

## **Multicultural Education in a K-12 Modern Language Department: Reconciling the Professional Development Experience**

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This paper explores how teachers in a K-12 foreign language (FL) department experienced a school-wide, sustained professional development program designed to integrate multicultural curriculum across all disciplines using James Banks' (2005) framework while simultaneously revamping assessment practices through Wiggins and McTighe's (1999) backward design for classroom assessment. Data reveal that the initiative challenged and affirmed teachers in terms of what is "multicultural" in a FL curriculum. While sustained and embedded professional development is touted as best practice in professional development, some teachers in this study experienced weariness from the process, which was sometimes perceived as having an unclear vision. Data also suggest some important differences in how the professional development initiative was perceived by U.S.-born, native English speakers and non-U.S.-born, nonnative English speakers. Challenges of and recommendations for meeting the disciplinary and individual teacher's needs within a school-wide curriculum transformation initiative are discussed.

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In this research, we explore the way a K-12 modern language department in a private school perceived a long-term professional development initiative to transform the curriculum of their entire school in ways that included a wider range of diverse perspectives, practices, and products. Our inquiry began as we considered how curricular transformation (Banks, 1995) occurs in a modern language department. When we went to the literature in the field of foreign language (FL) education, we found Michael Byram's words from some 20 years ago: "One of the contributions of FL teaching...is to introduce learners to and help them understand 'otherness.' Whether it be linguistic or cultural terms, learners are confronted with the language of other people, their culture, their way of thinking and dealing with the world" (1987, p. 26). Byram argued that "otherness" does not include only "foreigners" but also people born within our borders who are still perceived to be "othered," such as ethnic or racial minorities. Therefore, while most FL departments would be quick to claim multicultural education as a critical part of the everyday work they do, there are also challenges in incorporating a range of "foreign" perspectives, both global and local, within the overarching goal of producing students who are proficient in the FL.

This study is set within the context of a school-wide multicultural curriculum development initiative at a private preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (P-12) school in the Midwest of the United States. We will refer to this school as "College School." All of the teachers at the school participated in professional development experiences that were designed to support them as they enhanced their existing curriculum to include more and varied multicultural perspectives or created entirely new curricula that would bring multicultural education into their classes in thoughtful and integrated ways. As an overlay to this initiative, College School teachers were also asked to conceptualize their new curriculum using a process of *backward design* set forth in Wiggins and McTighe's (1999, 2005) *Understanding by Design*.<sup>2</sup> This study focuses specifically on College School's FL teachers in the context of this initiative. The following discussion will compare two very different bodies of scholarly work focusing on culture – one centered on the integration of culture in FL teaching and the other set squarely in the realm of promoting social justice through transforming school culture in the United States.

## Background

Research from the field of FL teaching shows that teachers have a wide range of existing beliefs and practices related to the role of culture or intercultural competence teaching in their FL classes (Klein, 2004; Sercu, 2005; Siskin, 2007). This research is supported by a survey conducted by the Social Science Education Consortium (1999) of 1,566 high school FL teachers which found that "no definition of culture is common among [FL] teachers" (p. 5). Nevertheless, the FL teaching profession in the U.S. clearly sees culture integration as a high priority and has included culture across a number of the standards for FL, known as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) Standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999). Most notably, the second standard focusing on "Cultures" seeks to

encourage students to “gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.” For this, the Standards use a practices-products-perspectives framework to conceptualize culture. The ACTFL Standards urge teachers to find and teach links between what a given culture does (practices, such as eating), what that culture creates (products, such as music) and what people of that culture believe or are concerned about (perspectives, such as status symbols). For example, in some families in Panama, New Year’s Eve involves eating 12 grapes as midnight approaches, and counting the grape seeds. Once the clock reaches 12:00, people kiss friends and family and set off fireworks. After midnight, dinner is served and some people may go dancing to celebrate. These practices and products are tied to traditions from Spain, which in turn are grounded in religious beliefs and cultural values.

