Barbed Wire Fence: A Japanese Man's Account of His Internment (p. 101).

Banks uses the last half of the book to cover a large number of ethnic groups in the U.S. by giving a brief history of each group (that includes a timeline). He also includes a list of concepts, generalizations, activities, and resources for each ethnic group that can be used by primary and secondary educators. Finally, he includes a lengthy appendix that lists a number of multicultural education related websites, books (for students and teachers), articles, and videos.

Description

This project was undertaken at New Spirit Middle School in Saint Paul, Minnesota during the 2004-2005 school year. The primary school (K-5) and the middle school (6-8) make up New Spirit Charter School. According to an article by Sebastian Lecourt (2000) on the Mac Weekly Online website, the primary school was started in the fall of 1998 (the middle school opened a year later) by Macalester Classics Professor Jerry Reedy and his associate, Mike Ricci. The school employs a Core Knowledge curriculum that requires teachers to follow general content guidelines established by E.D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge Foundation. Teachers are not required to use a set list of textbooks, but are free to chose whatever resources they deem necessary to meet the content guidelines. In addition to a strict discipline policy and uniforms, New Spirit currently enjoys a low student to teacher ratio (averaging around eighteen students per class).

During its short existence as a charter school, enrollment at New Spirit has steadily increased. For example, in 1998, New Spirit enrolled 150 students and this has risen to 305 students during the 2004-2005 school year (New Spirit document). The Executive Director of New Spirit, Walt Stull, has stated that the target enrollment for the school is 350 students.

Although student demographics show that New Spirit is fairly split in terms of gender (46.6% female and 53.4% male), it is racially and ethnically heterogeneous (New Spirit document). The following list of demographics from the 2004-2005 school year illustrates this diversity: 22.4% African American, 53.8% Asian American, 11.5% Caucasian, 11.9% Hispanic, and 0.3% Native American (New Spirit document). The Hmong represent by far the largest ethnic group at New Spirit (roughly 50% of the student body). The vast majority of Hmong students are children of parents who came to the U.S. as refugees from Laos and Thailand during the 1970s and 1980s. Many of these parents came to the U.S. to escape war and to find relatives.

In addition to the demographics that show New Spirits' diversity, they also show that the school has a large special needs population and its students come from families that are economically disadvantaged. For example, during the 2004-2005 school year, New Spirit continued to have a high English Language Learner (ELL) (56.1%) and special education population (12.5%) (New Spirit document). These demographics also seem to indicate that a large majority of students live in poverty. In fact, 83% of the student body qualified for free and reduced lunch during the 2004-2005 school year (New Spirit document). Because of these challenges, New Spirit employs a fairly large number

of ELL teachers, social workers, teacher aides, and school psychologists. It also provides in-service trainings for teachers and staff on topics related to ELL and urban education.

For this project I worked with my 7th and 8th grade social studies students. During the 2004-2005 school year, I taught two sections of 7th grade, two sections of 8th grade, and one homeroom section. In my 7th grade class, I was required to cover the period of U.S. history from the late 1800s until after WWI, a few economics units, and a few world history/geography units. In my 8th grade classes, I had to cover the period of U.S. history from the Great Depression until the end of the Cold War, a few economics units, and a few world history/geography units. The project involved all of my 7th and 8th grade students.

There were many goals that I wanted to reach before finishing this project. These goals included a few primary goals and a number of secondary goals. The primary goals for this project are listed below:

1. To get the majority of students (and myself) involved in some kind of social activism that would benefit the school, community, city, state, country, and/or world.
2. To critically examine my curriculum (from my first two years of teaching) and outline a plan for curriculum reform using the “Levels of Integration of Ethnic Content” as laid out in James Banks’ book, Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies.

The secondary goals not only are a little more detailed, but tend to overlap and reinforce the primary goals. The secondary goals are:

1. To get students to critically think about social activism by journaling, filling out surveys, and participating in class discussions or dialogues.
2. To identify a series of themes that are evident in my students’ journals and surveys that can be used to change or refine my teaching in regards to social change.

3. To begin a process of personal psychoanalysis by starting a “Freiren journal” and by identifying a theoretical problematic.
4. Attempt to combine my lessons and units with information regarding Freiren thought and social change.
5. Start a social justice group with students, identify one social problem to tackle, and carry out one social action project.
6. Evaluate and examine my lessons and units (from my first two years of teaching) to see how well I am integrating ethnic content into my curriculum.

These primary and secondary goals were used to center and focus my teaching during the 2004-2005 school year.

The project began after winter break 2005 and it involved six activities and/or mini-projects. All of these projects involved gathering and analyzing data in order to evaluate my progress toward the primary and secondary goals. I began this project by assigning surveys and journals. I also kept a “Freiren journal” that was used to record my thoughts and help to identify a theoretical problematic (which will be explained later). In addition, I attempted to mesh the Freiren ideas that were discussed in class to my non-Freiren/required curriculum. Finally, I set out to start a social justice group (in and outside of school) and analyze my curriculum to see how well I was integrating ethnic content into my lessons and units. In the next few pages I will describe each of these mini-projects in more detail.

