BENEATH THE SURFACE: MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS AND DIVERSITY

By
Terri Pipes

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative action thesis is a case study of diverse middle school students' perspectives on educational and social equity at a central coast California school. Its purpose is to open up dialogue, create awareness and bring democratic change that empowers students of all backgrounds to participate freely in their education. Student data revealed a highly segregated social environment that created disrespect and hostility between groups. Certain ethnic groups were perceived to have more status and privilege than others. Multicultural strategies are recommended to assist students in breaking down stereotypes and creating an educational environment that is sensitive to the issues of marginalized students.
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By

Terri Pipes

Approved by the Dean of the Center for Collaborative Education and Professional Studies

Dr. Dorothy M. Lloyd

Date

Approved by the Graduate Advisory Committee

Interim Director, Dr. Patricia Whang

Date

Director, Thesis Advisor, Dr. Christine E. Sleeter

Date

Capstone Advisor, Dr. Linda Rogers

Date
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Bess Hailey. Without her inspiration, advice and support, I would not have been able to complete this project. She was a principal whose words and actions demonstrated her commitment to high academic standards for all children.
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First, I would like to thank my husband for his support, help and encouragement throughout this time. He became both father and mother to our children as he gave up his time to take over my normal responsibilities. I look forward to reconnecting this summer.

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I would also like to thank the students from my Teen Issues Class for their honest contributions and hard work in helping me to gather all the data.

To my dear friends and colleagues, I miss you and thank you for your continual support and questions. Let's go have coffee and chat.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Statement of Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to focus attention on the social environment, and perceptions about equity of a diverse middle school population. This thesis will look at the current educational experiences of students from different backgrounds at Pacific Middle School. It is intended to be an honest picture of what these students are thinking and feeling about their educational environment. By listening to their voices, exposing the issues that lie under the surface, and addressing those issues, we might add to current dialogue, bringing this school and others closer to the ideals of a democratic society.

Description of Site

Pacific Middle School, where I currently teach, is located on the central coast of California, and has a population of 756 students from diverse ethnic groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. It was built back in 1954 on a hill overlooking the bay. At its inception, the school primarily served students from upper and middle class Italian families. Though the real estate and homes surrounding the school have dramatically increased in value, the present boundaries are such that the 756 students come from many diverse local communities with socio-economic backgrounds varying greatly. One hundred and sixty-eight students receive free meals and twenty-five receive meals at a reduced cost.
History

The Declaration of Independence states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The Bill of Rights gave people the rights to speak, to publish, to worship, to petition, to assemble, to be tried fairly, to be secure at home against official intrusion. The Pledge of Allegiance, which children have recited for years, ends with these words: "with liberty and justice for all." Most Americans today would say they believe in these ideals. In fact, many grow up believing that these words are the truth about democracy in the United States.

Our educational institutions have a critical role in educating our students about justice for all. Giroux (1992) asks, "Are schools to uncritically serve and reproduce the existing society or challenge the social order to develop and advance its democratic imperatives?" (p.25). Every day in the United States professional research and our judicial system uncover discrimination in our schools based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual identification, and standardized tests. The personal life experiences of oppressed people uncover this as well.

So many times in both my daily and professional life, I hear people say that the U.S. system of democracy is not perfect, but it's the best thing the world has going right now. As a white teacher and a parent, who is a part of this educational system, I know that many of us are not aware of the ways in which we unconsciously support social stratification within our public schools. We are not aware of how knowledge is suppressed in many children's textbooks. Educational opportunities for all should be
assured in a democratic society, but there has been an inconsistency between democratic ideals and America's educational policies (Myrdal 1944).

From the 1600s through the 1700s schools were privatized and open only to the male elite class. The thinking was that these schools were training the future leaders with an emphasis on the classics, development of the mind and morals. Schools in the 1800s were geared toward the industrial revolution, built on models of education for the elite. Traditional education was standardized with little connection to the real world. Dewey (1902) wrote of the crisis of an educational system where a small percentage actually connect with what they are learning because of social conditions that kept them from realizing their educational interests. Later Paulo Freire (2001) echoed these sentiments when he wrote about the apathy and conformism that education produced by separating learning from real culture.

Public institutions that reflect a society committed to equal access for all was the goal of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI of this federal law declares that no educational institution may receive federal dollars of any kind if that institution discriminates on the basis of race, color, creed or national origin. This Act provided a basis for enforcing the landmark Supreme Court ruling Brown v. the Board of Education, which dismantled the 'separate but equal' doctrine. The Supreme Court's Gault decision (1967) affirmed that students have the same rights as adults under the constitution. Later in 1972, sex discrimination was prohibited in schools through Title IX (of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). Black students throughout the United States began to experience desegregation.
However, these court decisions and acts of Congress have not brought equality and democracy to our schools. For example, the research on African American performance after desegregation indicated that African American students had not significantly improved and might have done just as well if they stayed in the black school (Ladson-Billings 1994). Many of these students felt less connected to the school and did not have good relationships with teachers and peers. Conversely, colleges that primarily served black students demonstrated success in that a higher portion of blacks graduated and went on to graduate school. These colleges have paid particular attention to nurturing black students and making them feel valued. A democratic society can not ignore marginalized students who feel alienated from mainstream education. "Uncovering this alienation is an essential step in the march towards educational equality" (Banks 1999).

The purpose of this thesis is to look at students' perceptions of equity at Pacific Middle School.

Background

My student teaching first brought me in contact with the issues of marginalized cultures and schooling. I was assigned a 6th grade class in Sherman Oaks, a fairly affluent area north of Los Angeles. Because of desegregation laws, inner city African American students took a forty-five minute bus trip to this predominately white school. It was clear from the moment I walked into the classroom and found all the black students on the left side and the whites on the right, that integration was not taking place. The different races were antagonistic to one another. The white master teacher, near a nervous breakdown, told me that I was the answer to her prayers, even though I had never
actually taught before. The class was so out of control that I concentrated on finding a management plan that would work. I am not proud to say that behavior modification (complete with M&Ms) was the system I used to bring some kind of order and calm. I had not received any kind of multicultural training and was hopelessly unaware of the issues these students were grappling with.

A year later I joined an international humanitarian organization that worked in countries throughout the world. As I traveled throughout Europe and the Middle East for the next year, my world expanded. For the first time, I experienced stereotyping and racial discrimination as a white American. Though many people were welcoming, there was a caution and animosity I had never experienced before.

Being an American woman and living in some very male dominated societies, also did much toward sensitizing me to the experiences of marginalized people. Of course, it just scraped the surface, since I could return to my white privileged position in California.

When I got back, I sought a teaching position in Los Angeles and was assigned to Florence Avenue School in South Central. In this 99% Latino school, brand new teacher that I was, I was given the position of bilingual teacher for the 6th grade. Though my aide fortunately spoke fluent Spanish, I did not. I enrolled in Spanish and bilingual education classes and finally began to get some theory about teaching students from marginalized cultures. I had a class that was divided pretty equally with non-English speakers, limited English speakers and fluent English speakers all at different grade levels. The school had a positive climate, teachers of different races, great administration and a lot of support from the community. It still is by far the best school I have ever had the privilege of
teaching in because of the team approach that involved almost everyone (community members, bilingual aides, teachers, administration) in the decision making process.

Because the school population was predominately Latino, the culture of the school was Latino, though curriculum knowledge didn't reflect all points of view. My experience as the bilingual teacher at a public school in the inner city of Los Angeles for two years, gave me an outsider's understanding of another culture's perspectives, issues, conflicts and aspirations. After I got married, we moved to the central coast of California, where I have been teaching for the last eighteen years.

On the first day of ED 620, Proseminar for the Masters of Arts in Education, Fall 1999, at CSUMB; Dr. Christine Sleeter asked the class if discrimination still existed in U.S. schools. I remember thinking that, of course, there were still problems, but that things had gotten a lot better recently. Three years later, through exposure to research and literature written by minorities, I now realize that I am a white teacher who wanted what was best for all my students, but was unaware or in denial of how the United States educational system marginalizes people of color.

Teachers attracted to the Human Relations approach (an approach that fosters positive relationships between social groups and strong identity using Cooperative Learning strategies) generally regard American society at large as fair and open. They view disharmony among students (such as racial name-calling or social segregation on the playground) to be a result of misunderstanding and untrue stereotypes. They believe that providing positive information about groups as well as contact experiences will eliminate such disharmony. (Sleeter 1993, p. 54)
A Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist approach (p.56), where students learn to analyze inequality and oppression in society and develop skills for social action is the ideology behind my thesis.

*Philosophy*

I remember when I was studying for my teaching credential at UCLA, how our professor opened our eyes with her philosophy that the educators were the ones who should be held accountable for their students' academic progress. We should not make excuses or blame the child's background when he/she doesn't understand a concept. We should find new ways to teach the skills and concepts, to engage all children and make what is incomprehensible comprehensible.

No student wants to fail, yet many do and often a variety of factors are cited that 'explain' this failure: lack of motivation, lack of parental involvement, low socio-economic background, ethnicity, learning disability, lack of funds, discipline problem etc. The truth of the matter is that it is our responsibility as educators to find a system that works for all children. We will continue to condemn students to failure if we just blame society and not take responsibility for what we are doing or not doing that is hindering the learning process.

I have been inspired by three education professionals in my goal toward empowering students to achieve. Howard Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligence Theory helps students to identify their natural abilities. Once they recognize their own and each other's talents, the fear and level of concern decrease considerably. Each child begins to know that he/she has value and that there are no 'dumb' children. This lays the foundation
for learning. A variety of teaching strategies that serve the different learners gives students the opportunities to write, collaborate, draw, act, dance, create, read and recite about topics they find meaningful. Once students know they can demonstrate their comprehension in a variety of ways, they are willing to try new things. Jo Beth Allen (1999) started the LEADS, a group that is dedicated to making social justice central to the curriculum. Her stories about teachers who teach students to begin to see the world through multiple perspectives, to analyze the systems of domination and create a society where there is true justice for all has also provided the impetus behind this thesis.

Educating for democracy gives students a chance to realize their potentials and those of others. Christine Sleeter (2001) in her E-book *Culture, Difference and Power* documents the relationship between social status and the level of education a person achieves as an adult. Though many people view schools to be the "great equalizer," basically they reproduce the existing inequitable social structure. From what gets taught in schools to who gets taught what, the system reflects the dominant society's biases and economic hierarchy where 40% of the people are low income or below the poverty level, a disproportionate amount being people of color. It is important to identify the issues that perpetuate this system and find new ways to change this injustice.

*Research Questions*

This project will seek to bring my school community closer to the ideals of social justice in a democratic society by answering the following questions from the students' perspectives and developing a school action plan.

1) To what extent does the school have an environment that promotes caring and respectful relationships?
2) To what extent do all students feel they have an equal opportunity to learn and participate?

3) What do the students think the teachers believe about the educability of the different student groups?

4) How do the students get along and view others from different cultures?

5) Do students from all backgrounds feel valued and treated fairly?

Description of Terms

*Bilingual Teacher:* Teacher who speaks English and the language of the majority of the students, culturally sensitive and trained to teach diverse language learners.

*CORE:* Six grade class of three periods of instruction: Reading, Language Arts, and Social Studies.

*Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:* Teaching that uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings 1994, p.18).