Other frameworks for considering the role of culture in FL teaching have been available to teachers and teacher educators for a long time (e.g., Byram & Zarate, 1997; Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1987; Kramsch, 1993; Seelye, 1997). Most current definitions of culture learning in the field of FL teaching tend to urge explorations beyond simple facts about people who speak some variety of a target language and to promote the understanding of culture through processes that engage students at multiple personal and intellectual levels. Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2003) offer this cogent description of the way in which learning about culture is often framed in FL education:

[Culture learning] is the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively (p. 177).

This definition is appealing to today’s FL educators because it focuses on culture in terms of developing communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1971).

Nevertheless, facilitating this sort of learning is often challenging in a FL classroom because communicative activities carried out in the target language are often controlled by texts or teachers and informed by a limited amount of contextual/cultural information (Fischer, 1997). Other challenges to integrating culture into a FL classroom may occur because of teachers’ limited or out-of-date experience with communities that speak the target language. Some teachers did not have the opportunity to examine approaches to integrating culture in their pre- or in-service teacher education experiences. The task of integrating products, practices, and perspectives, as the National Foreign Language Standards (1999) suggest, typically requires practice, dialogue, and exemplars (Schulz, 2007). Klein (2004) found that teachers tend to think about culture in terms of practices and products, not in terms of the meaning attached to the events of the world and the behavior of others. We concur with Sercu’s plea that “language-and-culture learning has to be more complex and rich than the emphasis on communicative competence in FL education tends to suggest” (2005, p. 180). The present study will analyze these issues in the context of College School’s multicultural curriculum initiative and explore how the language teachers felt as they participated in the school-wide reform effort.

Thus far, most readers will easily recognize these problems of practice related to the integration of culture into FL classes where the push is strongly toward proficiency goals. Teacher educators urge teachers to cultivate balance and nuance with regard to culture in FL curricula, be it to present a range of French speaking cultures to students (not just a monolithic Parisian culture), offer a range of images of Spanish speakers (not just of poor people), or expose students to a range of aspects of Chinese cultures (not just holidays, as traditionally celebrated). The field of FL teaching and learning has a long scholarly history of thinking about the integration of culture into classes across a range of levels and ages.

The scholarly literature used to discuss culture in the multicultural initiative at College School, however, was very different than what is typically used to frame culture in FL teaching. The readings offered to the teaching staff and the speakers invited to guide teacher learning were squarely set within the field of multicultural education, not the subject-specific literature such as that cited above. The initiative drew upon multicultural education scholars whose work is grounded in the U.S. public school context (e.g., Carl Grant & Christine Sleeter, 2003; James Banks, 1999). The multicultural education scholarship frames “culture” in terms of categories such as race, gender, social class, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. In other words, the discourse was about difference and was framed within U.S. American cultural systems of oppression. Teachers across all grades and disciplines were asked to consider how their curriculum could be more inclusive of a range of views, discover inherent bias in the existing curriculum, and examine injustice playing out in the local or school community. For this reason, the school leadership chose to use James Banks’ work on multicultural education (Banks, 2005; Banks & McGee-Banks, 2003) to guide the initiative.

*Curriculum transformation*, according to Banks, aims to challenge mainstream curriculum that ignores the experiences, contributions, and perspectives of individuals from non-dominant groups in all subject areas. It aims to go beyond “celebrating” difference by the addition of a few heroes and holidays seen as valuable to minoritized groups. Rather, curricular transformation involves grappling with issues and concepts that are tightly bound to the subject matter and integrated in a way that is not perceived as superfluous. These transformations are meant to lead to social action and awareness as well as the full inclusion of students, families and staff from minoritized or non-dominant communities. Specifically crucial to curricular transformation are Banks’ “Dimensions of Multicultural Education,” namely, (a) content integration, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) an equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure (1999, p. 14).