The first mini-project involved a survey that was given to students in January and at the end of the year in June. It included thirteen short essay, circle, and check questions (see the appendix for a copy). This survey was designed and given to students for three reasons. It was a way to check for prior knowledge (prior knowledge of Freiren ideas surrounding words like oppression) and it was used to gauge how the thinking of students

may have changed over time. Finally, it was used as a kind of checklist of things that I wanted to cover in class that related to Freire. For example, I wanted to discuss oppression and oppressors in society and thus one of the questions asks, “How often this year has there been a discussion or dialogue concerning the word “oppression” in social studies?” (Student Survey). After the surveys were gathered, I analyzed the responses looking for themes in the data and then made a few observations regarding the data and how I could modify my teaching for next year.

In addition to the surveys, I also had students journal throughout the last half of the year. I collected four of those journals (beginning in January and ending in June) to analyze (see appendix for copies). The journals covered four main topics. They are: animals and humans, social problems, praxis and history, and students and teachers. I had students do some free writing in these journals in order to introduce content related to Freire and/or to reinforce ideas talked about in class. I examined these journals by looking for themes and then I listed a few ways in which I could modify or change my teaching for the upcoming school year.

As students were journaling, I also decided that I should start a journal to collect my thoughts. I labeled this part of the project my “Freiren journal” (see appendix for copies). I started my eleven total entries in January and ended in June. The journal served as a way to collect “Freiren moments” (things that happened in class that could be tied to Freire). It also served as a way to identify a theoretical problematic (a problem or challenge of teaching a curriculum that includes Freiren thought) and continue a personal discussion on these problems or challenges. I used this journal as a way to clarify my thinking in regards to Freire and to provide a record for how my thinking evolved over

time. I analyzed these entries looking for themes and to see where I currently stand in regards to Freire and education.

In addition to the surveys and journals, I also examined my lessons and units for evidence of my attempt to include Freire in the overall curriculum. I did not want to teach two separate curricula. For example, I tried to include Freire in discussions relating to immigration and racism. I did this because I want to get to the point where Freire and some his ideas are seamlessly woven into the topics I am required to teach. In order to get data to analyze, I counted and made note of the times during lessons and/or units that included Freire. I also made a few suggestions in which I could improve my curriculum for next year.

Another part of this project involved starting a social justice group with students. My aim was to start a group at the middle school that was volunteer based and was basically led by the students. (One or two teachers would attend weekly meetings as faculty advisors.) The students would essentially be involved in thinking of ways in which to fight various forms of oppression. They would do this by identifying a social problem they wanted to tackle, brainstorm a number of possible actions, and then carry out a social action plan related to the problem. Finally, the group would debrief the plan and talk about possible changes or improvements for next year.

I decided to start this kind of group with students for a few reasons. I wanted to provide students with an opportunity to put into action some of the ideas or things we discussed in class (such as *praxis*, social justice, and social change). I also wanted students to be able to experience and think about social activism as a viable way in which to create social change.

In terms of the data to analyze for this part of the project, I will describe the group, a few of its projects, and documents that relate to the group (such as journals). I will use this data or information to create a list of possible changes or improvements that could be made for the next school year.

In addition to this group, I also decided to help start a social justice group outside of school. I helped to start a peace group in Saint Paul and we are currently working on a statewide project. (I will describe this group and its implications for me as a citizen and teacher in the results section of the paper.)

Finally, the last mini-project involves an analysis of my curriculum that spans my first two years of teaching. I will be mainly looking at how well I integrate ethnic content into my curriculum. I will use Banks' approaches to integrating ethnic content (see pages 14-16 for a description) as a rubric to examine my lessons and units. I will use this data to create a data table and then I will offer a few observations in regards to possible themes that emerge from the data. I will use these themes to create a plan for curriculum reform that would go into action during the 2005-2006 school year.

There are many reasons for why I included this mini-project as a part of the larger project. I believe that the world is becoming more diverse and thus my curriculum should reflect that diversity. I also think that there are many benefits to exposing students to a diversity of perspectives and experiences. In addition, the ultimate goal of education should be to improve the world. This can be done by taking social action that is supported with careful reflection. Banks' Social Action Approach to integrating ethnic content and Freire's *praxis* both reflect ideas that I want to include in a curriculum based around social justice.

Themes, Implications, Results, and Plans for the Future

Themes and Implications

The first of six mini-projects involved a survey that was given to students in January and then again in June 2005 (see appendix). I used this survey to check for prior knowledge, to gauge how the students' thinking may have changed over time, and as a checklist of things that I wanted to cover over the year. In looking at the students' responses, I have attempted to boil down the data into themes and then offer a few observations regarding the themes.

The first set of data I will analyze will concern the responses for questions 1-4 and question 11. I will identify general themes for each survey and then compare and contrast responses from both surveys. I will also offer a few implications regarding the data.

The responses for question #1 are fairly similar for both surveys. Students in both surveys listed a number of characteristics that they think embody a teacher: nice, smart, kind, helpful, serious, honest, funny, cool, patient, strict, and knowledgeable (Student Survey). They also seemed to indicate that the primary responsibility of a teacher was to teach the students. "Teachers teach kids so they can learn" and "Teachers are supposed to teach students" were common responses (Student Survey).

Although the January and June surveys did share similar themes, there was one key difference in the responses for the June survey. A few students commented that teachers also learn from their students. One student wrote: "Sometimes they [teachers] learn from the students" (Student Survey).