*Curriculum:* Two types: Overt Curriculum: The objectives, textbooks and overall lesson design for a subject area, what teachers plan: Hidden Curriculum: What children learn that isn't planned for such as your place in the social structure of the group (Sleeter MAE 637, 2001).
Marginalized Groups: Kept outside the mainstream, not given fair treatment. They do not have the same opportunities or power as the dominant group.

Elective Star Classes: These are not required classes. Students can choose from a variety of subjects such as drama, music, art etc. They meet once a week for 83 minutes.

Middle School: Usually six to seven periods a day of instruction for sixth, seventh and eighth graders, ages 11-14.

Multicultural Education: Education that includes all perspectives and ethnic groups; a curriculum that has culture and language as a part of its daily routine; anti-racist, empowers marginalized groups.

Constraints and Considerations

Generalizations of the research results to a wider population would be limited by the understanding that my research was done in order to inform action at my specific school site. This research was done at a particular site, and cannot be generalized to any other site. I was gathering data in order to expose an issue and bring about change. I wanted to find out how ethnicity and social grouping affected the educational experiences of our student body. I wanted to free the voices of the subordinate cultures so that we might create an environment that would be more equitable. Being a teacher at this school gives me an insider perspective that was helpful, but subjective. Though I many have been able to have already established the trust of the students, which would enable them to tell their true stories, they might have felt the need to impress me with their answers. I certainly would not be considered an objective source. Since this research was done on the central coast of California, a half suburban/half rural area, any attempt to duplicate the results may show differences, especially if the research were done in more urban area.
Overview of Action Thesis

Current theory and research show that our education system continues to reproduce the inequalities of our society. This issue is just beginning to get the attention it deserves and needs to be addressed further. There is a crucial need to continue to expose this problem through more research. If we are truly committed to the goals of a democratic society, then we must be open to examining how our schools measure up by paying attention and listening to all the students’ voices, not just those of the dominant culture. This research will attempt to take a closer look at one middle school in order to expose the issues that lie under the surface and develop an action plan that might address the inequities. Chapter Two will look at case studies, theories, and thematic conclusions that are a part of the academic discussion of this problem. Chapter Three will delineate the research methodology that was employed for this qualitative study. Data were collected through the use of a survey, interviews and personal observation. Chapter Four will present the results of my data analysis both quantitatively and qualitatively. Chapter Five will present my interpretation of the results. I will separate the findings into identifiable themes and discuss their implications for my school and educational policy. It is my hope that in undertaking this project and sharing my results, my school and others might come closer to bringing about the democratic ideal of equal educational opportunities for all students.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter is organized into five main sections: Education in a Democratic Society, Studies Similar to my Research, Dimensions of Multicultural Education (James Banks 1999), Multicultural Dimensions and the Case Studies, and Multicultural Education Theorists. I have organized it this way in order to help the reader gain a broad understanding of the issues, research and thoughts of various multicultural experts and visionaries in the field. I begin this literature review with a discussion about what education should be in a democratic society, because I believe that an education that is free and equitable for all is a fundamental principal of a government by the people. I chose to review Banks's Multicultural Dimensions in order to give an organizational framework that clearly defines the essential components of an education that includes all students. The four case studies I chose to include have similar multicultural issues to my study. I identify what each researcher's data revealed about the school site using Banks' Dimensions as a way of organizing the themes. In order to give a wider perspective, I expand the literature review to focus on what professionals in the field are saying about multicultural education. I conclude with a brief summary of the major theories that apply to my action project.
Democracy

Democracy: n. 1. A government by the people; esp: rule of the majority: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usu. involving periodically held free elections 2: a political unit that has a democratic government...4 the common people esp. when constituting the source of political authority 5: the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges

Democratic: adj. 1: relating to or favoring democracy 2: relating to one of two major parties. 3: of or relating to, or appealing to the broad masses of the people 4: favoring social equality: not snobbish

(Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 1977)

'What the best and the wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy' (Dewey 1902, p.7).

John Dewey believed that school should be a place where each student and teacher would find 'personal and social well being in their daily activity' (p. 36). The school would be a microcosm of the community where students would fulfill their own potential in a non-competitive environment 'open to the possibilities of the human spirit, not just economic value' (p. 18). His pedagogy emphasized the inclusion of all members of the community, not just a special class, in the education process, a principle of democracy that he held dear. He believed that education should help each member of society reach his/her potential through a spirit of cooperation rather than competition. Motivation for learning in the classroom would not come from a desire to be seen as
better than the others, but rather as a means of reaching a goal that might benefit society as a whole. He advocated for the student to have contact with many people. "The child must be brought into contact with more grown people and more children in order that there may be the freest and richest social life" (p.36). John Dewey's ideals of education in a democracy have not been realized for many students from marginalized cultures in the United States during this last century. Much of what he had to say still pertains to educational theory.

Perhaps the absence of Paulo Freire's ideas from mainstream school conferences, such as The California League of Middle Schools, is a significant factor in this discussion of democracy for all students. Freire's ideas were virtually unknown to me until I began studying Multicultural Education at CSUMB. Not only was he not mentioned during my teacher education work at UCLA in 1979-1980, I had never encountered his theories in the many conferences, inservices and classes I have attended over the last twenty years. His voice was unknown to me until I started hearing it whispered and quoted with reverence mostly by Latino/Latina colleagues in my Multicultural classes at CSUMB. His work addressed discrimination in a hierarchical society, where class status determines treatment. My thesis is about this issue and how students perceive the fairness of their environment.

Freire (1998) believed that we should help students look critically at education so that they can begin to become problem solvers of institutional inequity. Because of his conviction that all education is political and ideological, "a human act of intervening in the world" (p.99), he wrote of a pedagogy that frees students to think about freedom, equality and class. He wrote, "It is equally part of right thinking to reject decidedly any and every
form of discrimination. Preconceptions of race, class, or sex offend the essence of human dignity and constitute a radical negation of democracy" (p. 41). He believed that a society that tolerates dominance by those with wealth and power in all its many vicious forms is not truly a democracy. He wanted students to be aware of and critically reflect on their position in the social structure and what they could do to challenge that structure. He saw education not only as a tool for liberating those who experience oppression, but also as a way of being together (teacher and students) in a community committed to social justice.

I am a teacher who stands up for what is right against what is indecent, who is in favor of freedom against authoritarianism, who is a defender of democracy against the dictatorship of right or left. I am a teacher who favors the permanent struggle against every form of bigotry and against economic domination of individuals and social classes. It's important that students perceive the teacher's struggle to be coherent. And it is necessary that this struggle be the subject of discussion from time to time. There are situations in which the teacher's attitude or practice may appear contradictory to the students. This apparent contradiction usually occurs when the teacher simply exercises authority in coordinating the activities of the class in a way that seems to the students an excess of power. (Pp. 94-95)

I chose my thesis topic and asked questions about equity in education because I wanted to bring the issues of democracy and discrimination to the surface in my school environment. I involved my students because I believe, as Freire did, that as they look critically at their environment, they will find the autonomy to become the problem solvers of institutional inequity" (p. 128).
It was James and Cherry Banks (1997) concerns that first inspired me to take a closer look at the school where I teach. They write: "Maintaining a democratic society and preserving and enlarging freedom require citizens who embrace democratic values and recognize their responsibility to help narrow the gap between real and idealized American values" (p.186). His research and theory has contributed significantly to the dialogue about multicultural education within a democracy. Most Multicultural Education theorists agree that the major goal of Multicultural Education is to restructure schools so that all students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world (Banks 1993a). He believes that the issues of race and discrimination have been silenced in the dialogue about school reform. "Most school reform proposals focus on quality and rarely discuss equality and justice. However, because of the diverse characteristics of the nation’s youth, school reform must address equity as well as quality" (Banks & Banks 1997, p.183).

bell hooks (1994), a writer, professor and Black intellectual writes,

In the last twenty years I have encountered many folks who say they are committed to freedom and justice for all even though the way they live, the values and habits of being they institutionalize daily, in public and private rituals, help maintain the culture of domination, help create an unfree world. (p.27)

She believes that our culture is in denial about racism. She thinks that many teachers do not address these issues for fear of losing control in the classroom and yet the demographics are changing where "whiteness may cease to be the norm ethnicity." In so many ways, students do not feel comfortable talking about the real issues of
marginalization that they confront everyday at school. My action thesis is an attempt to open up this dialogue at my school.

Even though students enter the “democratic” classroom believing they have the right to “free speech,” most students are not comfortable exercising this right to “free speech.” Most students are not comfortable exercising this right—especially if it means they must give voice to thoughts, ideas, feelings that go against the grain, that are unpopular. (hooks, 1994 p.179)

Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant propose a Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist approach, where students learn to analyze inequality and oppression in society while developing skills for social action (Sleeter, 1993, p.56). Sleeter writes:

Why do people continue to regard schools as an equalizer, when for the most part, children end up leaving school to move into their parents’ social class? For the most part, schools don’t scramble people so that there is no relationship between family background, educational attainment, and life chances. (Sleeter, 2001, p.18)

Though we live in a democratic society, where class should not privilege certain groups, our public education system maintains privilege, race and class status. Sleeter cites statistics that show 85% of whites who are twenty-five or above graduated from high school, whereas only 74% of African Americans and 53% of Latinos were able to achieve the same (Sleeter, 2001, Schools as Institutions p.11).

The upper class gets the best schooling, the middle receives average education and the lower class receives remedial or poor schooling. Looking at how income is distributed in the United States shows that 40% of the citizens are low income
or below the poverty line. Yet somehow many whites believe they've eliminated discrimination and that individual merit determines the success of the student.

(Sleeter, 2001, Social Reproduction Theory p.40)

Even back at the beginning of the twentieth century, the highly respected John Dewey was writing about an education that was meaningful to students and inclusive of all. Freire, Banks, hooks and Sleeter have taken this further in that they all share a vision of education that seeks to actively involve students from all cultures and social groups to address institutionalized inequality and bring our society closer to democracy.

Dimensions of Multicultural Education

One way to define Multicultural Education is to explore Banks' (1999) five different dimensions, which can help educators provide a rich curriculum and supportive school environment. The Dimensions of Multicultural Education are "(1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, (5) an empowering school culture and social structure" (p. 14). These are his definitions for each dimension:

1) Content Integration: Content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline.

2) The Knowledge Construction Process: The knowledge construction process relates to the extent to which teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references,
perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it.

3) Prejudice Reduction: This dimension focuses on the characteristics of students' racial attitudes and how teaching methods and materials can modify them.

4) An Equity Pedagogy: An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, and social class groups. This includes using a variety of teaching styles that are consistent with the wide range of learning styles within various cultural and ethnic groups.

5) An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure: Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation, disproportionality in achievement, and the interaction of the staff and the students across ethnic and racial lines are among the components of the school culture that must be examined to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

I am using this framework to organize the analysis of the case studies in the rest of this chapter.
Case Studies

I chose four ethnographic studies that had similar multicultural issues to my study. The secondary students in each study were from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds; there was social stratification in their school environments and openness by administrators to investigating the students' perceptions. The researchers studied school environments in order to determine how the schools' pedagogies affected achievement and social structure. After I describe the studies and the findings, I will organize the themes using Banks' Dimensions of Multicultural Education.

Making and Molding Identity in Schools
Case Study #1.

