Good intentions are not enough: a decolonizing intercultural education

Paul C. Gorski [a]

[a] New Century College, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA

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Good intentions are not enough: a decolonizing intercultural education

Paul C. Gorski*

New Century College, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA

Despite unquestionably good intentions on the part of most people who call themselves intercultural educators, most intercultural education practice supports, rather than challenges, dominant hegemony, prevailing social hierarchies, and inequitable distributions of power and privilege. In this essay I describe a philosophy of decolonizing intercultural education – an intercultural education dedicated, first and foremost, to dismantling dominant hegemony, hierarchies, and concentrations of power and control. I argue that attaining such an intercultural education requires not only subtle shifts in practice and personal relationships, but also important shifts of consciousness that prepare us to see and react to the socio-political contexts that so heavily influence education theory and practice.

Keywords: social justice; intercultural dialogue; intercultural education

I remember the invitations: red text on a white background, the title of the event in a curly bold typeface surrounded by a crudely drawn *piñata*, a floppy sombrero, and a dancing *cucaracha*. A fourth grader that year, I gushed with enthusiasm about these sorts of cultural festivals – the different, the alien, the other – dancing around me, a dash of spice for a child of white flighters. Ms Manning distributed the invitations in mid-April, providing parents a few weeks to plan for the event, which occurred the first week of May, on or around Cinco de Mayo.

A few weeks later my parents and I, along with a couple of hundred other parents, teachers, students, and administrators crowded into the cafeteria for Guilford Elementary School's annual Taco Night. The occasion was festive. I stared at the colorful decorations, the papier maché *piñatas* designed by each class, then watched as my parents tried to squeeze into cafeteria style tables built for eight-year-olds. Sometimes the school hired a Mexican song and dance troupe from a neighboring town. They'd swing and sway and sing and smile and I'd watch, bouncing dutifully to the rhythm, hoping they'd play *La bamba* or *Oye como va* so I could sing along, pretending to know the words. If it happened to be somebody's birthday the music teacher would lead us in a lively performance of *Cumpleaños feliz* and give the kid some Mexican treats.

¡Olé!

Granted, not a single Mexican or Mexican American student attended Guildford at the time. Although I do recall Ms Manning asking Adolfo, a classmate whose family had immigrated from Guatemala, whether the Taco Night tacos were 'authentic.' He answered with a shrug. Granted, too, there was little educational substance to the evening; I knew little more about Mexico or the Mexican American experience upon leaving Taco Night than I did upon arriving. Still, hidden within Taco Night and the simultaneous absence of real

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*Email: gorski@edchange.org

curricular attention to Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and other Latinos, were three critical and clarifying lessons: (1) Mexican culture is synonymous with tacos; (2) 'Mexican' and 'Guatemalan' are synonymous, and by extension, all Latino people are the same, and by further extension, all Latino people are synonymous with tacos (as well as sombreros and dancing *cucarachas*); and (3) white people really like tacos, especially the kind in those hard, crunchy shells, which, I learned later, nobody eats in Mexico.

Thus began my intercultural education: my introduction to the clearly identifiable 'other.'

And I could hardly wait until Pizza Night.

Introduction

As I look back, 26 years later, through my educator and activist lenses, what I find most revealing – and disturbing – about Taco Night and my other early experiences with intercultural education is intent. Or, more precisely, lack of intent. I assume that the adults at Guilford Elementary School believed that this event had educational merit. I am sure they believed that events like Taco Night were more age-appropriate for fourth graders than, say, a critical examination of US imperialist intervention in Latin America. And I am equally certain that they intended for my classmates and me to leave that evening with an appreciation for Mexican or Mexican-American culture. I am certain, as well, that they did not intend to inflate the stereotypes about Chicana/os and Latina/os into which the media and my parents had been socializing me since birth. I am equally certain that they did not purposefully reify my growing sense of racial and ethnic supremacy by essentializing the lives and diverse cultures of an already-oppressed group of people, then presenting that group to me as a clearly identifiable 'other.' But that is exactly what they did.