There are many implications that can be drawn by reviewing this data and examining the themes. Students seemed to imply that the teachers were the main and perhaps only source of education in the classroom. The responses in the June survey regarding students teaching the teachers could indicate that students are becoming conscious of the fact that they are also teachers (a discussion of data themes, students-teachers, teacher-student can be found in the next section on student journals) and/or are remembering class discussions and journals regarding students-teachers.

The data for question #2 (regarding characteristics or qualities that describe students) also seem to indicate similarities and differences for both surveys. Common themes between the surveys would include a list of personal qualities (shy, nice, good, mean, wired) and the idea that students learn things from their teachers. A few examples from both surveys would include: “Students look like kids who are trying to learn from the teacher,” “They [students] get information form teachers and become smarter so they can graduate from high school,” “In my mind I think a student learns from their teachers and do what the teachers tell them,” and “Students are people that learn from teachers” (Student Survey).

Only one student in the June survey indicated that students are also teachers. “Students teach the teachers and other people what they know” (Student Survey). Although this cannot be counted as a theme, this is an important distinction in light of the majority of responses that indicate that teachers are the sole educators in the classroom.

One implication (that has already been stressed) regarding the data for question #2 is that students still seem to see the role of the student as one of taking in knowledge from

the teacher. This has been discussed in the preceding section and thus does not merit further discussion.

Question #3 asked students to identify the various ways in which teachers teach. The data for question #3 from both surveys indicates no distinct themes, but rather a laundry list of different activities and teaching methods. A few examples would include: homework, group work, lectures, note taking, review games, group discussions, reading, worksheets, concept webs, graphic organizers, group projects, jigsaw activities, and writing songs/raps (Student Survey).

The responses could imply that teachers employ a variety of teaching methods and use a number of different activities in their classrooms. (Conversely, it might imply that one teaching strategy does not predominate, like lecturing for example.) The responses that mentioned group discussions were common, but were not a large majority in either survey.

The responses for question #4 were also similarly lop-sided. Question #4 asked students to identify what they thought was the central goal or purpose of education. A large majority answered this question by stating that the main goal or purpose of education was to get a good job or career (Student Survey). The responses from both surveys followed this central theme with a few variations in wording. One student wrote, “Education is necessary because you need to know something to get a good job to survive in this world-you don’t wanna be walkin’ around askin’ for change to eat” (Student Survey). Another student argued that “Education helps you get a better job, to get money to help your family” (Student Survey). Finally, another student simply stated that the purpose of education was to “get a job and a better life” (Student Survey).

There are many implications that can be drawn from this data. One implication could be that I failed in my attempt to persuade students to see that education is not just about moving up the economic ladder, but thinking of education as a means of making the world a better place to live (by fighting social problems). The data could also imply cultural ideas surrounding the motivations for why one should become educated (i.e. to make more money). Although one student did mention in the June survey that the purpose of education was to learn how to take action (presumably action to change the world), the majority of the responses imply that education is a means toward monetary gain, is an idea that is deeply ingrained (Student Survey).

Question #11 asks students to list and explain some actions that they may have taken to change the world. The responses for the January survey varied between “never” and “cleaning the neighborhood, picking up trash” (Student Survey). The June survey included much longer and well detailed responses. A large number of students answered the question by listing and explaining one, two, or all three of the following school sponsored activities: giving money to the Tsunami relief drive, volunteering with a student group at a local homeless shelter, and bringing cans for a canned food drive (Student Survey). A few students in the June survey mentioned that they donated old clothes or volunteered at their church to serve food (Student Survey).

Many interesting implications can be drawn from this data. One is that almost no one recognized, acknowledged, or took some action to change the world as was evident in the first survey. Another is that the second survey seems to indicate that a large number of students took some kind of action to change the world and a few did so outside of school. This could indicate that students were receptive to class discussions

surrounding social change or social action. (Although it may indicate that the school sponsored activities were easy to take part in.) Finally, it is interesting to note the disconnect between the theme of education as a step toward monetary gain and the fairly large increase in student action throughout the school year.

Questions 5-7 focus on the frequency in which there have been discussions in social studies. These questions also focus on the number of times there have been discussions that concerned the word “oppression” and identified the “oppressors” in society. Table 1.1 lists that data as a percent of all 7-8th graders who completed the January survey (S1) and the June survey (S2).

		Never	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-9 times	10 or more times
<u>Question #5</u>						
S1	5.66	20.75	28.30	18.86	26.41	
S2	0	8.77	22.80	24.56	43.83	
<u>Question #6</u>						
S1	51.92	30.76	15.38	1.92	0	
S2	1.81	27.27	40	27.27	3.63	
<u>Question #7</u>						
S1	61.53	19.23	11.53	5.76	1.92	
S2	9.25	25.92	50	7.40	7.40	

After examining the data in table 1.1 there is one central theme that begins to emerge. The central theme in the data indicates that there was a large increase in frequency (between the two surveys) in which students recognized that they had

discussions, that there have been discussions concerning the word “oppression” and also that there have been discussions that identified the “oppressors” in society.