Ann Locke Davidson (1996) focused her research on how five school factors--tracking, negative expectations, differential treatment of social groups, bureaucratized relationships and practices, and barriers to information--contributed to students' sense of identity and academic involvement. She investigated what role the school and classroom played in shaping the meaning students brought with them. The study included students from four major racial and social groups (African American, European American, Latino, and Vietnamese) with varying degrees of academic achievement from four California high schools. This research took over three years of ethnographic investigation with fifty-five students, twelve of whom were selected for in-depth case studies.

She discovered that though many groups still defined themselves by social identity, students were in conflict because they felt that a loss of their own cultural identity was necessary in order to succeed. When the school culture was in conflict with the home culture, a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness ensued, further alienating the students of diverse cultures. Oppositional identities were molded by the
schools' discipline technologies, since there was a much higher rate of suspensions and referrals amongst minority groups. She found that the school culture created a sense of inferiority in students who did not speak English as a first language, because linguistic status was used as a way to segregate or track. The institutional message was to conform to European American ideals in order to be successful; democratic principles of independence, risk taking, questioning authority were discouraged. Course content reinforced social boundaries and European American identity since textbooks presented knowledge from a Western traditionalist perspective. Contributions from the different ethnic groups to literature, history, science etc. were not validated, which served to further marginalize those members of the subordinate culture. Advanced courses were more challenging and provided important cultural capital about college and tests which minority students were not privy to. She found that minority students wanted to know about entrance exams, school loans, and colleges but had to work hard to get answers. The social mobility that a democratic education is purported to create was seriously undermined.

*Just Girls*
*Case Study #2.*

Margaret Finders' (1997) focus was the role of literacy in social development at a midwest junior high school with a strong language arts program. She researched the girls from two social groups, The "Queen" (middle class) and The "Cookies" (working class) and found diverse literate practices of which the teachers were unaware. She identified a literate underlife that created social boundaries and formed the identities of the junior high girls. Literature such as yearbooks, notes, graffiti, teen magazines, novels, short stories and journals all played a role in forming group and individual identity. The
magazines that the students were reading for pleasure reinforced popular stereotypes of women as sex objects. The yearbook further isolated the working class girls, since the pictures were predominantly of the popular students. Cooperative Learning Groups and student centered literacy were pedagogical practices common in many classrooms. Though teachers were trying to connect the students meaningfully to the curriculum, Finders wondered if this pedagogy privileged those who were the most comfortable in the classroom and school. Also cooperative groups seemed to value "niceness" and cooperation over independence. Already separated from mainstream campus life, the lower socioeconomic group was silenced with this pedagogy. It also seemed to favor students who were social and more confident sharing their work with their peer groups (the Queens), whereas if it had been combined with other teaching strategies, groups such as the "Cookies" might have benefited. Social barriers and learning styles needed to be taken into consideration more.

After the School Bell Rings
Case Study #3

Carl Grant and Christine Sleeter (1996) studied the educational experiences of junior high students at Five Bridges Junior High. Located in a mid-western city of working class parents, these students were of mixed racial backgrounds and educational ability. The school's goals were twofold. 1) Provide a Multicultural Educational Program where diverse students had equal access to all subject matter. 2) To raise math and reading scores.

Grant and Sleeter found that although race, class, gender or ability did not track students, they were also not challenged to raise their achievement and realize their dreams. Most teaching involved rote learning rather than high level thinking skills, and
little was done to incorporate multicultural perspective and knowledge in the different subject areas. Low expectations and a lack of sensitivity to learning styles helped to maintain the status quo of the community. All students were taught as if they were on the low track. Though students developed relationships with people from different groups, they were not made aware of the oppression that existed both inside and outside their culture. This school helped to reproduce structural inequality by continuing the legitimization of the dominance of the white high economic class. The students were not taught to become politically aware citizens of a democratic society. They were not made aware of prejudice and discrimination within their community or outside of it. Since they were not asked to think critically about society, many of them just accepted the way things were. Because Grant and Sleeter were able to follow the students to graduation from high school, they found that that their social status was reproduced, since most were content to live in the community and remain middle class.

*Through Students' Eyes*  
*Case Study #4.*

Karen Donaldson (1996) asked the questions: How do students perceive racism and its effects on learning and development? Can a Multicultural Arts curriculum empower students to address racism? Since very little research had been done in this area, she focused her attention on students' perceptions of racism in a large urban school system in the New England area. The school district had experienced a lot of racist incidents, and there had been media exposure about high percentages of students of color being suspended. Teachers had been reluctant to address racism and other forms of discrimination. Surveys indicated that many students felt there was a high degree of
racism in their schools. Racism had come out in the open and the community was ready to address this issue.

"The High School Project" began with a task force of secondary students who gathered to address the topics of Multicultural education, racial sensitivity (student to student, staff to student), the student community and to develop an antiracist/multicultural arts project. They created a play, which presented the history of the settlement of North America through the perspectives of marginalized cultures. The students performed a reenactment of forced migration to the U.S. and afterwards created a survey about the play and their teachers' curriculum. They found that many of the students perceived their teachers as having more racist attitudes than the students have, and that there was a positive response about their project. Through the use of qualitative interviews with students and focus groups, the students then helped to develop multicultural curricula. This intervention was successful in that it created dialogue and change that brought a school closer to multicultural ideals. She tapped into different learning styles through the use of drama, art and discussion. The need for more teacher/staff development in antiracist education was emphasized along with continuing to raise the level of awareness.

A Synthesis of The Studies Using Multicultural Dimensions

I will be using the Multicultural Dimensions of James Banks, but I have combined the first two dimensions into one category because I believe that "Content Integration," which represents multiple perspectives can be combined with the idea of "Knowledge Construction," which emphasizes point of view and bias. I have created a table which will
show what dimensions were missing from the schools' pedagogies. An "X" in the square means the school in this study was missing this multicultural component.

**Case Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Davidson #1</th>
<th>Finders #2</th>
<th>Grant/Sleeter #3</th>
<th>Donaldson* #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Integration/</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice Reduction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity Pedagogy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering School</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Social Struc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Before Donaldson introduced her action plan, these factors were missing from this school too.

Each study is enlightening in revealing how public education falls short in providing education that is truly multicultural. In the first three case studies, the researchers discovered that the classroom instructional content was slanted towards a Western European perspective and did not address different cultural perspectives of the students, nor was there any instruction on how the perspective of the writer influences the knowledge that is presented to the learner. Donaldson sought to remedy this situation by bringing in a multicultural interpretation of U.S. history. Prejudice Reduction was not viewed as an important need in any of the school sites in the first three case studies, and perhaps would not have been considered at Donaldson's school if the media hadn't exposed the problem. An Equity Pedagogy was completely lacking at the first school; in the second school there was some attempt with cooperative learning strategies, but not enough variation with other teaching styles. The third school did not allow students to critically analyze oppression and thus reproduced the existing social structure in the
community. By incorporating students from different backgrounds into developing a Multicultural Arts curriculum, Donaldson helped them down the road towards academic achievement. An Empowering School Culture was lacking in the first school due to the way they were tracked by linguistic ability and given different treatment. In the second case study the school simply reinforced the dominant social group through the yearbook and not finding ways to connect the lower class to mainstream campus life. The third case study shows an apparent lack of concern by the majority of the teachers to help students become social mobile. The fourth case study shows how an intervention such as the High School Project can empower students to become engaged in learning.

Fortunately the findings were presented to the school sites, which would have begun to open up dialogue about Multicultural Education, so that the schools could begin to address the problems. Exposing the inequities was a good first step to creating a school environment that embraces all students. In fact, Grant and Sleeter suggested that some possible solutions to the problems at the school site they investigated would be: recruit better teachers and train them to help students see the world through various cultural perspectives, teach with a multicultural perspective and impart high status knowledge, use a more constructivist approach and provide opportunities for critical thinking, engage the students in curriculum that is meaningful to them, and encourage political involvement and responsible citizenship. These are some ideas we might be able to try at my school site in the future.
Theory and Theorists: Multicultural Education

I selected the theories and theorists that follow because they address the complex issue of multicultural education for diverse groups. I have divided the ideas into same four dimensions.

Knowledge Construction and Content Integration

Knowledge Construction (how perceptions and bias determine what students are taught) and Content Integration (using material that represents a variety of cultures) are important components to Multicultural Education. Dewey envisioned an education that would be meaningful and practical to all students, one that would engage the child's culture. "If we were to introduce into the educational processes the activities which appeal to those whose dominant interest is to do and to make, we should find the hold of the school upon its members to be more vital, more prolonged, containing more culture" (Dewey 1902, p.28).

He deplored the factory, assembly line methods of traditional education and advocated for a child-centered pedagogy, a pedagogy that renounced passive learning and sought to engage the child's interests curiosity, ability and talents. He believed in an education that would connect the child's culture with the world he/she lived in. "Literally we must take our stand with the child and our departure from him"(p.187).

Banks (1993b) believes that an education that allows students to understand that all knowledge is biased will help students to begin to appreciate the diversity of our community and its different points of view. Helping students understand how knowledge is created and how it is "influenced by the racial, ethnic and social-class positions of individuals and groups is an important component of good multicultural education"(p.4)
Many students do not understand that all knowledge is biased and must begin to ask the questions about how it is constructed, whose point of view is being reflected and why. ‘Beginning to realize that history has many diverse points of view will go a long way toward helping students develop understanding and tolerance of different ethnic groups’ (p.19).

Sleeter (2001) emphasizes that what gets taught in schools and what does not is important to the discussion. She questions which students get taught a rich curriculum that will enable college entrance and which students get a watered down version. She and her colleague, Carl Grant, have spent much time analyzing forty-two commonly used textbooks for multiple perspectives and found them woefully lacking. All of the textbooks were framed with a predominantly European perspective: black history only went as far back as slavery, Native American issues were of the past and Latinos weren’t visible.

Publishing companies today scrupulously count how many pictures and references are included for different racial groups, so that groups are included roughly in proportion to their representation in the population as a whole. This means that whites predominate consistently, receiving the most attention and being shown in the widest variation of roles. Numerically, African Americans are the next most represented group. Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are included in very sketchy form. In history the backbone of the storyline features white people and tends to flow from the East Coast to the West Coast. (p.4 Knowledge and Ideology)
They discovered that most curricula make racism, sexism, and classism issues of the past. It is no wonder that students remain confused about issues of equity in the schools. When the majority of their classroom time is spent studying textbooks that maintain the dominant viewpoints, students are not given the true multicultural picture. The curriculum is also not relevant to their real experience. Since white students see themselves in a wide variety of roles, historically connected and developing the various disciplines, they usually do not see this representation as a problem unless someone points out how much has been left out. Many students of color, however, do see the curriculum as a problem; especially the older they get. "Students are probably more affected by how teachers treat them than they are by what is in their textbooks, but a combination of negative treatment by teachers and sketchy attention in curricula sends a message that many students interpret as meaning that schools are for white students" (p. 15, Knowledge and Ideology).

When students receive an education that helps them to see multiple perspectives, they will begin to understand other groups' experiences. This will open their minds to the problem of educational inequity and help to break down social barriers. This pedagogy provides one solution to how we can help students get along and value students from different cultures and backgrounds.