Unfortunately, my experience and a growing body of scholarship on intercultural education and related fields (such as multicultural education, intercultural communication, anti-bias education, and so on) reveal a troubling trend: despite overwhelmingly good intentions, most of what passes for intercultural education practice, particularly in the US, accentuates rather than undermines existing social and political hierarchies (Aikman 1997; Diaz-Rico 1998; Gorski 2006; Hidalgo, Chávez-Chávez, and Ramage 1996; Jackson 2003; Lustig 1997; Nieto 2000, 1995; Schick and St. Denis 2005; Sleeter 1991; Ulichny 1996). This is why the framework we construct for examining and encouraging intercultural education reveals, among other things, the extent and limits of our commitments to a genuinely intercultural world. The questions are plenty: do we advocate and practice intercultural education so long as it does not disturb the existing sociopolitical order?; so long as it does not require us to problematize our own privilege?; so long as we can celebrate diversity, meanwhile excusing ourselves from the messy work of social reconstruction?

Can we practice an intercultural education that does not insist first and foremost on social reconstruction for equity and justice without rendering ourselves complicit to existing inequity and injustice? In other words, if we are not battling explicitly against the prevailing social order with intercultural education, are we not, by inaction, supporting it?

Such questions cannot be answered through a simple review of teaching and learning theory or an assessment of educational programs. Instead, they oblige all of us who would call ourselves intercultural educators to re-examine the philosophies, motivations, and world views that underlie our consciousnesses and work. Because the most destructive thing we can do is to disenfranchise people in the name of intercultural education.

In this essay – my response to a request from the International Association for Intercultural Education (on whose Board of Directors I sit) to share my philosophy of intercultural education – I offer my continuously evolving, perpetually incomplete reflections on these questions. I organize these reflections into two primary arguments. First, any framework for intercultural education that does not have as its central and overriding premise a commitment to the establishment and maintenance of an equitable and just world can be seen as a tool, however well-intentioned, of an educational colonization in which inequity and injustice are reproduced under the guise of interculturalism. Secondly, transcending a colonizing intercultural education requires in educators deep shifts in consciousness rather than the simple pragmatic or programmatic shifts that too often are described as intercultural education.

I begin by providing a brief contextualization for these arguments and how US and world socio-politics inform them. I then contend that the softening of socio-political context in the dominant intercultural education discourse (Gorski, 2006) – particularly that context related to economic exploitation through racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other oppressions – results, too often, in unintentionally colonizing intercultural education. I end with a series of shifts of consciousness that, I argue, may inform a more authentic intercultural education.

As a point of clarification, although 'multicultural education' is a much more common term and movement in the US (my present national context) than 'intercultural education,' and although I define the objectives of both of these movements very similarly – as the establishment and maintenance of equity and social justice in education contexts and, by extension, society – I choose to focus here specifically on the latter. I do so because multicultural education tends to refer more rigidly to formal schooling environments, whereas intercultural education, in my conceptualization, is broader in scope, unconstrained to formal education.

Socio-political context

The world may be flat, as Friedman (2006) wrote, for the corporate elite, but for the rest of us – the workers, the teachers, the wage-earners, those of us without stock options and lobbyists – the world is as round and inhibiting as ever. Even while economic power brokers invite us into unabashed celebrations of globalization, corporate elites – often with help from legislators – demonstrate greater and greater propensities for expanding their markets and finding ever-cheaper labor. They demonstrate, as well, propensities for accelerating economic inequality worldwide (Chossudovsky 2003); and so globalization, although pitched as the pathway toward economic growth and stability, even in the poorest countries in the world, has proven to be little more than a contemporary form of mass economic exploitation – a vehicle for what Harvey (2005) calls the 'new imperialism' and what Chossudovsky (2003) calls the 'globalization of poverty'.

Corporations and their government allies employ a variety of techniques to maintain among the people something on a continuum between compliance and complicity with this exploitation. In Colombia, US corporations such as Chiquita Brands International fund paramilitaries to protect their interests, often through physically and psychologically violent means (Bussey and Dudley 2007). It is not uncommon for Colombian teachers who dare voice an opinion about, for example, their government's complicity with US corporate interests, to be assassinated (Klein 2004). Within the US, where federal education policy is firmly under the thumbs of corporate elites in the form of the Business Roundtable, the public education system itself (along with increasingly conglomerated corporate media) is becoming, more and more explicitly, a vehicle for socializing citizens into compliance and

complicity (Chomsky 2003; Gabbard 2003). We can observe this infestation of corporate influence on education in one of its most disturbing manifestations in the emerging educational hegemony in the US. Although the idea has long existed (however contested) that education's primary purpose is to prepare people for employment and economic stability, only recently has the language commonly used to describe this attitude – preparing students 'to compete in the global marketplace' – become so explicitly market-centric.

