



VOL., 25 Nº 3 (Noviembre, 2021)

ISSN 1138-414X, ISSNe 1989-6395

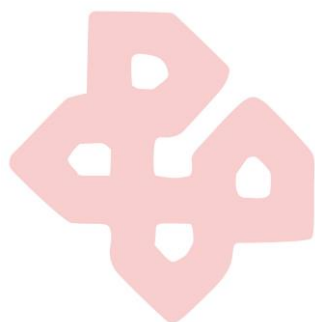
DOI:10.30827/profesorado.v25i3.21634

Fecha de recepción: 25/06/2021

Fecha de aceptación: 13/10/2021

ETHNIC IDENTITY PEDAGOGY AND INTERCULTURAL

Pedagogía de la identidad étnica e interculturalidad



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Resumen:

La enseñanza de la educación y la comunicación intercultural sin haber desarrollado una identidad étnica propia corre el riesgo de que los estudiantes se enamoren tanto con las culturas de otros que se desilusionan de sus propias herencias étnicas. Estas circunstancias son particularmente perjudiciales para los niños y niñas de color que viven en sociedades en que todo lo que se asocia con la gente Blanca se considera positivo, bueno y deseable, mientras que muchas cosas asociadas con la gente de color se interpretan como negativas, peligrosas y denigrables. En este artículo, presento y analizo los resultados de profesores de enseñanza primaria y secundaria que dieron a sus alumnos la posibilidad de explorar sus identidades étnicas por medio de contenidos. Argumento que los estudiantes que tienen un fuerte sentido de su propia identidad están posicionados para beneficiarse de la instrucción y la comunicación intercultural que requiere nuevos conocimientos culturales, sentimientos y comportamientos. Estos resultados refuerzan la necesidad y la eficacia de la exploración de la identidad étnica como un componente necesario de la educación intercultural en todos los niveles de la enseñanza. La exploración de la identidad étnica en la educación incluye establecer conexiones con las familias de los alumnos acerca de la identidad étnica, involucrar a los estudiantes en el diálogo de la identidad étnica, presentarles a personas de su grupo étnica que sean buenos modelos a seguir y la exploración de sus historias étnicas, tradiciones y costumbres.

Palabras Claves: caso de estudio; educación intercultural; formación de profesorado; identidad étnica; identidad racial

Abstract:

Teaching intercultural education and communication without personal ethnic identity development exposes students to the possibility of becoming so enamored with the cultures of others that they become disillusioned with their own ethnic heritages. Such circumstances are especially detrimental to children of color living in societies in which everything associated with White people is considered positive, good, and desirable, and much associated with people of color is interpreted to be negative, dangerous and worthy of denigration. In this article, I report and analyze the findings of primary and secondary school teachers who facilitated students' ethnic identity development using subject matter content. With a strong sense of their ethnic identity, I argue that such students are positioned to benefit from instruction in intercultural education and communication with its requisite new cultural knowledge, feelings and behaviors. These findings reinforce both the need and efficacy of ethnic identity exploration as a necessary component of intercultural education at all levels of schooling. Ethnic identity exploration in education includes making connections with students' families about ethnic identity, engaging students in ethnic identity dialogue, introducing students to social justice role models in their ethnic groups, and exploration of ethnic histories, traditions, and customs.

Key Words: case studies; ethnic identity; intercultural education; racial identity; teacher education

1. Presentation and justification of the problem

The aim of this article is to illustrate how classroom teachers engaged their students in ethnic identity dialogue to facilitate their ethnic identity development in intercultural education. Perry and Southwell (2011) contend that a critical examination of culture is essential for developing intercultural competence. They write, "students must critically examine culture, not just accumulate facts and knowledge about a culture, to develop intercultural competence" (p. 457). I argue that as students discuss the unique aspects of their ethnicities in ethnic identity dialogue, with different cultural experiences and responses to historical and current events among them, they thereby have opportunities to examine critically their culture and the cultures of their classmates. Intercultural education scholars agree that intercultural competence requires that knowledge of other cultures be accompanied by new and positive feelings (Arasamratnam, 2009) about them as well as appropriate behaviors (Perry and Southwell (2011). Students and teachers attest to ethnic identity instruction and development bringing about an avalanche of new knowledge, with accompanying new feelings and behaviors (Sleeter and Zavala, 2020).