This is not entirely surprising. As a social studies teacher interested in class discussion as a teaching method, I always try to include as many opportunities as possible for students to be involved in class discussions (on various topics). Furthermore, I did not start having class discussions on oppression and oppressors until after I collected the first survey. The increase in numbers is probably due to the fact that I included a large number of discussions on these topics throughout the year. (This was a part of my teaching checklist for the year.)

Questions 8-10 focus on many ideas that are central to *praxis*. *Praxis* can be basically defined as thinking or reflecting critically, identifying problems, and then taking action. After the first survey, I emphasized in class the definition of *praxis* and how it applies to social studies. I also gave students the opportunity to think critically about a number of topics and/or problems by journaling or being involved in discussions. Finally, I worked with students to identify problems in the world and possible solutions and I gave them opportunities to take some kind of action. Table 1.2 lists the data as a percent of all 7-8th graders who completed the January (S1) and the June survey (S2).

<u>Table 1.2</u>	Never	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-9 times	10 or more times
<u>Question #8</u>					
S1	13.2	18.86	26.41	22.64	18.86
S2	1.75	21.05	28.07	14.03	35.08
<u>Question #9</u>					
S1	9.61	28.84	26.92	17.30	17.30
S2	7.01	8.77	26.31	22.80	35.08
<u>Question #10</u>					
S1	33.96	30.18	16.98	11.32	5.66
S2	14.03	36.84	26.31	14.03	8.77

The main theme in the data indicates that there was a fairly large increase (between the two surveys) in which students recognized that they did some reflective thinking, identified problems in the world and possible solutions, and took some kind of action to change the world.

This seems to imply that my efforts to get students to think reflectively were successful on some level. Perhaps they remembered the various journal entries or class discussions from social studies. The data also implies that they were a little more aware of problems that exist in the world or how to identify problems. Finally, another implication could be that the students took the various opportunities at and outside of school to take some social action.

The last two questions of the student survey, questions 12 and 13, mainly involve how students and teachers interact and how curriculum is chosen for social studies. Question 12 asks students what best describes their interaction with teachers by providing them with three possible answers. Table 1.3 lists the data for question 12 as a percent.

Table 1.3

<u>Question #12</u>	S1	S2
I. The teacher teaches and the student learns.	24.48	8.92
II. The teacher includes some interaction with students in which they are participants in their learning, but mainly the teacher teaches and the student learns.	36.73	32.14
III. The teacher and the students learn together, reflect and think together, and take action to change the world.	38.77	58.92

The data for this table indicates a few interesting, if not problematic, themes. One theme is that there was a large percentage increase (roughly 20%) in the number of students who chose the third answer between the two surveys. On the more problematic side, a plurality in the first survey and a majority in the second survey chose the third answer. This is problematic because class discussions regarding critical reflection and social action did not take place until after the first survey. (Thus the numbers for the first survey should be flip-flopped: 38.77% should have chosen answer 1 and 24.48% should have picked answer 3.)

The data could imply that I did not explain the question and answers in enough detail and thus received suspect results. Or it could show that a larger number of students recognized what we have been doing in class and decided to choose an answer that matched that experience.

Finally, question 13 asks students how they think the materials for social studies are selected. The student is offered three answers to the question. Table 1.4 lists the data for question 13 as a percent.

Table 1.4

Question #13	S1	S2
I. The teacher chooses and lets the students know what they will be learning.	50.98	39.28
II. The teacher sometimes asks what students are interested in and want to learn about, but mainly chooses what the students will be learning.	35.29	39.28
III. The teacher and students work together to identify the central themes or ideas that will become the curriculum or units of study.	13.72	21.42

Two data themes seem to appear from table 1.4. The first would be that the majority of students chose the first answer for survey 1 and the second is that students chose either the first or second answer for the second survey.

These results seem accurate. I did not ask students for feedback on possible themes or ideas that would be used to create lessons or units. It was a struggle I never resolved this year. It was difficult to ask for and use feedback and try to cover all the required material that is a part of the Core Knowledge curriculum.

In addition to the surveys, the students also did some journaling throughout the last half of the year. I collected four journals to analyze for this project. The journals were a starting point for discussions on the following topics: animals and humans, social problems, *praxis* and history, and students and teachers. Instead of looking at the data for each of the questions, I decided to examine the questions that I thought were the most important and relevant to the project.

Journal #1 included the following question: “What is the main difference between animals and humans?” (Journal #1). I decided to use this question to start a discussion on humans and how they are able to recognize what oppresses them and then take action. (I also used this question as a beginning point because it is similar to many topics covered in Pedagogy of the Oppressed.) In addition to journal #1, the students also used a Venn diagram to help them answer the journal question (Venn Diagram on Animals and Humans).

The majority of students listed many different ways in which animals and humans were different. Many said animals cannot talk or go to school and humans can go to school and drive a car (Venn Diagram on Animals and Humans). In addition, the vast majority argued that the main difference between animals and humans was that one lived in nature (animals) and the other lived in homes (humans) (Journal #1). Variations of this answer involved what animals do in nature and what humans do in cities or homes (Journal #1).

The main theme for this data would be that students seem to argue that animals and humans have different housing or habitats and thus have different experiences and/or have different abilities.