Banks’ work strongly emphasizes the need for teachers to move beyond the traditional, narrow view of multicultural education as just content integration, where teachers focus on using examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key aspects of their subject area. College School’s multicultural initiative, based on Banks’ work, encouraged teachers to move into the knowledge construction process, where teachers first became aware of the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases in their subject area, and then lead students to uncover them in the classroom. The dimensions of prejudice reduction, where teachers

help students develop more positive attitudes toward racial and ethnic groups different from their own, and equity pedagogy, where teachers use techniques to reach students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups, also influenced the development of the multicultural curriculum.

The following research question was formulated to allow for an examination of stories, observations, and documents related to the multicultural education initiative at the school:

How do FL teachers experience a sustained professional development program designed to guide all teachers in their school community to integrate multicultural curriculum into their subject areas?

### **Methodology**

The methodology used to understand the multicultural education professional development experience was a qualitative case study. The bounded unit of analysis was the FL department.

### **Setting**

College School is a private school in a large metropolitan area. The school employs 150 teachers and enrolls approximately 1,100 students. Fifteen percent of the student body is from minoritized racial groups. The FL Department is well-known in the state for having strong K-12 programs in Chinese and Spanish. Students also have opportunities to begin a FL in middle and high school, including French at the time of the study. The strong FL program is a reason cited by some parents for sending their children to this school. It is important to note that as a private school, the majority of the students come from families considered wealthy. Given that, we recognize that “the more privileged the student, the more likely she or he is to have accepted socioeconomic stratification, educational tracking, and other hierarchies of race, class and gender privilege” (Martin, 1998, p. 46), making the multicultural initiative well-matched to this particular school setting.

### ***An Outline of the Multicultural Curriculum Initiative***

The three primary goals of the multicultural initiative were to teach students how to (a) take perspective, to develop skills to view the world from someone else’s viewpoint; (b) function well in a diverse society; and (c) be effective change agents in our society. One of the important features of the multicultural curriculum initiative is the fact that it has spanned a long period of time and has offered teachers many ways to both learn about diverse perspectives and think about how to teach and assess the new or improved curriculum. Some of the ways teachers could engage with the theory and practice of multicultural education were through guest speakers, staff development

workshops, intensive work with small groups of colleagues and larger unit (Department, grade level), and feedback on assessment and lesson plans. Table 1 outlines the phases of the multicultural initiative through 2007.

Table 1. Phases of the Multicultural Initiative

Phase One: Self-Reflection	
2000-2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohort groups of teachers established</li> <li>• Faculty attend workshops to develop awareness of non-dominant cultures</li> </ul>
Phase Two: Studying the Other	
Phase Three: Fundamentals of Multicultural Education	
2001-2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty listen to speakers about the American Indian experience</li> <li>• Introduction of Banks' Model of multicultural education</li> <li>• Invited speaker Christine Sleeter provides background about multicultural ed.</li> </ul>
Phase Four: Multicultural curriculum	
2002-2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invited speaker James Banks addresses faculty about the background for the implementation of multicultural education</li> <li>• Introduction of Wiggins' <i>Understanding by Design</i></li> <li>• P-12 departments begin to develop multicultural enduring understandings</li> </ul>
2003-2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P-12 departments write multicultural learnings, defined as observable "chunks" that students must learn to develop, differentiated by grade</li> <li>• P-12 departments begin to identify evidence or assessments that would indicate that students understood the learning</li> </ul>
2004-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P-12 departments continue to refine the multicultural learnings that pertain to their enduring understanding</li> <li>• Faculty develop multicultural lesson plans based on the multicultural learnings that feature backwards design and formative and summative assessments</li> </ul>
2005-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty are encouraged to refine, edit, and implement lesson plans</li> </ul>
2006-2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty are encouraged to refine, edit, and implement lesson plans</li> <li>• Faculty are asked to submit student work based on the lesson plans</li> </ul>

In 2004-2005, the faculty were asked to develop multicultural lesson plans using a template developed by the department heads, based on Wiggins and McTighe's *Understanding by Design* (1999). They created a performance task that would give evidence that the students achieved the identified learnings. This included assessment criteria for the performance task, formative assessment ideas, facets of learning, and a section on reflection and self-assessment.