Ethnic identity is a critical developmental process that has been researched, theorized, and debated for many decades (Erickson, 1968; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor, et al., 2014). Ethnicity refers to cultural practices such as "customs, language, and values" of a group (Helms, 2007, p. 236); an ethnic group is a cultural kinship group with which one chooses to identify (Helms, 2007). Ethnic group identification, then, which some scholars refer to as Ethnic Racial Identity (Umaña-

Taylor et al., 2014), signifies a commitment to an ethnic group and is characterized by a shared sense of belonging in which members share values, beliefs, and behaviors (Branch, 2020; Helms, 2007; Yoo & Lee, 2008).

Teacher educators and psychologists agree that nurturing ethnic identity development within the school context is beneficial to students (Banks, 1994; Rivas-Drake, et al., 2014). Moreover, understanding ethnic identity 1) serves as a buffering mechanism from attacks on ethnic identity (e.g., see Branch, 2020; Romero, Edwards, Fryberg & Orduña, 2014), 2) assists in making informed ethnic identity decisions regarding connections to one's ethnic groups (Branch, 2020; Phinney & Ong, 2007), and 3) affirms how ethnic groups have contributed significantly to the societies in which one lives (Banks, 2008). Evidence of effective use of the dimensions of ethnic identity development in education is important for at least four reasons: 1) ethnicity is salient in popular culture (Lynden, 2013), 2) questions of ethnic identity arise among children at all educational levels within the school context (Capacio, 2013), 3) ethnic identity is an area in which teachers are inadequately prepared (Gay, 2010), and 4) researchers in the U.S. have documented connections between academic achievement and ethnic identity for African American, Asian American, European American, Latino, and Native American adolescents (Adelabu, 2008; Fuligni, Witkow, and Garcia, 2005; Santos and Collins, 2016). Investigating ethnic identity, psychologists have determined its relevance to daily life, psychological functioning, and academic achievement (Rivas-Drake, et al., 2014). The present study is located in the U.S., but it has implications for other multiethnic countries whose readers will gain some insights from the case studies reported here that focus on ethnic identity development.

Some teachers have written about the critical nature of ethnic identity development and their design of effective lessons and projects (Cauhtin et al., 2019). For example, Aimee Riechel (2019) designed the Oral History Narrative Project so that ninth grade students could explore their racial, ethnic, cultural, or national identity. The project has a two-fold purpose: to give students the opportunity “to discover who they are and to help them become better writers and thinkers through a demanding, multi-draft writing process” (p. 108). The project is designed “as a humanizing counter-narrative in opposition to the dehumanization caused by white supremacy and other systems of oppression” (p. 109). She believes that this humanizing process “asserts the agency of marginalized people and validates identity” (p. 109). Students have an opportunity to read a portion of their oral history project before an audience of parents and community members. There is evidence that work such as Riechel's makes a positive impact on students' ethnic identity development (Lewis et al., 2012; Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2017).

The work of Riechel (2019) and others who facilitate ethnic identity development through curricula is consistent with Perry and Southwell's (2011) contention that intercultural competence can be taught at the primary and secondary levels, but only if the goal of intercultural understanding is written into the curriculum. Umaña-Taylor and colleagues (2018) tested the effectiveness of an eight-week curriculum that was designed to help high school students in the U.S. in their exploration and resolution of ethnic racial identity. Participants in the study

were equal numbers of female and male students (N-218) who identified as African American or Black, Latino, Asian American, American Indian or Native American, or White. Instruction and activities to promote ethnic racial identity exploration were provided to one half of the study participants who were randomly assigned to a treatment group. Students randomly assigned to the control group received instruction in careers and academic success. The researchers hypothesized that students in the treatment group would want to learn more about their ethnic racial identity as a result of participating in ethnic racial identity activities and instruction. All participants completed the Ethnic Identity Scale-Brief (Douglas & Umaña-Taylor, 2015) three times: a week before the instruction began (T1); twelve weeks after the pretest (T2), and eighteen weeks after the pre-test (T3). The researchers found that students in the treatment group had higher levels of ethnic racial identity exploration than the control group at the T2 interval. Consistent with their hypothesis, they reported that, “the intervention condition significantly moderated the relation between T2 exploration and T3 resolution” (p. 868), that is, students in the control group experienced gains in ethnic racial identity resolution after exposure to the ethnic racial identity curriculum. Significant to the present study, the researchers write that their project provides evidence that, ethnic racial identity “exploration and resolution are modifiable intervention targets” (p. 869). The researchers emphasize that research staff, not classroom teachers, delivered the intervention in the school setting. They assert that a true effectiveness trial will be one in which the program is delivered by teachers. In the present study, the opportunities for ethnic identity exploration and resolution were provided by teachers in real-world settings, i.e., public school classrooms.

