REVIEW OF *CULTURE, DIFFERENCE, AND POWER*

Title	*Culture, Difference, and Power, Interactive Video CD*
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OVERVIEW

With teachers in the K-12 education system in the United States as the primary audience, this e-book is intended to show that multicultural education involves more than celebrating ethnic holidays, tasting cultural foods, and talking about famous non-white people. Instead, *Culture, Difference, and Power* aims to provide teachers with the conceptual tools to critically examine -- following Freirian philosophy (Freire, 1970) -- institutional power relationships through real life application activities, so that they can respond appropriately to cultural differences within their own schools and larger society. Sleeter envisions three potential courses with three different student audiences in which her e-book may be used: an undergraduate service learning course on cultural diversity, a teacher credential course in multicultural education, and a graduate course in education. The nature of the e-book format engages users in the topic in a unique way that allows for multimedia interaction with text and information as well as a non-linear approach to reading.

Upon loading the program, the user is prompted to start with the *Overview* section, where background statistics on ethnic and racial diversity in U.S. public schools and at U.S. colleges and universities are presented, the author's definitions of key terms are provided, and navigation is explained.

The e-book is organized around four major sections: *Culture, Power, Difference,* and *Pedagogy.* Unlike conventional books, there is no prescribed sequence in which the four sections are to be read. However, in my own reading, I followed the linear sequence of sections as they were described in the Instructor's Manual (Sleeter, 2001) -- *Culture, Power, Difference,* then *Pedagogy* -- and found this to be quite effective.

Each of the four main sections is divided into four subsections, accessible via hyperlinks, as shown in Figure 1. Each of these subsections are made up of three to five chapters, which Sleeter calls *Ideas,* and three or four follow-up *Activities.* There are also extensive hyperlinked cross-references that allow re-familiarization with concepts and information already introduced. Finding such cross-references in a

traditional printed book can often be frustrating as it may require leafing through pages to locate a specific piece of information.

CULTURE		POWER
The New Demographics		Power and Institutions
What is Culture?		Wealth and the Global Economy
Culture and Representation		Knowledge and Ideology
Exploring Culture		Schools as Institutions
	OVERVIEW	
DIFFERENCE		**PEDAGOGY**
Human Variation		Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
Encountering Difference		Multicultural Curriculum
Identity		Critical Literacy
Mobilizing for Social Justice		Just Schools

Figure 1. Four main sections and sub-sections in the e-book

DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION

Content

In the section *Culture,* Sleeter provides background on shifting demographic and immigration patterns in the United States covering the past two centuries. She points out what becomes the dominant perspective in the e-book, namely, that cultural differences have been reconciled in favor of a predominantly white Eurocentric point of view. This section also covers the basics of ethnographic research, such as interview and observation skills, and the ethics of doing research. This is relevant as most of the follow-up activities require some type of ethnographic study.

The section on *Power* pursues the idea of racism in the United States. Sleeter traces the development of capitalism and social class over the past 500 years and the current distribution of wealth in the United States. Two subsections are likely to be particularly interesting for teachers: one discusses lop-sided representations of diversity in textbooks while the other explores issues of cultural bias in a social studies curriculum. Sleeter discusses school practices such as tracking (placing students in groups based on estimates of academic ability) and their role in maintaining social hierarchy and reproducing inequality.

In the section on *Difference,* Sleeter reviews the concept of biological determinism and how this has been used, especially by the media, to construct imagined categories of difference among people, which have then been used to justify discrimination. She discusses how alternative popular media may have an impact on altering this perspective.

Finally, the section on *Pedagogy* discusses "culturally relevant pedagogy," "multicultural curricula," and "critical literacy" and provides examples of specific teachers and classrooms that implement these principles in a way the author finds exemplary. These examples are all from (mostly California based) elementary school classrooms, with one middle school class and one high school class represented. While the previous three sections lay much theoretical groundwork, the *Pedagogy* section is probably the most directly applicable to teachers as it provides examples and ideas from various classrooms.

Throughout the sections, Sleeter provides numerous addresses for a variety of Web sites, for example, newspapers and magazines written for specific audiences such as Native Americans, people with disabilities, and gays and lesbians (all complete with subscription information). Considering that the intended audience for this e-book is (future) teachers, it would perhaps have been useful for this audience to also include Web addresses for sites that provide teaching and lesson ideas.

In a country and a teaching environment where teachers encounter an increasing number of students whose first language is not English (see Faltis, 2001), Sleeter's e-book is an important contribution.

Culture, Difference, and Power gets at the roots of a societal phenomenon that has important implications for teaching (see Damen, 1987; Faltis, 2001; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998): teachers lack multicultural training and have difficulty dealing with increasing diversity in their classrooms (Harklau, 2000; Lara, 1995; Marx, 2000; Verplaetse, 1998; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). *Culture, Difference, and Power* has the potential to make a difference by showing teachers what culturally responsive teaching should entail.