As corporations and their lobbyists garner greater control over all manner of policy and legislation, they gain more access to the systems, such as education, that facilitate access to knowledge and popular perception. A clear and complex illustration of this process can be found in the weakening over the last decade of laws prohibiting the very sort of media super-conglomeration happening today in the US. The outcome of these processes is the centralization of control of virtually every mainstream newspaper, magazine, film studio, television station, and radio station in the country into the hands of five corporations (Bagdikian 2004). As a result, these media, like the education system, have become tools for socializing a compliant and complicit populace into a market hegemony that normalizes consumer culture (with the help of a president insisting that we respond to the 9/11 attacks by shopping), glorifies corporate imperialism (with language such as 'liberating the Iraqi people'), and conflates capitalism with democracy. The ideals underlying and driving these shifts often are described as neo-liberalism.

One of the key neo-liberal strategies for socializing the masses into complicity with corporate interests is the propagation of deficit theory – an approach for justifying inequality that is enjoying resurgence in the Western world today. Deficit theory, a remnant of colonial and imperial history (Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi 2005), holds that inequality is the result, not of systemic inequities in access to power, but intellectual and ethical deficiencies in particular groups of people (Collins 1988). Deficit theorists draw on stereotypes already well-established in the mainstream psyche (Osei-Kofi 2005; Rank 2004; Tozer 2000) – such as through television shows that paint African Americans as urban thugs or gay men as promiscuous – in order to pathologize oppressed communities rather than problematizing the perpetrators of their oppressions (Shields et al. 2005; Villenas 2001).

Deficit theory has been used throughout history to justify imperial pursuits. For example, European colonialists justified Native American genocide and slavery in the US in part by painting native peoples and African slaves as 'savages' who required civilizing – the white man's burden. Deficit theory is used in similar ways today, such as to justify imperial US intervention in the Middle East.

But it is used, as well, to justify the dissolution of human rights and the quickening transfer of power from the people to corporations. In order to accomplish this justification, capitalist elites use their access to the media and schools to effectively blame certain groups of people, such as the poor and indigenous communities, for a plethora of social ills and the general decay of society, rendering them, in the public's eye, undeserving of economic or social justice (Gans 1995). In the US, economically disadvantaged people, from the homeless to undocumented immigrants, have become particularly vulnerable targets for deficit theorists. The capitalist fruits of this process are two-fold: (1) the deterioration of support for public policy meant to alleviate political and economic marginalization, which, among other things, helps justify the erosion of welfare programs in the US; and (2) the diversion of the public's attention away from increasing corporate empowerment and toward a perceived need to eradicate inequality by 'fixing' deficient people. 'Fixing' in this case often means assimilating – as in assimilating poor students into the very structures and value systems that oppress them, as today's dominant discourse on poverty and education in the US calls on educators to do.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – President Bush's landmark federal policy for US schools, composed largely by the Business Roundtable and other corporate cooperatives – epitomizes the deficit approach. Its reliance on a largely corporate model of standardization and accountability demonizes schools (and as a result, students and teachers) based on a narrow conception of student performance even while it ignores the structural conditions – including those within the system, such as inequitable school funding, and those outside the system, such as the scarcity of living wage jobs – that so heavily influence students' educational opportunities. Meanwhile, several aspects of the legislation, such as mandated testing and an insistence that schools use so-called 'scientifically-based' reading programs, provide additional economic pipelines from a supposedly public education system to the corporations that provide these materials and services.

As I explained in a previous essay (Gorski 2006), most of what people refer to as intercultural or multicultural education – including scholarship, teacher preparation courses, or educational programs – fails to take this sort of context into account. As a result, we expend much energy fighting symptoms of oppressive conditions (such as interpersonal conflicts) instead of the conditions themselves; and this is exactly what we are socialized to do. The powers that be are thrilled that we host Taco Night instead of engaging in authentic anti-racism; that we conduct workshops on a fictitious 'culture of poverty' instead of holding corporations and governments responsible for the growing economic inequities that inform educational inequities.

As an intercultural educator in the US, the journey toward acknowledging this sociopolitical context leads me daily into a corridor with two doors. I see most people who call themselves intercultural educators stepping through the first door – the one, easiest to reach, that allows access to a space where they can avoid this cynicism and concern over power and oppression; a space where these conditions are accepted as normal or inevitable; a space where we communicate interculturally and resolve conflict without spending an ounce of energy on reconstructing society at any fundamental level. I am tempted to follow suit, to participate in intercultural dialogue and skim along the surface of cultural awareness.