There were additional ongoing facets to the initiative including summer readings for faculty on multicultural issues, faculty meetings in cohort groups to discuss readings and other topics, and consultant speakers from higher education to lead workshops to

provide input to administrators and faculty members. The Headmaster of the school initiated and championed the effort. He was instrumental in forming a parents' group to discuss issues of diversity and chaired the school's Diversity Committee himself. It is also important to mention that teachers at this school were typically involved in a number of additional activities at the same time the multicultural curriculum work was unfolding (e.g., technology integration, reading in the content areas, curriculum mapping for accreditation). The professional climate at College School is one of invested, committed teachers who are given many responsibilities beyond their teaching assignments.

### ***A Note on Author Roles***

The three authors of this article had specific and distinct roles in this multicultural curriculum initiative. An explanation of their roles at the time of data collection and analysis can be useful in further contextualizing this study. Bigelow had worked closely with the school as an outside consultant for three years on the multicultural initiative. She had worked mainly with teachers who served as administrative leaders of the diversity committee and the curriculum committee, but later worked closely with department heads on the implementation of the curriculum and through joint observations of teachers in their departments. She also facilitated school-wide workshops about James Banks' dimensions of multicultural education (Banks, 1999) and creating and assessing performance tasks, as explained above. She observed numerous lessons across grades and content areas when teachers were implementing some part of their multicultural curriculum. Wesely had been a French teacher at the school for seven years, and she participated in the school workshops, discussions, summer reading, and other related activities from the beginning of the multicultural initiative. At the time of the study, she was a full-time graduate student and on leave from the school. Opsahl had a dual role as a FL teacher in the school (thus participating in all activities like Wesely) and as the head of the FL department at College School. In this second role, she was responsible for guiding her department in the creation and implementation of the new or revised multicultural curriculum. She was also responsible for monitoring the curricular shift and guaranteeing that students received a range of experiences with multicultural education as they progressed through their language classes.

The authors' professional experience with the multicultural initiative informs this study significantly. In effect, informal data were being collected well before the formal interviews began. Furthermore, data analysis occurred throughout the research via conversations and reflections of the authors (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), rather than at a specific stage of the study. This will be discussed more in the next section.

### ***Participants***

Participants in the study were six FL teachers. Four teachers were interviewed, and two participated via anonymous survey. Of the interview participants, two teach Chinese and are nonnative English speakers (NNES), and the other two teach Spanish and are native English speakers (NES). These individuals were recruited via e-mail sent to the entire department from Opsahl, the head of the department. They were instructed to contact Wesely if they were interested in participating in interviews or to respond online to the anonymous survey. In keeping Wesely, a peer to the teachers in the study, in charge of communicating with participants, a strong attempt was made to reduce the coercive nature of the recruitment. Interview participants all signed consent statements, and they were informed that their identity would be kept confidential. With six participants, the final participation rate was 50% in the FL department of 12.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

Data from the six teacher participants were collected in one of two ways: via semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes (4 participants) or anonymous online questionnaires with open-ended questions (2 participants). With some concessions to their difference in format, the interviews and surveys both had the objective of capturing the participants' personal narrative accounts of their experience with the multicultural initiative. Questions addressed their reaction to and assessment of the professional development opportunities and materials, the challenges and successes that they experienced in the course of the initiative, and the changes in how they viewed their own teaching practice, particularly relating to culture.

One important secondary data source was the professional development materials used during the initiative. These materials were collected by the three authors in the course of their participation in the initiative and consulted as needed during data analysis. Additionally, as mentioned above, the authors' personal experiences in the multicultural initiative served as an informal, foundational data source.