*Prejudice Reduction*

Prejudice Reduction refers to the ways that education and materials can influence student attitudes toward others. According to Allport (1958), there are many reasons why people become prejudiced towards other groups. One reason people become prejudiced against one another is due to previous historical relations. Another idea is that
urban life has become so stressful that people start to dehumanize others. A psychological approach would say that it is a part of human nature to discriminate, and it may relieve stress from personal frustration. Then there are also people who judge other cultures in relationship to their values, which makes them feel superior.

It holds that all groups (whether in-groups or reference groups) develop a way of living with the characteristic codes and beliefs, standards and "enemies" to suit their own adaptive needs. The theory holds also that both gross and subtle pressures keep every individual member in line (p. 38).

Finally, some theorists believe that fear of others who are different plays a role in creating prejudice. Since there is more comfort and pride in being with one's own culture group, separatism is a natural response. Allport (1958) believed that certain historical conditions produce more prejudice. Heterogeneity, vertical mobility, rapid social change, ignorance and barriers to communication, the size of the minority group is increasing, direct competition, exploitation that sustains certain interests in the community, bigotry is tolerated, ethnocentrism is justified, and assimilation or cultural pluralism is not in favor. These are the very conditions of our society today, but education can do a lot to address the social and psychological causes of prejudice.

Research indicates that having more acquaintance with different groups helps to reduce prejudice. Students were asked to indicate whether they were personally acquainted with at least five individuals belonging to the groups rated. "There was a uniform tendency to rate higher in the scale of acceptability all groups in which they had five or more acquaintances. Where there was no personal knowledge of a group, it suffered in esteem." (p. 253) Allport reported that effective school environments would
have these characteristics in common: a sense of equality in social status, occurrences in
ordinary purposeful pursuits, lack of artificiality, the sanction of the community, and
participants that regard themselves as a part of the team. He felt that schools that only
teach about group difference are usually not very successful.

Banks (1999) identified four intervention studies that have helped reduce
prejudice in children. They are laboratory reinforcement studies, perceptual
differentiation studies, curricular intervention studies and Cooperative Learning studies.
A laboratory study by Williams and Edwards (1969) demonstrated that when children
were given picture of white horses and brown horses and given positive reinforcement
when they chose positive adjectives for the brown horses, white bias was reduced. Katz
and Zalk (1978) found that when children were given help in physically differentiating
between faces of members of the same "but group," prejudice was reduced. Banks believes
that in order to create a caring community within the classroom a "superordinate" group
must be created. A superordinate group is a group that all students in the classroom
would belong to and identify with.

If you have a bilingual classroom and only the Mexican American students are
speaking Spanish, this tends to intensify in-group versus out-group identity. If, on
the other hand, both White and Mexican American students learn Spanish, it
becomes the basis for creating a superordinate group. This may sound
contradictory, on the one hand we want to help people accept their differences. On
the other hand, we need to create community and a superordinate group to which
all students belong (Banks 1999, p. 94).
Trager and Yarrow (1952) found that when children were taught with a democratic, Multicultural Curriculum, they developed more positive racial attitudes. Banks (1999) cites Allport (1958) on the effectiveness of using Cooperative Learning activities where students share equal status, have shared goals and the strategy is approved by adults the children respect. These ideas motivated me to survey the students about their attitudes toward cooperative learning. Cooperative Learning will also be discussed in the Equity Pedagogy section of this thesis.

Understanding that prejudice can be within a group of people as well as without, helps teachers to be more sensitive to what students may be experiencing. Sometimes outsiders use one category to describe an ethnic group when there are really many sub categories that represent them. Understanding intragroup differences helps reduce prejudice. Eugenia Mutute-Bianchi (1986) in her study of successful Mexican immigrant students and unsuccessful nonimmigrant Chicano students at a high school in central California identified five major categories of students: 1) Recent Mexican immigrants, 2) Mexican-orientated, 3) Mexican-American, 4) Chicano and 5) Cholo. She found that social identification, language usage and dress were distinct markers of difference amongst these groups. Recent immigrants were monolingual in Spanish and dressed differently from the rest of the student body. Students who had lived most of their lives in the U.S. were mainly bilingual and had a strong sense of identity with their Mexican families. The first generation Mexican-American students were strongly acculturated, using mainly English. Students from the Chicano group were second generation and tended to rebel against school culture and successful academics.
They often derisively describe academically successful Mexican-descent students—that is, those students who attend classes regularly, are frequently seen carrying books around the campus, and abide by the school rules—a "schoolboys" or "schoolgirls." Another term used by these students to distinguish themselves from more Americanized students of Mexican descent is "Wannabe," which is understood as meaning "wants to be white" or "wants to be Anglo" (p. 240). The Cholo group took on some of the dress of popular culture, but formed gangs to maintain a sense of their identity.

The Chicanos and Cholo groups oppose school culture because it conflicts with their sense of identity. This is a result of historical oppression, discrimination and structured inequality. Teachers contribute to this isolation through stereotyping and using a curriculum that isolates their experience.

There is also great diversity amongst the Latinos/Latinas at my school site. Awareness of how identity is constructed helped me in the selection process of my interview participants of Mexican background in that I tried to make sure that intragroup differences were represented. Identity construction was also helpful in analyzing the data and developing an action plan.

To be able to implement prejudice reduction, teachers need to be aware of what causes prejudice, and be sensitive to the different stereotypes that exist within and outside of each ethnic group.

*Equity Pedagogy*

Equity Pedagogy is about using classroom instruction that empowers all students, of all classes, races and social backgrounds. For years some educational theorists promoted the idea that a student's ethnic background put them at an advantage or
disadvantage for successful education. Banks (1993a) calls this the "cultural deprivation theory." Students who are middle class or above are believed to have obtained culture, while those who come from lower status are without. Banks argues that we need to look at how the school environment conflicts with the culture and not the other way around. Banks notes that attention to social class background is also necessary (p.16). If we are to look at cultural difference theory, we must also pay attention to diverse learning styles. It is the school's responsibility and duty as a social institution to establish a culture that is sensitive to diverse learning groups. Banks believes in the importance of Cooperative Learning groups that are assigned equal-status roles before they are given group tasks. Social studies educators who believe that equal participation and cooperation by diverse groups in society is a critical goal of citizenship education, can teach this value if they accept the challenge of teaching heterogeneously grouped classes.

Elizabeth Cohen (1986) researched the interplay of status and learning in the middle-school classroom. She found that students who are perceived to have higher status were more active participants in Cooperative Learning groups. Status could come from race, class, ethnicity, academic ability, peer interaction or gender. She discovered that teachers who look for competence in low status students and communicate these expectations with the students could increase participation of low status students. She believes in the kind of instruction that changes the classroom social structure so that each student has the opportunity to participate using individual learning styles and abilities. Teachers can structure learning so those students from a variety of backgrounds can use their experiences and talents. Problem-solving activities, creative and inventive thinking, and multimedia are all ways to tap into the multiple abilities of the students.
The notion of multiple abilities is central to complex instruction and crucial for successful status treatments. It sets the stage for changing the teacher's and the students' expectations for competence and their view of what it is to be 'smart' in a complex instruction classroom. Multiple-ability tasks are in stark contrast to most traditional classroom tasks for which students use a narrow range of intellectual abilities such as listening to lectures, reading textbooks, highlighting key passages and sentences, memorizing information, or filling in blanks (p. 110).

An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure

This kind of framework gives students of diverse backgrounds the opportunities to participate equally in the educational environment. Paulo Freire (1998) espoused a pedagogy that involved the child's participation, thinking, and heart. An education that was connected to the reality of the world he/she was situated in. He believed that education should raise consciousness about the problems society faces. "One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (Freire 2001, p.67).

In addition, he was highly critical of the narrative structure of the student teacher relationship where students were the 'containers' and the teachers the 'depositors' of knowledge. "The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire 2001, p.69). Freire, like Dewey, believed that what students were studying and learning should apply directly to their real lives. Freire's vision was more revolutionary though, because the change he envisioned would help
students to think critically about structural injustice, ultimately leading them to become change agents.

bell hooks also advocates meaningful instruction through a Pedagogy of Equity. As a child, her early education had much more significance to her because she was in a racially segregated school where her experiences as a black student were central to the curriculum. "Almost all of our teachers at Booker T. Washington were black women. They were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers—black folk who use our minds" (hooks 1994, p.2).

And when she entered the desegregated school...

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved...Bussed to white schools, we soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us. (p. 3)

When she entered college, she was inspired by Freire and others to see education as the practice of freedom. She knew she must enter each classroom as an active learner and not just a consumer of knowledge. "What we all ideally share is the desire to learn to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world" (p. 40). An education that is meaningful to all, regardless of race or social group, is an equitable education. This provides part of the solution to the problem my thesis addresses.
Riane Eisler (2000) raises questions about authoritarian structured society. She believes we must change education for tomorrow’s children by laying the foundations for a partnership rather than a dominator world. A partnership model would be one that emphasizes egalitarian structures that can be found in some ancient societies. There would be mutual honor, respect and equal value of males and females. A partnership model is based on caring and nonviolent relationships, whereas a dominator model is based on an authoritarian structure of fear and violence.

I passionately believe that if we give a substantial number of today’s children the nurturance and education that enable them to live and work in the equitable, nonviolent, gender-fair, environmentally conscious caring, and creative ways that characterize partnership rather than dominator relations, they will be able to make enough changes in beliefs and institutions to support this way of relating in all spheres of life. They will also be able to give their children the nurturance and education that make the difference between realizing, or stunting, our great human potential. (Eisler 2000, p. 7)

The governance of a school institution that values a partnership model would be open to students, faculty and the community. This would give the students experience in democracy and leadership, where they would be members of a hierarchy that inspires actualization rather than fear and respects the diversity of all its members.

Banks (1999) has emphasized certain areas that need to be examined such group practices, labeling practices, curriculum, the social climate of the school, staff expectations and parent participation. School culture is key in this transformation process. “Characteristics such as collaboration between teachers, parents and
administrators, a positive belief system which puts forth the idea that all children can learn, and accountability were shown to make a difference" (Banks 1999, p. 18). "In a pluralistic society, educators must not only educate the mind, they must also educate the heart and create a sense of hope, commitment, and possibility among young people. They must teach students to know and to care, as well as to act" (Banks & Banks 1997, p.186).

**Conclusion**

I believe that by uncovering the dilemmas of racism, classism, and sexism at my school, we are on the road toward "social transformation, rooted in the belief in a radically democratic idea of freedom and justice for all" (hooks 1994, p.26).

I believe is important to listen to the voices of the students from diverse groups. If in fact the dream that inspires us is democratic and grounded in solidarity, it will not be by talking to others from on high as if we were inventors of the truth that we will learn to speak with them. Only the person who listens patiently and critically is able to speak with the others even if at times it should be necessary to speak to him or her. (Freire 1998, p.110)

The goal of my action thesis is to help teachers and students to talk about the problems of educational inequity and to empower marginalized students as their issues become more central to the curriculum. I hope this opens the door to creating a more multicultural pedagogy at Pacific Middle School that reflects the values of a democratic society.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Type of Study

This is a qualitative descriptive case study designed for the purpose of creating change at Pacific Middle School, a school of 756 diverse students, located on the central California coast. I followed the traditional qualitative research approach by presenting a problem, asking questions, analyzing the data and answering the questions (Creswell 1997). In chapter One, I presented the problem of educational equity at my school site. I created five overarching questions that would help me to clarify what I wanted to know from the students' perspectives. I collected multiple forms of data through the use of a survey, interviews and personal observations. My data analysis moved from the particular answers to general themes. The ontological assumption (the researcher's reality informs the research) guided me because I believe that the realities we see are based on who we are, our role in the situation and our past history.