I see few people and even fewer organizations choosing the second door – the one, heavy and inconveniently placed, that leads to a space of personal and institutional vulnerability. Like every intercultural educator, I must choose: will I comply, practicing an intercultural education that does not disturb these sociopolitical realities? Or will I choose vulnerability, practicing intercultural education for nothing less than social reconstruction? And what does my decision reveal about me?

Colonizing intercultural education: to whose benefit?

I have spent – continue to spend – countless agonizing hours in that corridor, slipping in and out of both doors. And I have arrived at this conclusion: the practice of intercultural education, when not committed first and foremost to equity and social justice – to the acknowledgement of these realities and the disruption of domination – might, in the best case, result in heightened cross-group awareness at an individual level. But in many cases, such practice is domination. And in any case, ignoring systemic oppression means complying with it. And to whose benefit? Who or what are we protecting?

In her discussion of intercultural education in Latin America, Aikman (1997) observes that it 'developed out of concern and respect for indigenous knowledge and practices, but primarily in response to the exploitation, oppression and discrimination of indigenous peoples' (p. 466). With this conception in mind, Aikman reports, indigenous organizations throughout the region lobbied extensively for intercultural education. Governments

responded and began codifying their commitments to intercultural education – or, more precisely, to candy-coated versions of it. For example, Foro Educativo (as cited by Aikman), an NGO hired to help the Peruvian government conceptualize intercultural education, offered this definition:

> Interculturality in education is a space for dialogue which recognises and values the wealth of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in the country, promotes the affirmation and development of different cultures which co-exist in Peru and constitutes an open process towards cultural exchange with the global society. (Aikman 1997, 469)

This vision echoes most conceptualizations of intercultural education – especially those from people and organizations in positions of power. Cushner, a leading US voice in the field, offers a similar vision, explaining that intercultural education

> recognizes that a genuine understanding of cultural differences and similarities is necessary in order to build a foundation for working collaboratively with others. It also recognize[s] that a pluralistic society can be an opportunity for majority and minority groups to learn from and with one another, not a problem as it might be viewed by some. (Cushner 1998, 4)

These views synthesize the goals most often identified in definitions of intercultural education: the facilitation of intercultural dialogue, an appreciation for diversity, and cultural exchange. But they also demonstrate why intercultural education quickly became a target of scorn and scrutiny by many of the indigenous communities who once enthusiastically supported it (Aikman 1997; Bodnar 1990). This sort of framework for intercultural education, they argued, according to Aikman (1997), 'maintains the distribution of power and forms of control which perpetuate existing vertical hierarchical relations … Thus, this interculturality remains embedded in relations of internal colonialism' (469). In other words, an intercultural education constructed on the basis of these visions is a tool for the maintenance of marginalization (Gorski 2006; Lustig 1997; Sleeter 1991) – marginalization that supports the interests of the powerful at the expense of the oppressed.

Take, for example, the goal of intercultural dialogue – a hallmark of intercultural education. Research indicates that participation in such experiences can result, in the short-term, in changes to individual attitudes and cross-group relationships (Dessel, Rogge, and Garlington 2006; Rozas 2007; Vasques Scalera 1999). However, absent from this scholarship is evidence that intercultural dialogue contributes in any way to eliminating, or even mitigating, systemic inequities (DeTurk 2006). But this body of scholarship does include several studies that reveal the colonizing outcomes of intercultural dialogue when it is not grounded in an acknowledgement of inequities in access to power – including imbalances of power among the participants themselves – and a bigger movement toward social reconstruction (DeTurk 2006; James 1999; Jones 1999; López-Garay 2001; Maoz 2001; Wasserman 2001).

This sort of colonization and domination through intercultural dialogue reveals itself in a variety of ways. For example, such dialogues usually involve groups that, according to Maoz,

> are involved in asymmetrical power relations. Such are the planned contacts between Whites and African Americans in the United States, Whites and Blacks in South Africa, and … representatives of the Jewish majority and Palestinian minority in Israel. (Maoz 2001, 190–1)

But far too often these experiences are facilitated – controlled – in ways that assume that all participants sit at an even table (Jones 1999), one at which all parties have equitable

access to cultural capital. According to Jones, such dialogue experiences tend to focus on the goal of mutual empathy – requiring dominated people to empathize with people who are, or who represent, their oppressors. Jones asks,

> What if 'togetherness' and dialogue-across-difference fail to hold a compellingly positive meaning for subordinate ethnic groups? What if the 'other' fails to find interesting the idea of their empathetic understanding of the powerful, which is theoretically demanded by dialogic encounters? (Jones 1999, 299)

Which people and systems do we protect when we request empathy from dominated groups without first demanding justice from the powerful?