### ***Data Analysis Procedures***

The interviews, which were digitally recorded, were listened to at least twice by two of the researchers (Bigelow and Wesely), during which time all of the content (e.g., topics addressed, answers given, opinions offered, stories told) of each interview was noted in list form. The content lists from the interviews were coded topically in order to capture the range of information obtained in the interviews as well as the ways any codes overlapped. After these steps were completed, themes in the interview data were noted through a process that was both inductive and deductive<sup>4</sup> (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The open-ended questions of the online questionnaires were similarly coded and considered for themes.

Finally, as participants in the process we brought our own views to the inquiry and used them to fuel discussion among ourselves and to understand the different experiences others had with the multicultural curriculum initiative. Our engagement with the multicultural curriculum effort at this school varied greatly among the three of us, but together we are able to offer a comprehensive account of what happened. As we engaged in this inquiry, we reminded ourselves that we too are products of schooling processes and “carry deep within us all manner of ideological baggage that... goes a long way to perpetuate the educational status quo” (Farber, 1995, p. 49).

## **Findings and Discussion**

Of all the K–12 subjects taught in schools today, culture and FL teaching should go hand in hand. FL teachers are often seen as the ones who know about “culture” in a school. Isn’t their mere presence in a school evidence that the curriculum is multicultural? Doesn’t studying a FL guarantee students multicultural learning opportunities? What we have found and aim to demonstrate is that FL teachers may find it difficult to reconcile their notions of culture in the realm of Banks’ multicultural education framework of transformative curriculum. Although multicultural education is a natural fit in most FL curricula, we will describe some of the hurdles FL teachers experienced in participating in the school-wide reform that seemed to cause ambivalence and disequilibrium as well as an increased awareness of how culture is dealt with in the curriculum.

### ***Teacher Learning and Engagement***

All of the teachers interviewed and surveyed had positive things to say about their professional development experiences at College School in the area of multicultural education. They specifically mentioned the following things as enjoyable or helpful:

- Watching and discussing movies with parents
- Discussing books with cohort groups
- Listening to speakers (e.g., Native American speaker)
- Learning about differences between people
- Learning to integrate culture

One teacher said, “I show them [students] that I respect different cultures. I used to just give the information. No discussion. Now I think those things are in my mind I integrate more.” A similar experience was reported by another teacher when she said, “before I just did it and I didn’t really think about it...but this time I’m really thinking about, if I do this, this, this, that’s really gonna help them understand...or it would be more profound.” Another teacher said that the most positive outcome of the experience was “Thinking

more about culture in my teaching. Cultural understanding is big for their learning.” This idea is mirrored by another teacher who said, “It makes me more aware of what I teach and how I teach it.” The opportunity to focus on the thoughtful integration of multicultural learning and understanding seems to have helped teachers give this area of their teaching focused consideration, which led to changes in classroom practices.

These quotes suggest that language teachers, too, can benefit from learning opportunities related to multicultural education and reconcile the disciplinary differences between FL teaching and multicultural education. In fact, one teacher on the anonymous survey showed that he/she was engaging students in what Banks terms “knowledge construction.” This teacher said, “I now go more in depth in a unit of study, devote more time to perspectives, and wrestle with HOW to teach my students to understand that a lot of what they 'know' is filtered through someone's perspective.” Interestingly, this teacher uses the word “perspectives,” which is widely used in FL and multicultural education scholarship, but then focuses back on the students and the importance of understanding their own perspectives to better understand the perspectives of others.