One implication of this data is that the students did not either understand the question or I did not give enough explanation about my expectations. (I did ask students to think about one big, broad difference between animals and humans.) After the students finished the Venn diagram and journal, we had a discussion about their answers and how humans are able to recognize that they are oppressed and thus take action (i.e. *praxis*).

The questions for journal #2 involved social problems and they asked students to reflect on some of their experiences to answer the questions. Journal #2 included seven questions and they basically asked students to do the following: list some social problems that exist in the world, choose one problem that is relevant to their lives, explain why they thought this problem was important, explain how it relates to their lives, explain how life might be different without that problem, list ten things that could be done to solve the problem, and list three that they could start doing to try to solve the problem (Journal #2).

The vast majority of students were able to identify a list of problems (like racism, crime, and drugs), choose one problem, and explain how it was relevant to their lives (Journal #2). Despite this many students struggled in identifying a list of ten things that could be done and a list of three things they could do to immediately start trying to solve the problem (Journal #2). Although students on the whole could not list ten or three things, the ones that were listed were for the most part clear and well stated (Journal #2). For example, one student wrote concerning gangs that gang members should “talk to someone that went down the gang path and try to make them change their minds” (Journal #2).

The data implies that many students were able to grasp what a social problem is and were able to list examples. The themes also show that many students were able to tie a particular social problem to their life or experiences. However, the data also implies that students had difficulty in providing concrete or tangible ways to fight a social problem. (They also were unable to provide ways in which they could immediately start fighting a problem.) All of this could show that I spent more time explaining what social

problems are rather than providing examples of how one could fight these kind of problems.

The questions for journal #3 concentrate on topics related to *praxis* and history (Journal #3). Students were asked to answer seven questions that varied from defining *praxis* in their own words and thinking about what an individual might do to make the world a better place to live (Journal #3). For this study I examined questions 4-7.

Questions 4-5 ask students if it is possible for a person to change their life in an important way and change the world for the better. The vast majority of responses stated that it is possible for a person to change their life and the world in some positive way, although many said that it was more difficult to change the world (Journal #3). One student wrote for question #5: “Yes, because Martin Luther King, Jr., is one person and he helped stop racism. Rosa Parks is one person and she stopped segregation on the bus. I’m one person and I’m planning on changing the world into a better place” (Journal #3).

The responses for questions 4-5 seem to indicate that I was successful in using historical figures as models or examples of single individuals that affected social change. The responses also seem to imply that students were able to accept the possibility of change on an individual or personal level.

Questions 6-7 concentrate on what an individual might do to change their life or the world in some important way (Journal #3). A large number of the responses included vague ideas on how to bring about change on a personal or global level. One student responded to question #7 by writing, “Gain power, make a way to end world hunger, find a cure for sicknesses” (Journal #3). Another student wrote (for the same question): “You can sacrifice something and help others. Get help from others” (Journal #3). A small

minority of students included a thought process (although still a little vague) when confronted with problems at an individual or global level. One student argued for question #6, “First the person has to identify the problem and think of ways to solve it” (Journal #3). Another student wrote for question #7, “You would think about the problem and take some kind of action. Like making a useful invention” (Journal #3). Finally, another in answering the same question stated: “It’s the same for the world to be changed as far as changing your own life in some way. For BOTH, you’ve got to have PRAXIS (identifying a problem and taking action to solve it and change yourself or the world)” (Journal #3).

The responses for questions 6-7 imply that only a few students recognized that *praxis* is a process an individual can use to tackle something that is oppressive at an individual or global level (despite numerous class discussions on the topic).

Finally, journal #4 asked students to answer questions related to the relationship between students and teachers. (A class discussion followed the journal and it concentrated on calling students “students-teachers” and a teacher a “teacher-student.”) I mainly concentrated on the responses for questions 7-8 and 13-14.

Questions 7-8 asked students if students can be teachers and if teachers can be students. An overwhelming majority of students answered the questions by stating that students can be teachers and vice-versa (Journal #4). Questions 13-14 also yielded similar responses. (Questions 13-14 ask students to decide how teachers should view their students and students their teachers.) A vast majority answered that teachers should view their students as having experiences that are important to explore in the classroom (Journal #4). A very large number also circled the answer indicating that students should

view their teachers as important guides in the learning process, but must work at including the experiences and knowledge of students in the classroom (Journal #4).

The data implies that students were able to grasp the idea (which was a part of an interesting class discussion) that teachers can be students and vice-versa. They were also able to understand or acknowledge that teachers did not usually include the knowledge or experiences of students in the classroom (which was also a part of the same discussion) and that teachers should work at doing this (which goes against the grain of banking education).

In addition to the student journals, I also decided to start my own journal, which I have titled the “Freiren journal.” The eleven journal entries from January to June 2005 were used to capture “Freiren moments” (incidents from the classroom that are related to Freire) and to serve as a way to identify a “theoretical problematic” (a problem or challenge of teaching a curriculum that includes Freiren thought). By examining the journal entries I was able to psychoanalyze myself, identify themes, and see how my thinking changed over time.