Dialogue experiences and other intercultural education practices reinforce prevailing colonizing hegemony as well when, absent a central focus on social reconstruction, the rules of engagement require disenfranchised participants to render themselves more vulnerable to the powerful than they already are. Jones explains what she calls the 'imperialist resonances' of such conditions for cross-cultural exchange:

> In attempting, in the name of justice, to move the boundary pegs of power into the terrain of the margin-dwellers, the powerful require them to 'open up their territory'. (Jones 1999, 303)

The powerful – who, as individuals or institutions, usually control (implicitly or explicitly) rules of engagement in intercultural education experiences – tend to leave unacknowledged the reality that the marginalized voices they invite into dialogue do not need organized opportunities to hear the voices of the powerful. They are immersed in these voices (Jones 1999) through the media, education, and so on. So in addition to being ill-conducive to a movement for real social change, this brand of intercultural education actually reifies power hierarchies (Maos 2001).

Worst of all participants from dominant groups, according to Vasques Scalera (1999), enjoy personal growth and fulfillment from these practices at higher rates than those from subordinate groups. And isn't this – the powerful gaining cultural capital on the backs of the oppressed, who often, regardless, are compelled to participate (as they are in school curricula, teacher education courses, or staff development workshops) – the epitome of colonizing education?

This brand of intercultural education, in which we focus on interpersonal relationships and cultural awareness, the power hierarchy firmly in place even within our intercultural practice, is exactly the kind of diversion that serves the colonizing and neo-liberal interests of the powerful. We can call ourselves authentic intercultural educators only when we ensure that our work – every moment of it – pushes against, rather than supporting, these interests.

Decolonizing intercultural education

One of the most dangerous dimensions of educational hegemony in the US is a culture of pragmatism. Exacerbated by a flood of education policy that requires assessment of student and teacher performance on the basis of standardized test scores, the culture of pragmatism dissuades theoretical or philosophical discourses among educators in favor of those focused on immediate, practical strategies. I find that educators who attend my workshops increasingly resist discussions aimed at deepening theoretical understanding and consciousness. Many seem to want, instead, a series of lesson plans they can implement immediately in their classrooms. I do not blame them for this desire. After all, we are all victims of this

culture of pragmatism; of its de-professionalization of the teaching professions; of its power to lure us away from a discourse of what 'could be' in education; of how it limits the education reform discourse to minor shifts in practice – Taco Night – that, despite good intentions, colonize more than they liberate.

Unfortunately, perhaps because we, as educators, are socialized into this culture, there seems to be little resistance to it. This is why the first step toward authentic intercultural practice is undertaking shifts in consciousness that acknowledge sociopolitical context, raise questions regarding control and power, and inform, rather than deferring to, shifts in practice. It is difficult work – transcending hegemony, turning our attention away from the cultural 'other' and toward systems of power and control. Those of us who choose this door must acknowledge realities we are socialized not to see. We must admit complicity. But how can we do otherwise, risking the possibility that our work may devolve into sustenance for the status quo, and still call ourselves intercultural educators?

I describe here several shifts of consciousness that, I propose, are fundamental to preparing a larger shift from a colonizing to a decolonizing intercultural education. Many of these shifts, in the most basic terms, refer to seeing what we are socialized not to see and pushing back against hegemony; against its diversions from dominance and our complicity with it.

I see these shifts as developmental. I continue to struggle, from my place of relative privilege, with all of them.

Shift no. 1: cultural awareness is not enough

Rather than focusing on cultural awareness or understanding differences, I must expose hegemonic meaning-making regarding difference (as compared with hegemony's appointed 'norm') and how it informs my worldview. Culture and identity differences may affect personal interactions, but more importantly, they affect one's access to power. The powerful exploit differences from the hegemonic norm to justify dominance and oppression. I especially must avoid the sorts of cultural awareness activities that other or essentialize non-dominant groups or that, absent a commitment to social justice, require dominated groups to make themselves ever more vulnerable for the educational benefit of the privileged.