Rivas-Drake and Umaña-Taylor (2019) review curricular interventions to be used in schools in the U.S., as well as community programs, that are designed to have youth explore their ethnic identities by engaging in intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic dialogue. The authors describe intergroup dialogue as, “a strategy in which members of different ethnic-racial groups are asked to engage in conversations about their own ingroup identities and to learn more about the identities and experiences of people who are different from them” (p. 130). They describe a Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity program, operated by the University of Michigan School of Social Work, that brought high school students from different racial and ethnic groups and different socioeconomic statuses together to discuss race and ethnicity. Among the goals of this program, Rivas-Drake and Umaña-Taylor list these:

- Tell stories and listen and learn from other group members
- Strengthen understanding of the relationship of their own personal lives with social group identities and multiple identities
- Identify differences and sources of conflict
- Explore similarities and differences between groups
- Discuss some concrete, contemporary issues involving these groups (p. 169).

Clearly, the program designers understand that the nature of ethnic identity development includes investigating one’s own culture as well as others, and

developing the capacity to listen to the stories, histories, and differences—without value judgement—that are necessarily a part of interacting effectively with those who are from ethnically different groups.

In both the school and community-based programs that Rivas-Drake and Umaña-Taylor (2019) describe, dialogues about ethnic identity included discussion of related topics such as oppression, social justice, inequality, prejudice, racism, privilege, power, social injustice, stereotypes, discrimination, and equity. These programs also included the development of a critical consciousness, which they describe as, “a person’s capacity to recognize and question unequal resources and attend to how power differences between groups may be leading to those inequalities” (p. 167). These dialogues resulted in the youth wanting to discuss race and ethnicity more and wanting to learn more about their race and ethnic groups. The authors report that when youth have an awareness and understanding of themselves ethnically-racially, they have more of an inclination and desire to “engage productively with people who are different from them” (p. 125). The effectiveness of these curricular and community approaches suggests that dialogues about ethnic identity specifically, accompanied by important related topics such as those listed here, help students to understand the world in which they live, to navigate the political structures in that world, and to interact effectively with those from different ethnic groups. These studies (Umaña-Taylor (2018; Douglas & Umaña-Taylor (2015) and Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor (2019) and others, conducted in schools, demonstrated that following these interventions, students wanted to learn more about their own and others’ ethnic identities. These results suggest that the school context is an appropriate environment for successful ethnic identity development for students.

1.1. The Current Study

Given the findings of the studies cited in the previous section, the teachers in the current study engaged students in discussions about ethnicity and ethnic identity (Branch, 2020) to facilitate the students’ ethnic identity development and to encourage their intercultural education and communication. The research question that guided this investigation was, What are the themes of the discussions in which teachers engage students to facilitate their ethnic identity development?

Because ethnicity and ethnic identity are under-researched in teacher education, neither teacher educators, nor classroom teachers have sufficient examples of how classroom teachers can foster ethnic identity development in schools. This lack of research in ethnic identity development is the central problem that is addressed in the current study; specifically, this study investigated how classroom teachers engaged students in ethnic identity dialogue in order to facilitate their ethnic identity development. I conceptualize ethnic identity development in education as comprising four dimensions: 1) making connections with students’ families about ethnic identity, 2) engaging students in ethnic identity dialogue, 3) exploring ethnic histories, traditions, and customs, and 4) introducing students to social justice role models in their ethnic groups (Branch, 2020). The focus of this