Many of the issues addressed are relevant to teaching in a wide variety of teaching contexts, yet Sleeter addresses the challenge of multicultural teaching only from a K-12 perspective. However, those teaching adult immigrants, pre-academic, university-bound non-native students, as well as students enrolled in college courses often face similar difficulties, yet they are left out of the pool of potential teachers that this e-book targets. In one activity, users are to choose between the following two options: "Are you an elementary school teacher or are you a secondary school teacher?" Many students using this e-book may be neither, but designing culturally relevant pedagogy is a real challenge for teachers of adult minority students as well.

Given that the stated objective of the e-book is "to develop teaching that is multicultural, critical, and responsive" (Overview, p. 3), I found the e-book a bit lopsided in the *Culture, Power,* and *Difference* sections in its heavy emphasis on white racism. Such a focus might perhaps be more appropriate for students in sociology or political science. Students in education and teacher credential courses will need more concrete frameworks and examples for teaching than are offered in the *Pedagogy* section, where users read and hear from several teachers about their personal approaches to multicultural teaching. However, the examples discussed are largely of a general nature and may not address the reality of non-K-12 users' teaching situations. While Sleeter adamantly emphasizes that she does not want to present pre-packaged lesson ideas, but to "engage teachers in discussions of what is worth teaching" (*Multicultural Curriculum,* Creating Multicultural Curriculum, p. 4), she does report an example of a math teacher who uses subway stops to help explain the concept of positive and negative numbers. More concrete suggestions or examples along these lines would likely help teachers, particularly pre-service teachers, see beyond a cultural contributions approach.

Much of what Sleeter reports echoes the distinction between what Nunan (1999) labels traditional and experiential learning. The concepts that she presents with respect to multicultural teaching are not new; in fact, they are all firmly grounded in meaningful, cooperative learning (Kagan, 1989; McGroarty, 1993), constructivism (Faltis, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978), and current calls to address students' various learning styles, needs, and interests (Reid, 1987; Scarcella, 1990) and foster critical thinking skills (Grognet, Jameson, Franco, & Derrick-Mescua, 2000; Thinking Questions, 1999).

Activities

In addition to the follow-up activities, some chapters begin with activities designed to increase motivation for the upcoming subsection and to activate relevant background knowledge. For example, at the outset of *Cultural Literacy,* users are asked to choose among four possible teacher reactions to a student's question about why the US is bombing another country. These activities might benefit from some built-in feedback mechanism to the response the user types in; otherwise, users may not gain from the engagement that the activity seeks to create.

Users of the e-book can quickly test their comprehension and retention of what they have read in short multiple choice quizzes, which Sleeter provides at the end of most *Ideas* sections. The majority of items ask users to recollect factual information from the section; for example, "The proportion of gay and lesbian high school students who have reported hearing homophobic remarks from other students, according to a recent survey, was: 97%, 79%, 53%" (*The New Demographics;* Quiz item 10). Immediate feedback is provided, as is a brief explanation of why the selected answer is correct or not.

Nonetheless, most of the activities at the end of *Ideas* sections are application activities that invite readers to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and practices. These appear to require a lot of field work which would be most easily implementable in a service learning setting. A number of activities are also more directly relevant for teachers, such as one in which users critically examine school textbooks for representation of minority groups. However, other activities that are potentially relevant to teachers either assume the users' immersion into a school setting or are quite vague. Still other activities assume that students already know how to put lessons together: "Using your knowledge of local social justice issues, symbol systems and beliefs, and the process of making social change, construct a unit in a way that teaches a group of students to critically analyze a social issue, and to take collective action to address it" (*Critical Literacy;* Teaching Critical Literacy activity). However, users of the e-book may have little experience teaching and little knowledge about methodological aspects of lesson design.

E-Book Features

Navigation through the e-book is very user-friendly and self-explanatory. Buttons at the bottom of the screen allow navigation between sections as well as within subsections and provide access to *Ideas, Activities,* and references. As sections and subsections can be read in non-linear fashion, and as cross-reference information is provided with links dealt with in different sections of the e-book, it is easy to become lost. However, within each *Ideas* section, navigational help is available to facilitate navigation through an internal search engine and a *Tips* menu. The search engine contains a "find" function to locate specific ideas in the e-book. However, it appears that users need to target the relevant subsection, which makes the search for a specific concept a bit frustrating.

In addition, the e-book contains a lot of attractive features that set it apart from a traditional book. Occasionally, users are engulfed in soft, pleasant musical interludes that accompany section openings, and they sometimes encounter vivid sounds accompanying the images. For example, readers hear a loud scream when viewing the income discrepancy between the average U.S. worker and the average CEO of an American company. The e-book is further interspersed with several short video clips featuring classroom teachers, artists, and researchers. The videos require QuickTime, included on the CD-ROM, and provide an element of immediacy and personalization that a written version cannot offer. Ironically, for someone who advocates the rights of the disabled, such as the deaf, Sleeter has included a large number of audiofiles without corresponding printed text.