Many of the journal entries involved describing various Freiren moments and what I thought of each of those moments. For example, in late February, I talked about how in class students answered the following question: “How are *praxis* and the Civil Rights Movement related?” (Freiren Journal). Many of the students answered this question by stating how the protestors saw racism as a problem in American society and thus participated in marches, boycotts, demonstration, sit-ins, and freedom rides (Freiren Journal). In a May entry I also mentioned that many students thought that Rosa Parks was an example of *praxis* (Freiren Journal). Finally, in a June entry I talked about how I

started to think about the standards movement/No Child Left Behind and critical pedagogy (Freiren Journal).

The majority of the journal entries concerned my theoretical problematic: By becoming a Freiren educator I may become just another type of banker (Freiren Journal). In early January, I argued that I was becoming a kind of Freiren banker (Freiren Journal). “As of today, I think that by becoming a Freiren educator or an educator that uses Freiren elements (I have not decided which), I will become a type of banker, but I will become a type of banker that chooses to work with students to “name” the world or identify what oppresses the oppressed” (Freiren Journal). In mid February a few entries indicate subtle shifts in my thinking. I seem to be arguing that I am not a Freiren banker, but some type of banker. I began one entry by writing, “I think my mind has changed or my thinking has shifted in the last week and a half regarding this “banker problem”” (Freiren Journal). In this same journal I begin to rationalize this new position. “So although I am using Freire in the classroom, I would not say I am a Freiren banker. I do not use all of his ideas, but I use some of his ideas in a modified form” (Freiren Journal). The rationalization continues: “On the other hand I am still a non-Freiren banker. I use an ELL social studies textbook and I often deposit info into the brains of my students” (Freiren Journal). At the end of this journal entry I stake out my conclusion. “I think I am halfway between a Freiren type of banker and a standard or non-Freiren banker. As of today this is where I stand” (Freiren Journal).

In a May journal the waffling continues and I come to what appears as a final conclusion. I argue at the beginning of the entry that “I now believe that what I am doing is not necessarily a form of banking education” (Freiren Journal). In the middle of the

same entry I complicate this judgment by stating: “I suppose in one way I am banker because I am teaching students a basic vocabulary and analysis that is based in Freiren thought, but in another way I am not a banker because I learn with my students and help them to identify oppression in their lives and how it can perhaps be resolved” (Freiren Journal). At the end of the journal I seem to be resigned to the fact that this tension will always exist. I wrote, “I do not think that this tension between a banker educator and a Freiren banker—which I believe is inherent in a Freiren pedagogy—will ever be resolved. It is important to note that one type of education will give students the analytical skills to encounter oppression, while the other will only help to maintain oppression and thus dehumanization” (Freiren Journal).

Two themes begin to appear when reading through these journal entries. One is the fact that there were numerous Freiren moments in class throughout the school year. The other is a common theme of internal conflict in which I could not decide if I was a banker, a Freiren banker, or a non-Freiren banker. (I eventually seem to argue that this tension will be inherent to an education based around Freire and his writings.)

One implication of the data and themes could be that I was able to discuss Freire and his ideas on numerous occasions to merit numerous Freiren moments. This seems to show that I was consistent in talking about Freire’s ideas throughout the year and was able to explain them in such a way that it was easy for middle school students to understand the material. Another implication could be that I did have an internal conflict regarding the banking problem and it was never fully resolved.

In addition to the Freire journal, I also tried to include Freire and his ideas in my curriculum. I attempted to weave some of his ideas into my lessons, assignments,

homework, and assessments. Aside from the in-class discussions regarding Freire's ideas, and the surveys and journals, I counted at least three separate instances in which I included some of his ideas in my curriculum. For example, I would assign two "6Ws" a week to my students for current events homework. Students would have to read an article or watch a news program and identify a current event that is related to a social problem. Once they have done this they would have to answer the following questions (6Ws):

1. When did this event happen?
2. Where did this event happen?
3. What happened?
4. Why do you think this event is important?
5. What social problem is related to this event?
6. What are three possible solutions for this social problem?

The 6Ws were used to identify an event that was related to a social problem (that was oppressive, like racism) and to think of ways to solve that problem.

In another instance, I had students engage in a think-pair-share activity that was related to Dr. King's speech, "I Have a Dream" (I Have a Dream Sheet). For this activity students had to brainstorm independently, work with a partner, and work with a small group to identify five "I have a dream" statements and list two possible actions for each statement. (For example, one statement could be: "I have a dream that racism will end.")

A few possible actions: 1. Do not laugh at or tell racist jokes. 2. If someone says something racist around you, call them on it and explain why it is racist.) This again reflects Freire and his ideas because it is asking students to identify a few things that are oppressive (which can be social problems) and then think of ways to solve or work toward solving those problems. This is closely related to the idea of *praxis*: think reflectively, identify a problem, and take action.

A final example of Freire's ideas being found in my curriculum would include a unit ending assessment for a unit on fighting stereotypes. For this assessment students had to identify a stereotype, dissect or examine the stereotype (by using various sources like the internet and books), and then write a personal plan of action (Dissecting a Stereotype Sheet). The plan of action involved a detailed series of steps one would take when he or she encounters what may be a stereotype. This also reflects Freire because it allows students to pick a stereotype that is relevant to their lives, do some critical thinking while examining the stereotype, and take some action in formulating an action plan.