These quotes suggest that the FL teachers at College School benefitted from professional development on the topic of multicultural education. On the other hand, some found it difficult to disentangle their current practice with what would be considered “multicultural” from the perspective of the professional development initiative. One teacher said that it was “frustrating, in that what we teach in a foreign language is pretty much multicultural in general. How do we differentiate what we are actually doing on a daily basis from something specifically multicultural?” This quote brings to the fore the debate that perhaps students do have a multicultural education experience by simply attending a French, Spanish, or Chinese class. We contend that, while this is possible, students can obtain much more multicultural learning from their language classes in addition to improved linguistic skills. The quote could also indicate that some teachers were further along in the process of understanding curriculum transformation than others. This latter possibility is reflected in this statement made by a teacher: “I had to put it in the format they wanted because it’s something I’ve been doing for a long time.” He saw the demands of the professional development as being purely administrative – that by reformatting his existing curriculum he had accomplished his task.

One teacher expressed a disjuncture between her world of teaching and what she saw as a very different way of being in professional development meetings. She said, “We’re just so focused on doing our teaching, and so all of a sudden, you know, you’re philosophizing about the reasons for all this...” This statement suggests a possible register or discourse difference that seemed to make the activities of teaching disconnected from the activities of developing multicultural curriculum. It is important to take note of this perceived disconnect and work to narrow the gap between “teaching” and “philosophizing” or “theory” and “practice.” This rift is one that concerns us greatly. The whole point of the professional development opportunities was to transform teaching practices, but from some of the teachers’ perspectives, the readings, lectures, and workshops often seemed quite distant from this aim. On the other hand, how can a school facilitate school-wide learning about complex issues that is grounded in research

and theory while at the same time offer concrete assistance to teachers at many different stages in their careers with a range of formal teacher preparation?

The degree to which teachers in any school, in any professional development experience, engage and benefit from learning opportunities varies. It is our sense that the FL department, for the most part, willingly engaged and many teachers showed a great deal of interest in availing themselves of the conversations and readings intended to challenge them to make their curriculum more multicultural. But the degree to which some were willing or able to engage also may have been stymied by philosophical mismatches, perceived incongruities, mixed messages, and drawn-out discussion. This possibility is discussed next.

### ***Department Goals and School Agenda***

In the 2003–2004 academic year, the FL department at College School determined how they would focus their multicultural instruction. Together, they agreed that they wanted all of their FL students across all grades and levels to understand that “the study of language is a window into understanding the values and beliefs of a culture.” This agreed-upon focus led to the multicultural learnings, which were drawn from the FL Standards (1999), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Alignment of FL Department’s Multicultural Learnings with the FL Standards

<i>Multicultural Learnings</i>	<i>FL Standards</i>
Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.	Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.
Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.	Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and the perspectives of the culture studied.
Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive points of view that are only available through the FL and its culture.	Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the FL and its cultures.
Students demonstrate an understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied with their own.	Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied with their own.
Students demonstrate an understanding of the concept of culture through comparison of the culture studied with their own.	Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

<i>Multicultural Learnings</i>	<i>FL Standards</i>
Students identify and evaluate superficial stereotypes of the culture of the language being studied.	<i>Not directly matched to the FL standards.</i>

Judging from the strong overlap with the FL standards, the learnings are mostly set within the FL field's conceptualization of culture. The last learning, however, offers an important point of departure. This learning, focusing on stereotypes, edges into the realm of multicultural education because it can directly challenge prejudice and bias. This particular learning is squarely focused on one of the primary goals of the multicultural curriculum initiative at College School: to teach students how to take perspective and to develop skills to view the world from someone else's viewpoint.

The teachers frequently expressed the feeling of not always knowing what was expected of them. There are a number of possible explanations, including teachers joining the process late, being on sabbatical, or missing key learning opportunities. Other issues expressed by the teachers dealt with the drawn-out nature of the professional development at College School, depicted in Table 1 (although research in teacher development would suggest that sustained professional development is best practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). One teacher said she felt, "frustration about how it's been presented. We've spent so much time going in circles, slowly, and I wonder, could it have gone quicker? Now I feel kind of beaten down with it. It's been so long." Another teacher felt that the tasks they were asked to do were inconsistent. She said, "I would say there has been a lack of consistency about how the multicultural assessment plan should look. The messages have been mixed, unclear. That is frustrating to me."