paper is the dimension of engaging students in ethnic identity dialogue (Branch, 2020). I argue that ethnic identity dialogue in intercultural education will help to decolonize minoritized ethnic groups by bringing the experiences of those groups into the educational arena for unprejudiced investigation, interrogation, discussion and analysis. I argue further that engaging students in ethnic identity dialogue is important for at least three reasons: First, students need to be able to speak freely about their ethnic identities in the school because questions about their ethnicity often arise within the school context. Second, students benefit psychologically and emotionally from a school environment in which their teachers and classmates affirm and value their ethnic groups, which may be regularly denigrated in schools as they are in the society at large. Third, an understanding of how teachers engage students in ethnic identity dialogue is needed in intercultural education to a) prepare teachers for meeting the ethnic identity needs of all students, especially those students whose ethnic groups are marginalized by societies that demean and devalue them, b) give pre-service teachers opportunities to see ethnic identity dialogue at work in their teacher preparation programs and to develop, share, and practice implementing ethnic identity dialogue, and c) help to close the achievement gap by presenting students of color with curricula that affirms their identities, increases their engagement, and increases the likelihood of their higher academic achievement.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The data in this study are drawn from an investigation of four teachers who were employed by school districts in southern California. Ms. Millan, a Mexican American female who taught colegio (elementary 2nd grade), Mr. Hernandez, a Mexican American male who taught a colegio (a combination 1st/2nd elementary grade) class, Mr. Moore, a White male, who taught secondary (11th grade) American Literature, and Mr. Bernard, an African American male who taught secondary (11th grade) Advanced Placement History, agreed to be participants in the study. All of the teachers' names are pseudonyms.

Both Martin Bernard and Raul Hernandez taught at public urban schools. Martin Bernard taught at a public high school of 2,355 students, and Raul Hernandez taught at a K-8 distinguished charter school of 1,477. Both Ariel Millan and Dominic Moore taught at public urban schools. Ariel Millan taught at a K-5 elementary school of 318 students and Dominic Moore taught at a K-12 charter school of 1,348 students. All four schools were culturally diverse, with Latinx students being the majority population in all schools. All of the teachers were my former teacher education students. I invited them to be in the research because they were excellent teachers; they agreed to participate because of their interest in facilitating students' ethnic identity development.

2.2. Data Collection

Data collection consisted of three individual interviews and two classroom observations with each teacher, as well as one focus group interview that included all of the teachers. In the first interview, I collected demographic data and philosophy of education. In the second interview, teachers discussed their ideas about ethnicity and specifically their role in facilitating the ethnic identity development of their students.

In the third interview I explained the four dimensions of ethnic identity exploration in education: Connections, Dialogue, Exploration, Role Models (Branch, 2020), and how each of the dimensions could be incorporated into lesson designs. After responding to their questions about the model and showing them how each of the dimensions could be incorporated into subject matter lesson designs, I asked the teachers to incorporate at least one dimension into one of their existing lesson plans or to design a new lesson plan into which they would incorporate one dimension. This paper reports the teachers' perspectives and implementation of engaging students in ethnic identity dialogue. After each of the teachers taught the lesson that they had designed in their respective classrooms, we scheduled a fourth interview in which they discussed their experiences implementing their chosen dimension within Branch's (2020) framework of ethnic identity exploration in education. I observed all of the teachers once, and I used the observations to look for pedagogical practices that reflected the dimensions of ethnic identity exploration (Branch, 2020). I also looked for and noted consistencies or inconsistencies in praxis with what teachers told me in their interviews. All interviews and observations were recorded using Quick Time Player on a MacBook Air that was used solely for the purposes of this research. The interview and observational data were transcribed using NVivo Transcription. I obtained informed consent and the signed consent forms were secured in my office at the university throughout the study period.

2.3. Data Analysis

I used the following questions to analyze the data: What was the evidence of discussions that teachers had with students about ethnic identity? What specifically were the topics of those discussions? What modalities (whole group, small group, or individual) were used for these discussions? I analyzed the data using an open coding methodology (Straus & Corbin, 1996). I looked for relationships between concepts and sets of concepts to continue to build theory from the cases studied. In the following section, I discuss the cases of four teachers who engaged students in ethnic identity dialogue in their classrooms.

3. Results

In this section, I report the topics that students and teachers discussed as teachers guided students into an exploration of their ethnic identity. Engaging students in ethnic identity dialogue (Branch, 2020) is the dimension of ethnic identity

exploration in education in which teachers lead classroom discussions about ethnicity, ethnic identity, race and related concepts to help students explore and to clarify their ethnic and racial identities. Teachers who engage students in ethnic identity dialogue must be careful to set ground rules for discussion and to lead discussions so that students are encouraged to analyze and to think critically about what they are hearing, rather than attack their classmates. Students and teachers in this study introduced the topics for discussion, which gave students opportunities to grapple with issues of ethnicity, race, and related topics. Table 1 displays the topics and the grade levels in which the discussions occurred.