One theme that is apparent when looking at the data (i.e. my curriculum) is that for the most part I did not use any of Freire's ideas when formulating unit ending assessments (except for the one example cited) or during the bulk of my lessons. Another theme would include the fact that I used his ideas during homework assignments, surveys, journals, discussions, and one unit ending assessment-for the most part the structure of my units was not changed.

All of this could imply that it was difficult to integrate his ideas into a curriculum that has many standards and requirements. Another implication could be that I currently lack the knowledge and/or experience to include Freire at a higher level in my lessons and units.

Another mini-project involved starting a social justice group at New Spirit Middle School. I wanted to start this kind of group to give students an opportunity to get involved in social justice (as a way to put into action some of the things we talked about in class). In January 2005, I, Meghan Herlofsky (the math teacher), and nine students

started “Colors of Justice” (COJ). COJ was an all volunteer group made up of 6-8th graders who decided to identify and attempt to solve a few social problems over the school year. The students decided to focus on gossip/rumors (and what it does to the environment of a school) and homelessness.

COJ worked on five projects related to the problems of gossip/rumors and homelessness. The first project involved a comedy skit on how gossip/rumors can destroy relationships between students, teachers, and school staff. (This skit was given six times total-1 for each 6 classes in the school.) COJ also organized and sponsored two “Mix-It Up” lunch days. (Mix It Up lunch is a national event in which students sit and have lunch with students outside of their cliques or groups.) In addition to these two projects, COJ wrote and performed a rap (on the school intercom) about the devastating effects of gossip/rumors.

COJ also collected over four hundred food items during a canned food drive for the Dorothy Day Center in Saint Paul, MN. Finally, COJ prepared and served dinner for homeless families at the Family Service Center in Maplewood.

In addition to the projects, COJ held weekly meetings and had discussions on topics such as racism, homophobia, sexism, poverty, crime, and sexual harassment. It also spent time doing some journaling before and after projects. For example, COJ decided to tackle homelessness after it spent time listing examples of social problems, describing the problems, choosing a few problems to concentrate on, and brainstorming a list of possible actions (COJ Project #2 Sheet). They also spent time doing some reflecting after preparing and serving dinner at the homeless shelter. Many of the students

wrote that the experience was rewarding and also listed a few ways in which we can make the project better for the upcoming year (COJ Reflection Sheet for Project #2).

Although there is no hard data to analyze, there were a few apparent themes concerning COJ. The students seemed excited to talk about real world issues that were relevant and important to them. They also seemed to enjoy the fact that they had the power to choose which problems to focus on and what actions to take.

These themes could imply that the group felt comfortable and willing to discuss issues relating to social justice. They could also imply that students are most interested in problems or issues that are directly related to their lives.

Finally, I also decided to help start a social justice group outside of school. The group is called “Sensible People for Peace” and it is a group of citizens from Mendota Heights, Saint Paul, and Minneapolis. We started this group in July 2004 to share information, get active, and speak out against the current occupation in Iraq. (We are also concerned with social justice, protecting civil liberties and human rights, conserving our natural resources, promoting tolerance, and fair trade.) We attend a protest every week in Saint Paul and meet to discuss current projects. (We are currently working on a project to get “Democracy Now!” on every public access radio and television station in Minnesota.)

I decided to start and continue to do work with a social justice group outside of school as a way to continue as Freire put it-“to stand at the side of the oppressed.”

Another part of this project involved examining my curriculum from my first two years of teaching to see how well I integrated ethnic content into my lessons and units. I used Banks’ four levels of integration of ethnic content as a rubric (of sorts) to see how many lessons, units, and assessments included ethnic content and also to see what

approaches (if any) they fell under. (For a full description of these four levels see pages 14-16.) I decided to count all the lessons, units, and assessments from my curriculum that included varying degrees of ethnic content. Thus, lessons, units, and assessments that did not include any ethnic content were not counted or organized under the four levels. I also did not separate the results by grade in order to attain simplicity in results.

After reviewing the data, I discovered that I taught 160 total lessons over 11 units and gave a total of 45 assessments for both grades during the 2003-2004 school year (Lesson Plans and Assignments). During the 2004-2005 school year, I taught 105 total lessons over 8 units and gave a total of 36 assessments (Lesson Plans and Assessments). Looking over each individual lesson, unit, and assessment, I used Banks' four levels to organize the data. Table 6.1 shows this data as organized by the levels. (The lessons, units, and assessments that integrate ethnic content are counted as a number.)

Table 6.1

School Year	Level #1	Level #2	Level #3	Level #4
2003-2004	10	12	0	0
2004-2005	8	10	7	3

A few data themes are apparent when looking at table 6.1. The 2003-2004 data show that I had lessons, units, and/or assessments that met the first two levels, but not the last two levels. Whereas the 2004-2005 data show that although the lessons, units, and/or assessments were spread across all four levels, the majority were spread across the first three levels. For both school years, a plurality of the materials fell under level 2. Finally,

the 2004-2005 school year was the first year that I reached level 4 (on three separate occasions).

One implication that can be drawn from the data is that I began to do a much better job at beginning to transform my curriculum and giving students opportunities to make decisions and take actions regarding various social issues (during the 2004-2005 school year). This is probably due to the fact that I had one unit devoted to the lives of minorities (Japanese-Americans, African-Americans, Jews) and women during World War II. I also included a short unit on fighting stereotypes where students had to identify a few current stereotypes, dissect each of those stereotypes, make a few decisions, and come up with a plan of action to fight stereotypes. Finally, I also included a unit on the Civil Rights Movement in which many of the lessons fell under level #1 and level #2.