One explanation for these feelings of frustration is that at some point<sup>5</sup> in the process the school leadership decided that the purpose of the multicultural curriculum initiative was to promote social justice by creating a curriculum that would afford College School students opportunities to connect the new curriculum to their own personal examination of bias and prejudice. The *critical* examination of difference and raising students' awareness of their own cultural frames and biases was not, however, the aim that was salient in many teachers' minds. Understandably, this shift from implicit to explicit focus on social justice seemed to cause disequilibrium among some teachers, including FL teachers. Their carefully honed learnings (Table 2) suddenly only partially overlapped with the expectations of school. It is our contention that this mismatch between their agreed-upon learnings and what the school decided would fall within multicultural education was at the root of some of the teachers' confusion and frustration. We believe that this may be one of the reasons some of the curriculum created for the multicultural initiative was met with some criticism. It would not, for example, be sufficient to offer new curriculum that presents culture in stereotypical, monolithic or static ways. If this were to happen, teachers would be asked to revise the curriculum in ways that show how it would ask students to reflect on their own ethnic traditions and how the cultural practices, produces, or perspectives are informed by the past and influenced by the present. The dissonance between what "counts" as the

integration of culture into language teaching and what “counts” within a multicultural education framework seemed to cause confusion for some teachers.

### ***Native and Non-Native Speakers of English***

The differences between the native English speaking instructors (NES) and the instructors who were native speakers of the target language but nonnative speakers of English (NNES) were marked in some of the data. On one level, many instructors struggled with issues of using new pedagogical terminology for writing lesson plans, which they sometimes termed “*jargon*,” in the initiative. One NNES respondent identified that terminology as a real hurdle for the other NNES teachers who were less proficient in English. This respondent stated that, even though many NNES instructors had been licensed in education in another country, they were “*very very hampered*” by the American “*educational jargon*.” She appreciated the time that they were able to spend in a group where they all shared a common language (for instance, the French teachers all spoke in French together). That time in a small cooperative learning group, she stated, was really an opportunity to “*talk it out*” in the teachers’ first language. Another NNES teacher also attributed difficulty with the initiative to his status as a non-native speaker of English, stating, “English is my second language. It is slow, and I need more thinking. This process is not very fun to me. It’s kind of difficult.”

There was also a disparity between NES and NNES instructors due to the difference in their connection to the culture that they were teaching. Several NNES teachers mentioned struggling with representing aspects of their own culture to NES students and faculty members. One NNES instructor described her own “evolution as an immigrant” as a process that had preceded the multicultural initiative at the school. In her early years as a teacher, she had a “defensive attitude” about teaching her culture, feeling that she was the “torchbearer.” However, she soon realized that she needed to invite debate with her students in order to teach more effectively. She emphasized that this change occurred in her before the multicultural initiative began. Another NNES instructor mentioned a struggle with being a representative of a minority group on the staff as the multicultural initiative took place. He stated:

On a personal level, I think that even between teachers, and within the teachers, the faculty, I think we still need to educate or let people have that kind of knowledge, to respect different races, different people. Because I’m a XXX minority in a group with people, ...I think that the teachers are more sensitive or learn in these issues, and try to learn and understand others. This is great for me, it’s easy to start or have a conversation, or talk a little about difference, or to go a little bit deeper in some issue that people want to know...Also even all this works, but still, some colleagues it’s like they’ve already set up their minds and it’s hard for them to change. But I hope that these things will make something change their mind.

This NNES teacher’s statements echo that of several NES teachers relating to working in a community of teachers who have varying levels of acceptance of the multicultural

initiative. However, for him, the acceptance or lack thereof is more personal, and more related to his own identity as a minority.