Table 1

Dialogue Topics and Grade Levels

<i>Dialogue Topics</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>
Being punished for speaking Spanish or any language other than English	Elementary/Primary School
Definition of ethnic identity	
Ethnic celebrations	
Having a different ethnic identification than one's parents	
Normative nature of intra-group ethnic differences	
Racial prejudice	
Segregation by skin color	
Skin tone and where it comes from	
Choosing one's ethnicity	
Institutional racism	High School/Secondary/El Instituto
Internalized oppression	
Lack of parity in access to university for students of color	
Mixed ethnicity; mixed race families	
Questioning the identity assigned to students by parents	
Race	
Racial prejudice	
Rejection by one's ethnic group	
Segregation by skin color	
Sub-prime loans targeted to Blacks and Latinos	
History of racism and discrimination in the United States as the back-drop for present day racism and	

discrimination

3.1. Introduction of ethnic identity exploration

Ms. Millan did not have a scheduled designated time for introducing ethnic identity to her students. She stated that it was “through dialogue, through conversation of their normal everyday lives,” that she introduced ethnicity into the curriculum and to her students. Ms. Millan explained her reasoning for discussing ethnicity regularly:

Children need to build that stamina and that knowledge of being able to speak about it. And then they can write about it and then they can read about it. But they need to be more aware of it through dialogue, through something more relaxed. And then they can go into a deeper understanding.

She looked for opportunities throughout the day and the school year to affirm the ethnic identities of her students. She told me that she wanted to give her students,

More than one month in a year where they can feel like ‘my people are heroes too, we matter too,’ you matter in this book. They matter in this problem. You know, it’s not just in January or in February or March.

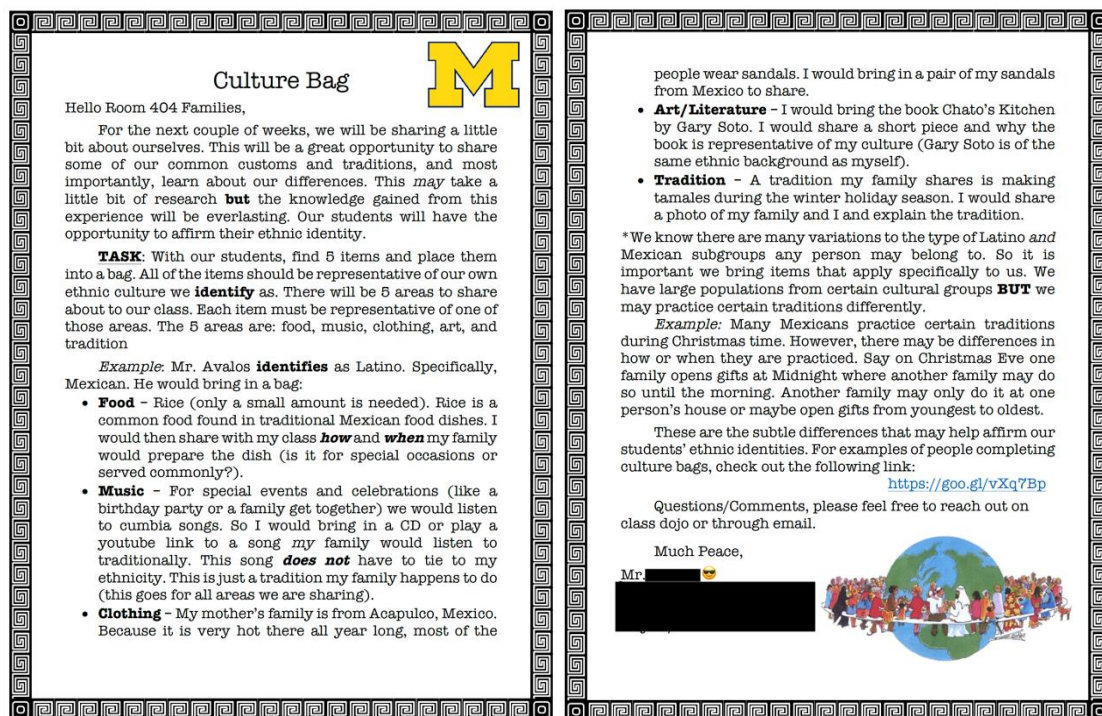
With her references to months in which special events in the U.S. are celebrated, including January (the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.), February (Black History Month), and March (the birthday of Cesar Chavez), Ms. Millan signaled her disapproval of the “heroes and holidays” approach to ethnic identity exploration specifically and intercultural education broadly. This approach is superficial, as it does not reveal the complex nature of the collide of cultures, the transformation of societies, and the struggle of power sharing that these heroes and holidays bring to the society and to the curriculum. While she did not avoid holidays altogether, she expanded the conversations to include multiple holidays and the familial stories that revealed the unique ethnic identities of the children. She explained:

What the kids do is they talk about their families’ stories and how and why their family celebrates Christmas, why their family has an Eid celebration, or why they observe Ramadan. By discussing what they do, they are exploring their ethnic identity.