Shift no. 2: justice first, then conflict resolution

Too often, intercultural educators conflate conflict resolution and peace with justice. When equity and social justice are not in place, peace and conflict resolution merely reify the existing social order. I must not allow intercultural education to become yet another vehicle for the maintenance of order by resolving conflict, meanwhile leaving injustices unresolved.

Shift no. 3: rejecting deficit theory

Any approach to intercultural education that explains inequality by demonizing disenfranchised communities must be abandoned. I must be wary of any supposed intercultural paradigm that, like the 'culture of poverty' myth, attributes values or worldviews to anyone based on one dimension of identity. I must recognize deficit theory as a diversion from the goal of dismantling oppression.

Shift no. 4: transcending the dialogic surface

Like conflict resolution, intercultural dialogue rarely occurs among people with equal access to power. So instead of facilitating such experiences with the false assumption of an even table, I must acknowledge the power imbalances, both individual and systemic, in play. In addition, I must avoid facilitating dialogue experiences in which I expect the least powerful participants to teach their privileged counterparts about oppression. Similarly, I must not focus exclusively on commonalities between the powerful and oppressed, mini- mizing disenfranchisement.

Shift no. 5: acknowledging sociopolitical context

A few years ago I attended a symposium on globalization intended for corporate CEOs and upper-level managers. Between presentations I stood in the hallway with a group of attend- ees as they debated the optimum unemployment level – the optimum, that is, not for secur- ing living wage jobs for all workers, but for maximizing their profits. One attendee argued that 'his people' insisted that 'the current level of unemployment is perfect – just enough to ensure sufficient demand for jobs'. Another attendee explained that 'his people' informed him that a 'half-percentage or so rise in the unemployment rate would help keep wages down and curb workers' bargaining power for better benefits'. I stood, jaw agape, while these men, polished from head to toe, argued over how many of their fellow citizens should be sacrificed to their corporate greed.

Today, as I attend symposia on class and poverty, I find an equally troubling reality: a dominant discourse that, ignoring this sociopolitical context, centers on ending poverty by 'lifting' individual people into the middle class through job skills and education. If I, as an intercultural educator, fail to see how ludicrous such propositions – like the idea that we can end poverty without dismantling a class hierarchy that sustains itself on un- and under- employment – are, then I am doomed, despite good intentions, to doing the bidding of the powerful in the name of intercultural education.

Shift no. 6: 'neutrality' = status quo

People often ask me why I make education so political. Shouldn't I, as an intercultural educator, be more neutral, appreciative of all opinions? But I must remember that I practice colonizing education when I claim or attempt neutrality. In fact, the very act of claiming neutrality is, in and of itself, political, on the side of the status quo. As such, my intercultural work must be explicitly political, against domination and for liberation; against hegemony and for critical consciousness; against marginalization and for justice.

Shift no. 7: accepting a loss of likeability

Practicing decolonizing intercultural education requires that I speak truth to power, chal- lenging hegemony and hierarchy. I cannot undertake these challenges authentically without being disliked by many individuals and most institutions. In fact, I must acknowledge that, as a white, heterosexual, first-language-English-speaking man in the US, I have access to a degree of institutional likeability that most people of color, lesbians and gay men, people who speak first languages other than English, and women, do not enjoy, and that this discrepancy is based on nothing more than unearned privilege. So I, in effect, must be will- ing to 'spend' my likeability, to take on oppression so vigorously that I risk being disliked

by the powerful. If my educational practice is not seen by the powerful as threatening to their dominance, as terrifying to their sense of entitlement and control, then I am not an intercultural educator.

Conclusion

I have not intended in this essay to question the commitments of those of us who refer to ourselves as intercultural educators. To the contrary – much of my analysis begins with my own struggles to abandon the path of least resistance and to choose a more authentic intercultural education.

This analysis has led me to a philosophy of intercultural education that insists, first and foremost, on the establishment and maintenance of an equitable and just world. It has led me, as well, to the conclusion that such a philosophy cannot be achieved through intercultural programs or slight curricular shifts. I cannot effectively enact authentic intercultural education so long as I – in mind and soul – am colonized; so long as I do the bidding of the powerful through well-intentioned, colonizing practice. I begin by liberating myself, determined to deepen my consciousness about the sociopolitical contexts and implications of my practice. And only then – when I can say that my work decolonizes instead of colonizes; that my work challenges hegemony rather than reifying it; that my work transcends prevailing intercultural discourses of cultural awareness, conflict resolution, and celebrating diversity – can I call myself an intercultural educator.

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