The ontological issue addresses the nature of reality for the qualitative researcher; individuals involved in the research situations construct reality. Thus multiple realities exist, such as the realities of the researcher, those of individuals being investigated and those of the readers or audience interpreting a study. (Creswell 1997, p.76)

The interviews, surveys and observations gave me a variety of perspectives on the problem; the knowledge I gained from the participants was useful in understanding multiple perspectives of students from different ethnic, gender and social groups and in creating an emancipatory action plan. "Academics and workers in participatory action
research are joined by a thematic concern, that is a commitment to inform and improve a particular practice (McTaggart 1997, p.30).

This particular inquiry and research design was useful to me because I am a teacher who has a desire to improve the quality of education for all students from marginalized groups at this school site. I wanted to look at this issue in order to be more informed on how diverse students experience education. The data analysis has sensitized me to the ways different groups experience education in my school environment and informed my practice. I will be sharing the findings of my action project with the principal, my colleagues and students from my Teen Issues class; we will collaborate together in order to create a more multicultural environment at Pacific Middle School.

Setting

This research project took place in a semi rural/urban city of great ethnic and economic diversity on the central coast of California. The major industries in this area are tourism, agriculture and fishing. Pacific Middle School is located in a city that has a population of 27,722, and is well known for its golf courses, hotels, restaurants and views. A look at the Real Estate section in the local paper, The Herald, reveals that houses in the area surrounding the school site have starting prices of $500,000 and can go up to the multi-million dollar range.

The 2000 Census indicates that California has the following ethnic make up: White 47%, Black 6%, Hispanic 32 %, Asian 11%, two or more races 3%, other race .2% and Pacific Islander .3%. The county population is 401,762. Table #1 gives the specific percentages for each ethnic group in the county and throughout the state. This table gives
a clear picture of state demographics as they compare to those of the county of my school site.

Table #1: County and State Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>County</th>
<th>California</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population, 2000</td>
<td>401,762</td>
<td>33,871,648</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>White persons, percent, 2000</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black or African American persons, percent 2000</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native persons, Percent, 2000</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian persons, percent 2000</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent 2000</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons reporting some other race, percent, 2000</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2000</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2000</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2000</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Nelson 2001, p. 53)

The county has a higher percentage of Latinos, a somewhat lower percentage of Asians and Whites. The other percentages are about the same.

The school site where the research took place is a part of a large district of 12,363 students, which includes six cities. Fifty-six percent of the 756 students who attend Pacific Middle come from the city of the school site; forty-four percent are mainly from the neighboring cities. Ninety-two percent of the students use district bus transportation to get to school. One hundred and sixty-eight students receive free meals and twenty-five
receive meals at a reduced cost. Socio-economic background varies greatly. Table #2 shows the demographics of the school site compared to those of the entire district at the time of this study. These data were collected from the school district's records.

*Table #2: Pacific Middle and School District Population*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>% of Students (Pacific Middle)</th>
<th>% of Students (School District)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian, Alaska Native</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student population at Pacific Middle School is less diverse than that of the entire school district. Whites have a much higher percentage than other groups, however, there are many students from foreign countries who are counted in the Other White category because of the military academies in the area. School attendance estimates that about 3% of our student population come from countries other than Mexico and Latin America. Asian percentages are about the same as the district, but Latino and Black are significantly smaller. The certificated staff is predominantly White. Class sizes average about twenty-nine students.
Research Participants and/Subjects

I chose the school site where I work because of its diverse student population and my concern that students from different backgrounds might feel alienated from the mainstream. Having studied Multicultural Education for the last three years, I felt it was time to apply what I've learned at my school site. The entire student body received a survey and approximately eighty-five percent returned them. Fifteen students from different backgrounds and social groups were interviewed in depth. I personally interviewed one Asian female, one Greek female, one Yugoslavian female, two White males, one White female, two Black males, one Black female, two Latino males, two Latino females, one Pacific Islander male and one Filipino female. These students had indicated on their surveys that they would like to be interviewed about the questions. Students from my Teen Issues class also participated in writing the survey questions and giving their interpretations of the data from the survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

First I discussed with the principal the need to look at how our students perceive their school environment, racism, social interaction and equity, and received permission to conduct a study. Students from my Teen Issues class studied and discussed racism, inequalities, prejudice and stereotyping in society. These eighteen middle school students from diverse backgrounds helped me to write the questionnaire and analyze its strengths and weaknesses. We wrote eighteen questions that would give us a quantitative understanding of how students at the school perceived the school environment, race issues, social interaction and educational equity. Students could mark the following
choices to express their feelings about the questions: Strongly agree, Agree, Not sure, Strongly disagree, Disagree. A copy of this survey is in Appendix A. There was a place on the survey where students could write their names if they wanted to be interviewed about their answers. Permission letters in Spanish and English were given to every student to take home to their parents. A week later, my students delivered the voluntary survey to every class at the school and assisted the teachers in explaining the questions. The following day, my students collected the completed surveys from the classrooms which accounts for the high rate of return, and we tabulated the results. These quantitative results from the survey will be shared in Chapter Four.

For the qualitative part of the research, the Teen Issues class discussed certain themes and patterns that emerged from the survey results. The students helped me to understand their perspectives about the different answers. Their opinions will also be shared in Chapter Four. For a more in depth qualitative understanding of the issues, we chose 15 students, representing diverse groups of students, from the 60 who indicated on their surveys that they wanted to be personally interviewed. Permission letters were sent to these students' parents and collected. We looked at individual student responses in order to develop questions for the personal interviews. I set up personal one-on-one informal interviews that were to take place during school in a private classroom. I asked these students what they thought of the survey results. These interviews lasted between fifteen to forty five minutes and were only conducted by me; my Teen Issues class was not involved in the interviewing process for reasons of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were given to the interviewees. I was able to take time away from my classroom to interview the students because I had a student teacher during this time.
Next I analyzed the data from the interviews in order to determine which areas were of the biggest concern to the students and how they perceived the different situations of inequity. I used Cresswell's (1998) analysis strategies: 1) I did a general review of all the data, 2) I wrote reflective notes, 3) I went back to interview participants for clarification, 4) I looked at words and metaphors, 5) I reduced the data into categories and codes. (p.140) Then I used Banks' (1999) Multicultural Dimensions to organize the themes along with my own insights and interpretations. Triangulation was used through the use of multiple sources of information: the survey, the class discussion and the interviews. An analysis of the data helped me to identify areas of need, such as Prejudice Reduction, which the school could focus on using multicultural principles from Chapter Two.
Chapter Four

Data Results and Analysis

The results in this chapter came from informal discussions with the 18 students in my Teen Issues class, the 650 surveys that were returned and tabulated, and the interviews with 15 students from diverse groups at Pacific Middle School. First, we studied and discussed issues of prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping within society and at school. Then we wrote the survey questions for our school site. After we distributed the surveys and collected them, we tabulated and discussed the results. Then we chose the students to be interviewed about the results of the survey. The percentages for each question have been represented in pie graphs with the synthesized data from the student interviews and class discussions below them. A conclusion for the student responses has been given after the pie graph and interview synthesis.

Student Data

The survey was designed so that the students could mark the appropriate space for their opinions about each of the 18 statements. The survey response categories were strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree. The following 18 pie graphs will show the results for each of the survey statements. The survey questions have been organized into four major topics. After each group of statements and corresponding tables, student analysis from my Teen Issues class discussion and data from personal interviews are presented.
General Treatment of Students within the School

In my school, all students are treated the same. (1)

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that almost half of the students disagreed with this statement, while 19% weren’t sure and only a third agreed.

This was a significant finding and I asked the students what they thought about it. In the interviews the students indicated that there was not a problem with how the teachers treated the students, but rather how the students treated each other. Almost
every student mentioned that the “popular students” were the ones who discriminated against the others. Here are some of the comments: “They band together and exclude others.” “They have a certain table in the middle of the cafeteria and no one can sit there but them.” “They’re meaner.” “Most of them are Italian and they’re related to each other.” “If you’re ‘geeky,’ have a ‘rollie’ backpack, glasses, different clothes, they say ‘get away from me.’” “They’ll kick your backpack or trip it.” “They have the power to kick you out.” There were a few students who agreed with the statement, here are some of their comments: “They don’t do nothing to me…to what I got…I’ll kick their asses. I don’t hang with them.” “Everyone has their own group.”

Class discussions about this statement were rather heated since some students in the class identified themselves with the “popular group.” Those who identified themselves as popular were quite indignant when they heard negative comments about themselves. A few of their responses were: “We’re just a group of friends who like to hang out together.” “They talk about us too.” “Everybody has their own group.” “So what?”

The survey showed that the majority of students didn’t think they were treated fairly by other students, and interviews and class discussion showed that the majority of students had a lot of negative feelings about how different social groups treated them.
My school is a place where all students feel cared for and respected. (2)

1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Not Sure   4 = Disagree   5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that the students were somewhat divided about this statement, but more had a negative response, while almost a third indicated they weren't sure.

The interviews showed that most of the students felt that others did not respect them. The interviewees often mentioned how students were divided into many different social groups and that there was a feeling of animosity between the groups. Social groups that were often mentioned were the "preps" (popular group), North City Cool
Kids (Black), South City Cool Kids (White), Skaters, Mexicans, Fijis, Drama, Music, Geeks or Dorks, Jocks, Goths, Library group, Stair Group, Nice Kids, BMXers (bikers), and the Nobody Group. Groups identified themselves through interests, music and the clothes they wore. For instance, the popular group was generally seen as athletic; the boys had bleached hair, "sagged" and wore "clean, clean shoes," while the girls wore tight up-to-date sexy clothes and nail polish. Those in the library group and the "dork" group were considered smart, but dressed weird. Students indicated that the popular kids were against all groups. "They think they’re all cool and can get away with anything. They’re jerky to the little ones, won’t do a favor, they ignore you, call you names, we’re enemies." "They don’t care about anyone." Some indicated there was a problem with the eighth graders being mean to the younger students. A Latino boy said, "I’ve been picked on by the eighth graders." A girl who indicated she was part of the popular group said matter-of-factly, "I disagree with the statement because I don’t treat everyone the same, I like some people so I treat them nice, and some people I don’t like… I’m not nice to." The South City cool kids were often mentioned as being difficult and mean as were the BMXers. "The South City girls don’t like the preppies." Some of the students indicated that they had friends in many of the groups or could be part of more than one group. An African-American boy said, "Everyone likes their own certain things. I get along because I have a good sense of humor. I’m accepted." Each group had its own territory at the school. The cafeteria seemed to be the place where the popular students ate lunch and other students from different groups mentioned being kicked out by them. One Asian girl said, "Let’s just say that if you try to go into the cafeteria there won’t be such warm greetings." One table in the cafeteria was considered
the "Nobody Group" table however. The Latinos ("Mexicans") sit outside the cafeteria.