Results

What were the results of this research project? In other words, did I meet my primary and secondary goals? Did I accomplish what I set out to do during the 2004-2005 school year?

I believe I met my first primary goal (to get the majority of students (and myself) involved in some kind of social activism that would benefit the school, community, city, state, country, and/or world) during this project. A large majority of students participated in the canned food drive and the Tsunami relief drive. All the students participated in a unit on stereotypes by writing a personal action plan on how to identify, examine, and help prevent others from spreading stereotypes. (A small group of students also joined Colors of Justice and participated in creating skits and raps on gossip/rumors. They also

helped organize Mix It Up lunch, a canned food drive, and volunteered at a homeless shelter.)

I was able to meet my part of the first primary goal by helping to start and stay involved with a peace and social justice group (Sensible People for Peace). As a group we attend weekly protests and continue to work on a statewide media access project.

I was also able to meet my second primary goal (to critically examine my curriculum from last two years and outline a plan for curriculum reform using the “Levels of Integration of Ethnic Content” as laid out in James Banks’ book, Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies) by examining my curriculum using the four levels and coming to the realization that a minority of my lessons and units included a small amount of ethnic content. (In the next section titled, “Plans for the Future,” I will outline my plan for curriculum reform.)

In addition to the primary goals, I also attempted to meet six secondary goals. I believe I met the first goal (see page 21) because I had students journal, fill out surveys, and participate in class discussions on topics related to Freire. I also was able to meet the second goal by collecting and analyzing some data. (I will mention how I used these themes to change or refine my teaching.) Furthermore, I was also able to meet my third goal by keeping a Freiren journal and identifying the “banking problem” as a theoretical problematic.

However, despite these successes, I was unable, for the most part, to meet my fourth secondary goal. Although I did have lessons, journals, surveys, and homework that included Freire’s ideas, the structure of my curriculum was unchanged. (In other words, I continued to be a banker that included elements of Freire’s ideas and philosophy.)

Finally, I was able to meet my fifth and sixth secondary goals by starting a social justice group and carrying out at least one project, and evaluating my lessons using Banks' four levels of ethnic content integration.

Plans for the Future

After reviewing the data, themes, and implications from the six mini-projects, and evaluating whether or not I met my goals, I have decided to lay out a few plans for the future. These plans would involve transforming my curriculum over the next few years.

One plan would involve increasing and ultimately transforming my curriculum to include or integrate more ethnic content. (In fact, the plan would begin a process to center my curriculum on ethnic content and ideas from Pedagogy of the Oppressed.) Specifically, this plan calls for writing at least two full units that are centered on ethnic content for the 2005-2006 school year. (It would also call for increasing the number of units to four during the 2006-2007 school year.) In addition, this plan would also call for gathering materials for other units to be transformed in the near future. Although the number of units is small, I believe that transformation should be gradual and consistent. A small number of units will allow that. (In fact, Banks argues that most educators and districts do not move beyond the first two levels of integration. I want to prevent this from happening by moving gradually, but deliberately with a goal in mind.) The ultimate goal is to have a curriculum that meets Banks' sixth level of ethnic content integration (the Social Action Approach) and includes ideas from Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (like *praxis*).

Another part of this plan would also involve continuing many of the projects that were central to this study. I plan on continuing to give students (which would include

Colors of Justice) opportunities to take action, to have students journal and fill out surveys, to have class discussions related to the work of Banks and Freire, and to have students identify themes (based on their experiences) that would make up the curriculum or units of study.

In addition, I will continue to journal and thus collect Freirean moments and further my discussion of the banking problem. I will also work at using Freire and his ideas as a starting point for lessons and units. (This would include having students complete a social justice action project. In this project students would have to identify a social problem, investigate it, brainstorm a list of possible actions, choose one action to undertake, and do some evaluation.)

Finally, I will continue to evaluate my lessons and units using Banks' four levels at least twice a year (during Holiday break and at the end of the year). This is essential in order to continue the transformation of my curriculum.

Conclusion

This project over the last year has been both challenging and rewarding. It has changed how I view schools, students, teachers, standards, and the purposes of education. I now see schools as “laboratories” for social activism and change. I see students not as empty vessels, but as young activists, willing and ready to change the world. I see teachers not as having all the knowledge, and dispersing it to those with no knowledge, but as partners with students in creating a more just, humane, and peaceful world. I also now tend to have a fairly negative view toward standards (specifically No Child Left Behind) because they seem like banking education writ large, which in turn prevents students from transforming their lives.

In a not so distant past, I also thought the main purpose of education was to climb the economic ladder (and perhaps learn a few interesting things along the way). I now see education as a process of transformation that includes constant reflection and informed action.

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Resources and Appendices:

- 6Ws
- COJ Project #2 Sheet
- COJ Reflection Sheet for Project #2
- Dissecting a Stereotype Sheet
- Freiren Journal
- I Have a Dream Sheet
- Journals 1-4
- Lesson Plans and Assignments
- New Spirit Document
- Student Survey
- Venn Diagram on Animals and Humans