Other e-book features include animated graphics and interaction. Many subsections contain visual illustrations of concepts and processes, and most of these involve some kind of motion or manipulation on the screen (see Figures 2 and 3). Other screens provide text boxes that invite the readers to become writers by typing in a response to a prompt or by generating thoughts on a topic. These features add variety as well as input for highly visual and spatial learners. But because the typed data are not stored, readers must either cut and paste their responses into another document, or print the screen image before moving on. This seems quite inconvenient, and, like the activities at the beginning of subsections, text boxes could benefit from some type of feedback mechanism. However, the printed responses can become useful input for class activities or can be given to the course instructor for feedback.
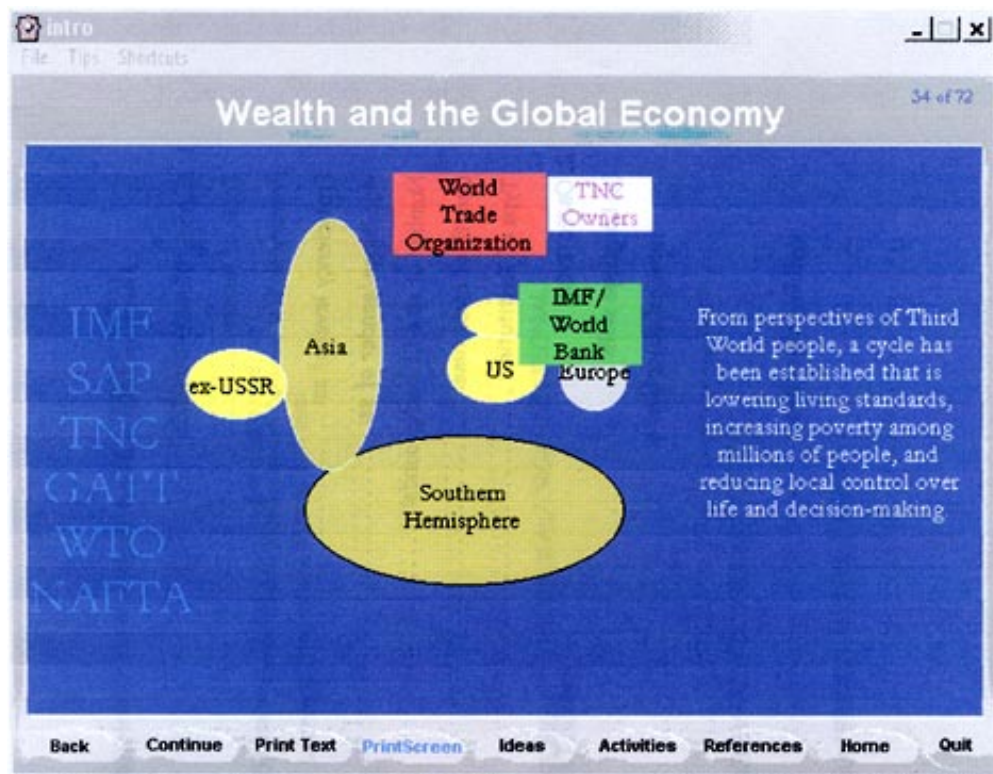
Figure 2. Sample graphic display of a concept

Figure 3. Sample manipulative activity

Instructor's Manual

The Instructor's Manual (Sleeter, 2001) for the e-book is available as a free download and viewable in PDF format from the publisher's Web site. It contains the same overview as on the CD-ROM, summaries of all four sections (including the subsections under each), three sample syllabi for courses in which the e-book might be used, chapter outlines, expected learning outcomes, suggestions for a culminating assignment to accompany each subsection. This is a handy reference list for instructors who are planning to use the e-book in their courses, and it is particularly useful that the *Ideas* and *Activities* menus for each subsection are also listed.

Editorial Errors

Something I found disturbing throughout the e-book was the large number of editorial problems consisting of spelling errors, but mostly sentence structure problems, as the examples below illustrate:

"As long as kids are being testing [sic.] on prescribed material, …" (*Knowledge and Ideology;* Ideology and curriculum: An Example, p. 4)

"How does social class related [sic.] to teacher identities?" (*Identity;* Teachers as Cultural Beings, p. 42)

"Friere [sic.]" instead of Freire (*Critical Literacy;* Developing Critical Literacy, p. 41)

SUMMARY

Provocative at times in its emphasis on unequal power relationships in an American society dominated by white Eurocentric values, Sleeter's e-book is well researched and documented. While the points relevant for the intended teacher audience -- forming stereotypes about students from underrepresented groups, interpreting behavior from one's own perspective -- have been presented by other researchers before (Barna, 1985; Damen, 1987; Faltis, 2001; Samovar & Porter, 2001), the format of Sleeter's e-book presents an intriguing alternative to books that deal with cultural issues and societal values.

However, if it is so obvious, as Sleeter claims, that teachers generally do not teach in multiculturally responsive ways but rather perpetuate the racist status quo, then teachers (and especially pre-service teachers) perhaps do not know how to develop complex instruction and critical literacy. In order to address this deficiency, they perhaps need more guidance in the form of sample classroom lesson plans and activities than this e-book provides. Nevertheless, I am certain that *Culture, Difference, and Power* will compel users to question their conceptions about the society they live in, and that is not at all a bad start.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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