There was a general consensus that most groups made fun of each other and rumors were a problem. A Latina said, "People make fun of how you look and talk, what you wear, what music you listen to...girls who think they're popular are clueless in their pink clothes...I don't let them get to me...I'll say excuse me, this is our table stupid."

An African American girl said, "I don't feel respected here. I totally want to leave...I don't feel comfortable...most people aren't nice...2 out of 24 are nice."

Class discussion brought out the same kinds of responses, but students were a little more diplomatic. One popular boy said, "I strongly agree with the statement because no one doesn't want to be cared for." Another said, "I marked 'Not Sure' because I don't know how everyone else feels." A girl from the "nice group" said, I strongly disagree because some kids and some teachers get "slammed" (insulted).

To summarize, the survey revealed that one third of the students felt cared for while interviews and class discussion showed that the majority of students experience a lot of disrespect between the groups.
At my school all students get along and treat each other with respect. (4)

The survey showed that a large majority (67%) did not agree with this statement, while one sixth weren’t sure and a small minority agreed.

Since this question was similar to #1 and #2, I found that most of the interviewees had already discussed their feelings about this, which I reported earlier.

Class discussion showed that the students felt that many students were mean to each other. “Kids get in fights and cuss at each other.” “People are arrogant and self-
centered: "People get beat up." One diplomat boy said, "Some people decide to be respectful and some don't."

The survey, interviews and class discussion revealed that most students did not believe they got along and treated each other with respect.

**Summary of Results for Questions about General Treatment of Students within the School**

The majority didn't think they were treated fairly by other students and they saw a lot of disrespect amongst groups. When this question was asked in different ways the results were the same; the majority of students do not feel students treat each other with respect.
At my school students from all backgrounds/groups feel important and valued. (5)

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that the students were fairly divided. A little over a third agreed, a little under a third disagreed and a little over a third weren’t sure.

Interviews revealed about the same results, though the majority of students indicated they didn’t understand what I meant by “backgrounds.”
Class discussion revealed a higher percentage disagreed with this statement. “Kids who are from Bulgaria and Turkey don’t understand half of the things we learn and get yelled at a lot.” “Not enough mutual respect between staff and students.”

The survey and interviews showed that students were evenly divided in their answers, while class discussion showed that more students felt that people from different backgrounds weren’t valued.
At my school, students treat each other differently because of race. (6)

The survey showed that almost half of the respondents disagreed with this statement, while a third weren't sure and a fifth agreed. The interviews revealed that mainly students of color thought there was some discrimination, the other students saw it more as social discrimination than racial. One Latino boy said there were a lot of problems within the Latino ethnic group itself. "Latinos are all different. They don't get along. They throw stuff and talk about you if you try to join another group. They say I'm not American, cause I hang out with everyone." A Latina strongly
agreed with the statement; she heard someone say, “Look at all those Mexicans push, they wear the same thing and they don’t do their work.” She also felt there was intra group prejudice against her because she was a lighter color. A black female said that she had heard racist comments about her. “You should know that there is racism in this school. It happens in every school. I have not been hurt by it, but I know people that have…” “There is a lot of racial prejudice at this school, but I haven’t been affected by it.” “We have too much discrimination in this school.” But one student said, “I think there are too many kids who don’t speak English good enough to be going to Pacific Middle School.”

Class discussion revealed more of a split, too. One Latina said that at the bus stop they told her she was stupid because she couldn’t speak English. A Latino boy said he was told to go back to where he belonged. Most students of color revealed that they had heard racist insults. Most of the white students said they hadn’t noticed people being treated differently because of race. An African American boy said, “Everyone is treated the same no matter what their color. Others would “back them up” if they were treated with disrespect.

While the survey revealed that a majority of students disagreed with the statement that students treat each other differently because of race, interviews and class discussion showed that a higher percentage agreed.
At my school students treat each other different because of gender (male/female). (7)

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that a majority of students disagreed with this statement, however there was a significant amount of uncertainty, almost thirty percent, while one third of the students agreed.

The interviews revealed very little opinion about this. Some giggled and mentioned that girls and boys “hung out together” and there were plenty of “dating relationships. The students preferred to talk about other issues. The class discussion
was much the same. A few mentioned that boys dominated games in P.E. The survey indicated a greater majority agreed, than did the interviews and class discussion.

*At my school, students treat each other differently because they're in different social groups.* (8)

The survey revealed that over half the students agreed with this statement, while one fifth weren't sure and a quarter disagreed.

The interviews revealed that most students agreed with this statement, though a few said it wasn’t a problem for them. Much of what they said about social groups has
already been stated in questions 1 and 2. There was a lot of agreement in the class
discussion too, though students who identified with the popular group were somewhat
defensive.

The survey, interviews and class discussion revealed that many students thought
that other students treated them differently because they belonged to different social
groups.
I have been personally hurt because of prejudice/racism in my school. (13)

The survey showed that the majority of students disagreed with this statement, though almost a quarter agreed and one fifth weren’t sure.

The interviews revealed that more students of color had been hurt by racial prejudice. A Chinese American female said that she had been called different names like “Lucy Loo” and “Gracie Race.” A Greek female said she was called the “Greek Geek.” All of the Latinos/Latinas indicated that they were made fun of and told that they were stupid. “Hey, they think we’re all going to be lettuce pickers.” An African American girl
said it had really hurt her when a friend called her "nigger." She also said, "Sometimes people say, 'Ooh, I like your hair, it goes with your black backpack.'" White students indicated that they hadn't been hurt by racism, but they thought some of their friends might have been. Class discussion was similar to the survey results. Most students did not agree that they had been hurt, though one Latina girl said that people make fun of her accent.

The survey and the class discussion indicated that most students hadn't been hurt by racism or prejudice in the school. The interviews showed a different story, students of color privately indicated that they had been hurt.
I have not been personally hurt because of prejudice/racism in my school. (14)

1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Not Sure   4 = Disagree   5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey indicated that the majority of students agreed with this statement, while one quarter disagreed and one fifth weren't sure. The survey showed that fewer students indicated they had not been hurt by racism than they had in question 13, but it was not by much. Class discussion and interview results were already reported with question 13.
There is no prejudice/racism in my school. (15)

1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Not Sure   4 = Disagree   5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that a majority of students disagreed with this statement, while one quarter agreed and one third weren't sure. The interviews revealed that most students disagreed with the idea that there was not racism/prejudice with the school. "There's so much discrimination in this school. It's much worse than other schools I have been to." Class discussion showed more of a mixture of opinion,
though the majority disagreed indicating that they thought prejudice/racism existed at their school. Their comments have already been shared in questions 6 and 14.

*Summary of Results of Questions about Treatment of Students by Identity Group*

It became apparent that 90% of the students in the private interviews did not understand what was meant by the word "backgrounds" in question number 5. Students of color reported being hurt by racism; white students weren't hurt by it, although some were aware that students of color were. Students of color tended to think that race and color affected how they were treated; white kids didn't see it as much. The majority agreed that social groups mattered a lot. About a third indicated that gender mattered, but they didn't seem interested in talking about it.
Treatment of Students by Teachers/Administrators

At my school all students have the same opportunity to learn and participate in class. (3)

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that the majority of students felt they had equal opportunity in the classroom, though one sixth weren't sure and 15% did not feel that way.

Half of those I interviewed agreed and half disagreed. On the positive side: "It's fair, everyone has a chance." "The teachers teach the same thing to everyone."

"Everyone has the same opportunity, but not all participate." On the negative side:
“There’s a kid in my class who’s very quiet, and she seems to be hesitating to do stuff. People should give her more of a chance.” “Language is a problem for some.” The class discussion showed that most students felt that if students weren’t getting an equal chance to participate it was their own fault. “Some people just don’t try.”
At my school, teachers/administrators treat students differently because of race. (9)

The survey revealed that the majority of students did not perceive this to be true, while a quarter remained unsure and one sixth agreed. The majority of students who were interviewed also disagreed with this statement. Both students of color and White students perceived their teachers to be fair in their treatment of the different races.

Class discussion was similar. Students mentioned that teachers were very helpful to people of different races. "My teachers treat every race the same." "I don't know any teachers like that, but I've heard of some..."
The survey, interviews and class discussion revealed that most students don't feel teachers treat students from diverse ethnic groups differently.

At my school teachers/administrators treat students differently because of gender. (10)

1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Not Sure   4 = Disagree   5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey revealed that the majority of students disagreed with this statement, though a significant number were unsure and one fifth agreed. Interviews revealed that a few students felt that certain teachers preferred one gender to another. One girl said, 'Mr.
X is against girls unless they're cute, but favors boys." Another student perceived that one of her teachers favored girls. A Latino student said, "Girls and boys are treated differently. There's less severity for girls. Teachers cuss at me, they don't cuss at the girls." Class discussion went along similar lines.

The survey indicated that the while the majority of students did not believe there was different treatment by teachers due to gender, interviews and class discussion showed more students felt that way.
At my school, teachers/administrators treat students differently because they’re in different social groups. (11)

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that the majority of students disagreed with this statement, though almost a third weren’t sure and one fifth agreed. Student interviews indicated that students had many different opinions about this. “I don’t think teachers favor a certain group.” “I think the teachers pick on the Skaters.” “Some teachers favor the popular group, but others favor the nerds.”
Class discussion also showed a variety of opinions. One girl said, "The teachers don't know what groups the students are in and I don't think it's their business." "They treat the popular kids like they're trouble makers and the nerds like they're cool." A lot of students just weren't sure.

The survey, interviews and class discussion revealed that though a majority of students disagreed that students were treated differently because of their social groups, there was a significant amount of students who weren't sure or who agreed.
The teachers and the principal have helped create good relations among the students of different groups. (12)

![Pie chart showing responses]

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that a majority agreed, though a quarter disagreed and one third weren't sure. Interviews and class discussion went along the same lines as what has already been stated in question 11.

The survey, interviews and class discussion revealed that most students felt the teachers were doing what they could, but there were some students who felt they could do more about creating more positive student relationships.
Summary of Results of Questions about Treatment of Students by Teachers/Administrators

Half or more of the students felt there was equal opportunity in class. Most felt that teachers and administrators did not discriminate by race, but discriminated to some extent on the basis of gender, and on the basis of social groups.
Classwork

I prefer to work in groups when doing an assignment. (16)

1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Not Sure   4 = Disagree   5 = Strongly Disagree

The survey showed that the majority of students preferred to work with groups, while one fifth disagreed and one fourth weren't sure. The interviews revealed that most students enjoyed working with groups. "I like to work in groups, because if you don't know the answer you can ask someone." Some students disagreed. "I disagree because I'm smart and I end up doing all the work." Class discussion followed similar lines though some students indicated that it depended on the class. "It makes things easier."
The survey, interviews, and class discussion all showed a preference for working with groups with a minority expressing disagreement.

*I prefer to work in rows when doing an assignment.* (17)

The survey revealed that the majority of students disagreed with this statement, while one fifth agreed and one third weren't sure. Interview and class discussion results were shared in question 16.
After high school, I plan to attend a four-year college. (18)

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree

The large majority agreed with this statement, while one fifth weren't sure and a very small minority disagreed. Interviews and class discussions revealed that most students intended to go to a four-year college, though a few indicated they would go through the military to get there.