## Conclusion

As teachers learned about multicultural curriculum, some experienced a competing view of what cultural content should be in their curricula. The experience served to complicate traditional FL perspectives on teaching culture, illustrating that teaching a FL from a multiculturalist perspective may be different than from a strict disciplinary perspective. For some, teaching culture through the lens of mainstream multicultural education added a new and critical element to how they thought about both cultural content and the instruction of teaching and assessing for deeper learnings and understandings. For others, this lens already existed. This fact reminds us that being a multiculturalist is not guaranteed among FL teachers and becoming a multiculturalist is not a linear process.

The most challenging hurdle teachers perceived was tracking the professional development experiences over so many years. While this sort of sustained and multifaceted professional development program is exactly what is touted as best practice in school-based reform, this is the part of the experience teachers often cited as most challenging. Furthermore, the process did not always seem to take into consideration the particular needs of nonnative English speakers who are an asset to the modern language department yet were often left feeling unsure about how to meet the expectations of the curriculum or diversity committee members.

This study has limitations, the most serious of which is the low participation rate of the teachers from the department. Only 6 of 12 agreed to participate in the study. Furthermore, we have interviews from only four because two decided to participate anonymously via an on-line survey. The study is also limited by the fact that our only data source from the participants was the teachers' interviews and/or surveys. Therefore it was not possible to triangulate data sources to verify findings. For example, had we obtained permission to analyze the participants' work, we may have found congruities or incongruities between what the teachers produced with what they expressed as challenges in their task to produce new curriculum. Had we observed them teach, we may have witnessed that teachers have more skill in teaching about multicultural issues than they do in expressing what they do to an outside audience using an unfamiliar format. The addition of these additional data sources would have made this analysis much more robust and rigorous.

This study suggests that there is still work to be done at College School on the multicultural curriculum. Curriculum work in general is never completed – there is always the need to adjust curricula according to changing times. However, it seems that when teachers engage in the much more challenging work of curriculum *transformation* that aims to integrate new and different perspectives, narratives, documents, images, and self-examinations into an already rigorous academic program, the process is an even greater negotiation of what is and what could be.

The process has been moving toward more departmental control over the multicultural education conversation. It will be very productive for department heads to devise content- and department-specific plans for talking about, reading about, and doing multicultural curriculum transformation. The FL department is well-poised to discuss, share, and debate how FL educators do multicultural education across languages and grade levels. College School took up the challenge of questioning their curricular status quo and most teachers came to the table willing to participate in the dialogue, to deliberate and negotiate. Although the learning needs of all of the teachers were not necessarily addressed all of the time, this step toward curricular transformation can serve as a model for ways other programs may begin the conversation about what multicultural education looks like in FL classrooms.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This is a pseudonym.

<sup>2</sup>The work by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe is widely used in K–12 schools to engage teachers in thinking about their assessment practices and the links between assessment, curriculum, and instruction. The basic tenet of the approach is *backward design*, which first asks the teacher to define what are the most important “learnings” and “understandings” in their curriculum, consider what counts as evidence of understanding and finally teach for understanding and then create lessons to achieve this end.

<sup>3</sup>The description of the participants is intentionally aggregated in order to preserve anonymity. This is also appropriate because the bounded unit of the case is the department, not the individual. We are aware that the terms “native” and “nonnative” may be needlessly dichotomizing, reflecting what Nayar (1994) has called the “implicational exclusivity of ownership” (p. 4). However, among our non U.S.-born participants who grew up speaking languages other than English and are bi- or multilingual, this socially-constructed label did have meaning for them in this particular setting.

<sup>4</sup>Our inductive approach to qualitative data analysis involved systematic reading and coding of the transcripts for the purpose of finding themes in the data. A deductive approach was used later as we examined the related literature on the research topic and checked for whether we should add coding categories to our coding protocol.

<sup>5</sup>We recall a meeting in 2003 when the entire faculty engaged in peer review of their plans. They were explicitly asked to check each others’ ideas for the following: “Does the assessment plan explicitly address multicultural learning and understandings (e.g., biases, prejudice reduction, knowledge construction, multiple perspectives, cultural assumptions)?”

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