Summary of Results of Questions about Classwork

Most students preferred to work with groups in class, although about 20% did not. The large majority was planning to go on towards higher education.
Analysis of Student Data

Banks' Multicultural Dimensions will be used to analyze the data. The students' responses applied to two categories of his framework: Prejudice Reduction and An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure. The other parts of his framework—Content Integration/knowledge Construction and An Equity Pedagogy—will be applied later when I address possible solutions to the problem.

Prejudice Reduction examines students' racial attitudes and looks for ways to help reduce stereotypes and teaches students to see value in others from different ethnic groups. An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure focuses on helping students to interact and participate in positive ways with members of different groups.

In general the students did not perceive their school environment to be a place where students of diverse ethnic and social groups were respected and valued. Data from the interviews and class discussion revealed that different social groups and ethnic groups had developed oppositional attitudes towards each other. Many students perceived their school to have problems with prejudice and racism. Students of color shared these concerns in interviews and class discussion. Though thirty percent indicated on the survey that gender issues mattered, the students did not seem interested in talking about it.

The majority of the students felt that social problems were created by the students and not the teachers or administration, though many indicated in class conversation and interviews that certain social groups seemed to have more privileges than others, and that some teachers discriminate on the basis of gender. Students in general did not believe that specific ethnic or social groups had more opportunity to learn in the classroom. They
indicated that they preferred to work together with groups, and a high majority plan to attend a four-year college.

Conclusion

The data revealed that students were concerned about two major areas in Multicultural Education: Prejudice Reduction and an Empowering School Culture and Social Environment. Their answers indicated that emphasis on these areas would improve social relations and the general school climate. A diverse student population with strong social barriers seemed to have created this highly competitive environment.
Description of Student Terms

BMXers: Students who enjoy doing stunts on bikes.

Dating: A relationship between a boy and girl that mainly involves talking on the phone, e-mailing and holding hands at school.

Drama: Students who participate in the school plays and are considered individualistic.

Fijis: Students who come from the Pacific islands.

Geeks/Dork/Nerds: Students who are often academically high achievers, computer oriented and enjoy fantasy games.

Goths: Students who are counter-culture and dressed in black.

Library Group: Students who are most comfortable in the library at lunchtime.

Nice Kids: Students who are accepted by most groups. Often considered to be good students, but not Geeks.

Nobody Group: Students who are often alone and do not dress in today’s styles.

Sometimes includes new arrivals from different countries.

Leadership: Students who are part of the leadership class. Perceived to be mainly popular students.

Mexicans: All students who are Latino or Hispanic.

Music: Students who play an instrument in the school band.

North City Cool Kids: Black students from neighboring city with lower socioeconomic status.

Preps (Popular Group): Students who are active in community baseball/softball.

Generally dress in trendy clothes. Perceived to be related to others with Italian backgrounds.
Sagging: A current trend where boys wear oversized pants that don’t stay up.

Skaters: Students, mostly boys, who wear baggy clothes and enjoy in-line skating/skateboarding. Considered a little wild.

South City Cool Kids: White students who are from the community, higher socioeconomic status and risk-takers.
Chapter Five
Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

"We dissuade kids from intense peer pressure through trying not to feed the feeling of competition and the feeling of being better than the next person. We have the child compete with himself/herself. We don't use the terms 'better than' or the word 'ugly' in our workshops." (Ortiz 2002)

This project attempted to answer the following questions: 1) To what extent does the school have an environment that promotes caring and respectful relationships? 2) To what extent do all students feel they have an opportunity to learn? 3) What do the students think the teachers believe about the educability of the different student groups? 4) How do the students get along and view others from different cultures? 5) Do students from all backgrounds feel valued and treated fairly? The answers to these guiding questions from this project can be found in the student surveys, class discussion, student interviews and by referring to the literature review. This chapter will reexamine the earlier discussion about democracy and its relationship to education, share the main findings, provide a perspective from the data analysis, and compare what was found in the four case studies with my results. The last section of this chapter will look at the implications of this study and make recommendations for action at the school site using Banks' Multicultural Dimensions.
Discussion

Democracy

At the beginning of my literature review, I explored the relationship between democracy and education. John Dewey (1902) wrote of his belief that our schools should provide every student, regardless of race, class or gender with an equitable education where the child can gain the knowledge and tools necessary to contribute to society and fulfill his/her true potential. Freire (1998), (1993a), hooks (1994), and Sleeter (2001) see the school as an institution that should not only should provide an equal education that does not privilege a certain class, but should also encourage our children to think about society and become empowered to participate in moving society closer to the true ideals of democracy. When diverse students enter our education system and find that they are not treated with respect and dignity, they learn that certain people have more value than others. When students see some groups being given more privileges than others, they learn that class distinctions make a difference in how they will be treated. When racist remarks and discrimination are tolerated, they learn that school, like society, really isn’t very democratic. The researchers and theorists I have discussed are committed to a vision of society in which our schools educate for democracy, not just for maintaining the status quo of institutionalized inequity.

Main Findings

Students revealed that racism and prejudice were problems at their school. Though the surveys indicated that only about 20% of the students believed this, the class discussion and interviews revealed strong feelings amongst students of color. As one
student said, "You need to know there is a lot of discrimination at this school." Almost
every student of color indicated that he or she had been hurt by racist remarks from other
students. "I was really hurt when he called me a 'nigger.'" It is also interesting to note
that though the survey showed only a minority of students had experienced hurt from
racist remarks, a majority believed that racism and prejudice existed at their school.
"There is a lot of racial prejudice at this school, but I haven't been affected by it."
Interviews also revealed that there was significant intra-group prejudice amongst Latinos.
"They throw stuff at you, if you try to join another group."

I think that it is important to analyze the survey data by taking into consideration
that 61% of the students who attend Pacific Middle School are white and less likely to
experience prejudice. The interviews and class discussion allowed me to focus on the
experiences of the minority, which revealed that racist comments were a problem for
them. Only one student of color felt that his friends would stand up for him if someone
insulted him, the rest of the students never indicated that others might speak up for them
if they were disrespected. In fact, there was a sense that they believed that racist
comments were inevitable and part of the middle school experience that had to be
tolerated. "There's racism at every school." I think that a factor that influenced a higher
percentage indicating that there was racism compared to racist comments at the school,
was that the question just asked them to be objective about whether this problem existed
and not whether they had been personally hurt. Sometimes middle school students do not
want to admit that anything really hurts their feelings. Most students of color did not feel
that the teachers or administrators treated them differently because of race. "My teachers
are fair." In the interviews, it was clear that English language ability was a factor in inter
and intra-group prejudice. Students whose language skills were better seemed to be trying to branch out into other groups and experienced pressure from other Latinos to stay together. “They say I’m not American, because I hang out with everyone.” Others were teased about their language ability. “They say I’m stupid because I don’t speak English right.” Based on these data, it would be important to implement a school-wide plan that would attempt to reduce prejudice between races.

A majority of students revealed that they did not feel they were treated fairly by students who were in different social groups. “Let’s just say if you go into the cafeteria, there won’t be such warm greetings.” Sixty-seven percent did not think that students got along and treated each other with respect. “They’re jerky to the little ones, won’t do a favor, they ignore you, call you names, we’re enemies.” Class discussions and interviews showed that most students identified with a certain social group and were in competition with students from other social groups. Social groups seemed to be identified by race, clothes and interests. Every student I interviewed identified at least eight different groups that students could belong to and the territories that they claimed at the school. These groups were The Preps, North City Cool Kids, South City Cool Kids, Skaters, Mexicans, Drama, Music, and “Geeks.” A complete list of group names and their definitions can be found in Chapter Four on pages 80-81. Many students identified the Popular Group, or “Preps,” as the one that had the most privileges from teachers and staff. They felt that these students could break the dress code and get away with it easier, as well as sit where they wanted, especially in the cafeteria and on the bus. Often students would mention that the Popular Group had a certain table in the middle of the cafeteria where only the members of the group could sit. “They have the power to kick you out.” Students
outside the group, who had tried to sit there, were told to leave by lunch duty staff.

Students also mentioned that popular people could remain in the cafeteria longer after the lunch bell rang for them to go to class, and they could get out of class more easily. The Popular Group and the Nerds were mentioned as having extra privileges such as being able to get away with breaking the rules that members of other groups didn’t have. “The girls show their stomachs and wear shirts with straps and no one tells them to change.” It also became apparent that the different social groups were in opposition to one another; very few students indicated that they could be members of more than one group.

“Everybody has their own group.” In general, the majority of students did not think that teachers taught social groups differently, but interviews revealed that students thought certain groups (nerds and popular students) had more privileges from teachers and staff. “They get away with stuff.” Though the survey revealed that the majority of students felt teachers were doing what they could to help students get along, interviews and class discussion showed different opinions. Many students weren’t sure the teachers knew a lot about the social groups, but they were adamant that some students had more power than others did. “The popular kids get their way more.”

Class discussions revealed defensiveness on the part of the students who identified with the popular group. “We’re just a group of friends who like to hang out together.” “They talk about us too.” I found this to be a very difficult topic to discuss in my Teen Issues class; interviews proved to be the place where I gained most of my information. In private, students had much more to say about this topic, in class discussions it created a lot of tension. “Most of them are Italian and they’re related to each other.” Students seemed to be angry about the way they were treated by each other,
but also seemed to accept that this was the way things were. "It happens in every school."

The survey, class discussion and interviews revealed that most students enjoyed working together with groups, though 20% revealed that they did not prefer this learning style. About a third of the students interviewed said they did not like it if they were expected to do all the work, while the rest of group did nothing. "I don’t like working in groups because I’m smart and I end up doing all the work."

The Case Studies and the Findings

The case studies were very informative in helping me to understand the results of my research. Each study revealed how a school’s pedagogy can affect the way that diverse students interact with their education and their social environment. The studies showed that multicultural issues such as identity construction, prejudice between groups, teacher/administration involvement and classwork were all key areas that should be addressed if a school is seeking to provide an education that is democratic for all students. Davidson (1996) and Finders’ (1997) studies showed that the different cultures experienced strong boundaries and conflict with each other, which was similar to what I found in my research. Oppositional identities, a sense of inferiority in marginalized groups, special privileges for the dominant group were all problems that emerged from my data too. Davidson found that language ability created a sense of inferiority in the students who did not speak English very well. Latino/Latina students in my study also shared in their interviews that students made fun of the way they spoke English. Though students are not tracked at my school as they were in Davidson’s study, the groups
socially segregate themselves. In Finder’s study the middle class students were privileged through being given more attention in school publications. In this study, the students in the popular group were privileged through being allowed to exclude others from the center table in the cafeteria, sit where they wanted to on the bus, not having to adhere to the same expectations with the dress code and finding it easier to leave class when they wanted. To some extent, this data also indicated that the Geeks (academics) had more privileges too, especially through being given extra attention. “Some teachers pay more attention to the popular kids, the others favor the nerds.” Finders’ study also indicated the Cooperative Learning strategies would need to be combined with other teaching styles in order to incorporate the less socially confident students which would also apply to my school since 20% said they preferred to work alone.

Sleeter and Grant’s (1996) study and Donaldson’s (1996) study showed the need for students to deal with oppression within the school and outside to the greater society. The students in this study were similar to those in Grant and Sleeters’ in that they seemed to accept the social order as just the way things were, something to put up with and not try to change. “Everybody has their own group. So what?” Gender issues elicited such little response that I wonder if they were really aware of the inequities that persist much like the students in Sleeter and Grant’s study who graduated and were content with the same social status of their parents. Donaldson’s study provided inspiration that once discrimination and racism are identified, students can successfully become involved in addressing oppression and creating change that brings the school environment closer to the ideals of Democracy. Since 43% of the students in my study believed that there was
racism/prejudice at the school, and 22% said they had been hurt by it in a student body that has a minority population of 49%, I believe it is time to address the problem.

**Multicultural Dimensions with the Findings/Solutions**

Banks (1999) Multicultural Dimensions will be used to organize the findings and discuss possible solutions. Content Integration/Knowledge Construction, Prejudice Reduction, An Equity Pedagogy and An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure all provide ways to look at the data and suggest solutions. Though this data fits primarily into two categories, Prejudice Reduction and An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure, solutions to the problems come from all categories.

Prejudice Reduction is a definite area of need for the students at Pacific Middle School. Many students indicated that prejudice and racism were problems at their school in the ways groups interacted with each other, comments that were made and negative attitudes and stereotypes towards one another. I believe that Donaldson’s idea of involving the students in the development of a Multicultural Arts curriculum would be a powerful way to address the problem. I would like to start by sharing my data with students in my new Teen Issues class and facilitating a play or plays that show the immigration experiences of marginalized people to the United States. I will also be sharing this data with the administration/teachers that we might collaborate on ways to address the issue. Allport (1958) and Banks’ (1999) suggestions that schools focus on helping students get to know members of other groups, creating a sense of equal social status, working as a team and having the support of the community could be ways the staff could begin to address prejudice. Multicultural curriculum in the classroom and Cooperative Learning with equal status relationships would also give students a chance to
get to know each other, explore their biases and break down stereotypes. In the past we have focused on raising test scores, creating heterogeneous classes, block scheduling and teaming with much success. I believe it’s time to create a plan that reduces prejudice amongst our students.

Creating an Empowering School Culture and Social Structure would address the data that revealed many students do not feel cared for or respected at the school. It would also address the issue of inequity in privilege and attention that students believe certain groups receive. Through sharing my data, students would be given a chance to discuss their feelings about the social climate at Pacific Middle School. Their consciousness would be raised as they find out that many students from different groups do not feel comfortable and welcome. Instead of just accepting their school as the status quo middle school, students can begin to see that their perspectives matter and they can help bring about change. I would also like to suggest that teachers/administrators could look for unifying themes that would give the students a sense of belonging similar to Banks’ (1999) idea of creating “superordinate” groups, where diverse students share common goals. Highlighting lessons in the classroom that teach caring and respect could connect learning to the reality of their social lives (hooks 1994). Designing a governance model that would encourage the participation of diverse groups would give more representation to students of different backgrounds creating a partnership model similar to what Eisler (2000) advocates. Currently, the majority of the students in our Leadership classes are from the “popular” group. A school wide plan that would encourage students from diverse groups to take an active part in leadership would empower marginalized students and create a more democratic environment. Since I will be sharing my data with the
Discussion

Introducing Content Integration/Knowledge Construction into the classroom curriculum would help students value other cultures' contributions to education and understand that all knowledge is framed by the perspectives of its authors. Teaching students subject matter through using a multiple perspective approach, would break down stereotypes, create a sense of inclusion for diverse members of the student body, show respect for other cultural contributions, raise self-esteem amongst marginalized students, connect learning with the lives of students of different backgrounds, and provide a balanced perspective that doesn't rely only on the Euro-white dominant view of society. Including social justice issues would help empower students to understand multicultural issues and challenge inequity within their school and society. I think this would go a long way toward reducing racism and disrespect amongst the different social groups at Pacific Middle School. An important component of this would be the support of the community. Further investigation into how to involve parents in the process would be essential toward making all of this work.

Creating an Equity Pedagogy within the classroom, where students are given equal opportunity to learn through integration of teaching styles that are sensitive to all types of learners, would give diverse students more opportunity to participate and achieve. Teachers could begin to organize their lessons in ways that help create equal status in the classroom. Cooperative learning strategies that create partnership rather than hierarchy would help students value others who are not a part of their social group.
Cohen (1997) and Gardner’s (1983) ideas of structuring learning that requires multiple abilities would lessen the sense of competition and increase cooperation and respect. Through using the unique talents and gifts they have acquired from their cultural backgrounds, family and heredity, diverse students would be able to demonstrate mastery of educational concepts. A pedagogy that demonstrates respect for all types of learners would be a model to the students and community demonstrating a belief that every student has value.

**Personal Perspective**

**General Answers to the Research Questions**

To what extent does the school have an environment that promotes caring and respectful relationships? This data reveal that the school’s environment is competitive which impedes caring, respectful relationships. Students have segregated themselves into different social and ethnic groups that are oppositional and discriminatory. Though the classes are heterogeneous and most students prefer cooperative learning strategies, in general the majority of the students do not feel respected.

To what extent do all students feel they have an equal opportunity to learn and participate? The data showed that the majority of students believe they have the same opportunity for education in the classroom, but it is significant that a third of the students weren’t sure or disagreed. Class discussion and interviews showed the students felt that favoritism was demonstrated to students from certain groups by the way they received more attention and extra privileges.
What do the students think the teachers believe about the educability of different student groups? The data revealed that the majority of students think their teachers give the same treatment to all students, but a significant percentage (48%) were either not sure or agreed that students from different social groups were treated differently. Interviews and class discussion indicated that in general students felt that teachers taught as if they believed that every student has the ability to learn. I don’t think that my survey questions were clear about this issue, since I asked about treatment of students by teachers instead of asking if they thought their teachers had the same educational standards and expectations for everyone.

How do students get along and view others from different cultures? The data revealed that the majority did not believe students got along well or respected students from different cultures. Interviews and class discussion showed that a majority of students of color experienced racist remarks and discrimination from other students. A small minority has been able to cross over into other groups and feel accepted.

Do students from all backgrounds feel valued and treated fairly? When I looked at all the data results together, it was clear that most did not think they were valued or treated fairly by members of other social groups. Students indicated that there was a lot of enmity between the groups and that teachers/administrators gave privileges to certain groups.
Personal Perspective

Solutions

I have asked the questions, established emergent answers and suggested possible solutions. I have spent so many hours working on this; so much time has been taken from my family, my students and friends to write this action thesis that will hopefully create change at my school site. So what really happens now? Do I believe in the principles and ideals that I have researched and espoused? Yes. Do I want to help create an environment that is more democratic and empowering to all students? Yes, again. My research has sensitized me to the needs of diverse students and it has affected how I teach and what I teach. I have given suggestions for possible solutions. These are the ideas I will be sharing with my colleagues so that we might develop an action plan:

1. Creating a Multicultural Curriculum.
2. Facilitating more intra-group experiences where students can get to know members of different groups.
3. Structuring Cooperative Learning opportunities with equal status relationships.
4. Providing opportunities for students/staff to discuss school environment issues.
5. Raising consciousness about social justice issues.
6. Developing unifying themes in teachers' curriculum that build cohesiveness.
7. Designing lessons that emphasize caring and respect.
8. Using a governance model that emphasizes partnership and represents diverse groups.
9. Thinking critically and collectively about how we privilege certain students and groups.

10. Designing and using curriculum that represents multiple perspectives.

11. Including social justice issues in the curriculum.

12. Finding ways to involve the community and gain their support.


14. Involving the students in creating a democratic environment that is sensitive to multicultural issues.

**Conclusion**

Recently, a parent approached me and commented that her daughter felt so uncomfortable at the school because she didn’t feel accepted by her friends anymore. She mentioned that her son had the same feelings when he was there. I think many of us would agree that the middle school years are problematic for many students due to being at that stage of early adolescence where issues of independence, security and identity play significant roles in psychological growth and development. Rather than believing that there is little we can do to help students navigate through this emotional time, perhaps it is all the more reason that we should look at ways the school can help students to respect their individual identities and the diversity around them. As educators we need to make a commitment to providing an education that teaches and reflects the democratic principle that every voice is important. I believe that if we structure education in ways that empower all of our students, we will give help them to develop strong identities, realize their dreams and create a society that encourages equal opportunity for all.
Appendix A

Pacific Middle School
Mrs. Pipes
Fall 2000

Attention Parents:

This questionnaire is a part of a thesis project for California State University Monterey Bay. The purpose of the project is to determine students' perceptions about race, school environment, social interaction and equality of opportunity. Students' answers will be used to determine issues and trends that we might address as a school in order to create a more democratic environment. Some students will be asked if they would like to share their viewpoints further in an in-depth interview. Parents will be notified and consent for this part of the research will also be solicited.

Thank you,
Therese Pipes

CSU Monterey Bay MA in Education
Consent Form

I am the parent of ______________________ (Name of the child) I hereby give my consent for my child to participate in the research project conducted by Mrs. Pipes.
(Questionnaire only)
### Student Questionnaire

All answers are voluntary and optional.

### Student Questionnaire on Democracy at Colton Middle School

For each statement, check whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), are not sure (NS), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD).

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<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>NS</th>
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<td>1. In my school, all students are treated the same.</td>
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<td>2. My school is a place where all students feel cared for and respected.</td>
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<td>3. At my school all students have the same opportunity to learn and participate in class.</td>
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<td>4. At my school all students get along and treat each other with respect.</td>
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<td>5. At my school students from all backgrounds/groups feel important and valued.</td>
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<td>6. At my school students treat each other differently because of race.</td>
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<td>7. At my school students treat each other differently because of gender (male/female)</td>
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<td>8. At my school, students treat each other differently because they're in different social groups.</td>
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<td>9. At my school, teachers/administrators treat students differently because of race.</td>
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<td>10. At my school, teachers/administrators treat students differently because of gender.</td>
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<td>11. At my school, teachers/administrators treat students differently because they’re in different social groups.</td>
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12. The teachers and principals have helped to create good relations among students of different groups.

13. I have been personally hurt because of prejudice/racism in my school.

14. I have not been personally hurt because of prejudice/racism in my school.

15. There is no racism/prejudice in my school.

16. I prefer to work in groups when doing an assignment.

17. I prefer to work in rows when doing an assignment.

18. After high school I plan to attend a four year college.

If you would like to be interviewed about your answers, print your name and grade level.

Name____________________________________

Grade__________________________________
Appendix C

Pacific Middle School
Research Project-CSUMB
Mrs. Pipes
Spring 2001

To the Parents of ____________________:

Last fall, the students of Colton were involved in a survey of their perceptions about our school environment, race, social interaction and educational equity. This survey is a part of a thesis project that I am doing for California State University of Monterey Bay. Many of the students indicated that they would like to be interviewed about their answers. Your child volunteered, and was chosen to be interviewed about his/her survey. The interview will take about thirty minutes and be conducted on the Colton campus. I will interview students during school hours with the permission of their teachers. Please indicate on this letter if your child has your permission to be interviewed.

Thank you,

Therese Pipes
6th Grade Core Teacher
Colton Middle School

My child ____________________ has my permission to be interviewed by Mrs. Pipes regarding his/her responses to the school environment survey.
Name ____________________ (Please Print)

Name ____________________ (Please Sign)
References


McTaggart, R. (ED) Guiding principals for participatory action research Participatory Action Research: International Contexts and Consequences (pp. 283) New York: State University of New York Press