Ms. Millan emphasizes that ethnic identification is illustrated in what individuals do and the importance that they attach to their unique ethnic behaviors.

Mr. Hernandez introduced his students to ethnic identity exploration by telling them about his ethnic background and the ethnic differences that exist in his Latino family. He illustrated intra ethnic group differences using a holiday that his students would understand: he explained that his mother is from southern Mexico, where they have a huge family celebration for Día de los Reyes Magos; his father, however, is from central Mexico, but grew up in the United States, and his side of the family does not celebrate Día de los Reyes Magos, but has a big Christmas day celebration. Mr. Hernandez told me that he used this example for the expressed purpose of preventing the development of stereotypes. He wanted to teach his students that even though many individuals might identify as Mexican, they may not all celebrate the same cultural traditions. His expressed purpose was to teach students that there is diversity of traditions within ethnic groups. He validated the reality of differences for his students and affirmed the value of differences. It is important to teach children at an early age that differences within groups are normal and that one’s ethnic identity should not be measured by how close one’s behavior or expression of one’s ethnicity comes to others in the group. Mr. Hernandez defined ethnic identity as, “how strongly an individual adheres or subscribes to the cultural values, attitudes, beliefs, and traditions, and often a similar racial background.”

This introduction also served as an introduction to their Culture Bag Project, a project whose purpose was, “to figure out what group you identify with and then show me five hard reasons why that is the ethnic group that you belong in.” The students were to complete this research with a parent, and parents and students were provided the explanation that appears in Figure #1.



Culture Bag M

Hello Room 404 Families,

For the next couple of weeks, we will be sharing a little bit about ourselves. This will be a great opportunity to share some of our common customs and traditions, and most importantly, learn about our differences. This *may* take a little bit of research **but** the knowledge gained from this experience will be everlasting. Our students will have the opportunity to affirm their ethnic identity.

TASK: With our students, find 5 items and place them into a bag. All of the items should be representative of our own ethnic culture we **identify** as. There will be 5 areas to share about to our class. Each item must be representative of one of those areas. The 5 areas are: food, music, clothing, art, and tradition

Example: Mr. Avalos **identifies** as Latino. Specifically, Mexican. He would bring in a bag:

- **Food** - Rice (only a small amount is needed). Rice is a common food found in traditional Mexican food dishes. I would then share with my class **how** and **when** my family would prepare the dish (is it for special occasions or served commonly?).
- **Music** - For special events and celebrations (like a birthday party or a family get together) we would listen to cumbia songs. So I would bring in a CD or play a youtube link to a song *my* family would listen to traditionally. This song **does not** have to tie to my ethnicity. This is just a tradition my family happens to do (this goes for all areas we are sharing).
- **Clothing** - My mother's family is from Acapulco, Mexico. Because it is very hot there all year long, most of the

people wear sandals. I would bring in a pair of my sandals from Mexico to share.

- **Art/Literature** - I would bring the book Chato's Kitchen by Gary Soto. I would share a short piece and why the book is representative of my culture (Gary Soto is of the same ethnic background as myself).
- **Tradition** - A tradition my family shares is making tamales during the winter holiday season. I would share a photo of my family and I and explain the tradition.

* We know there are many variations to the type of Latino *and* Mexican subgroups any person may belong to. So it is important we bring items that apply specifically to us. We have large populations from certain cultural groups **BUT** we may practice certain traditions differently.

Example: Many Mexicans practice certain traditions during Christmas time. However, there may be differences in how or when they are practiced. Say on Christmas Eve one family opens gifts at Midnight where another family may do so until the morning. Another family may only do it at one person's house or maybe open gifts from youngest to oldest.

These are the subtle differences that may help affirm our students' ethnic identities. For examples of people completing culture bags, check out the following link:
<https://goo.gl/vXq7Bp>

Questions/Comments, please feel free to reach out on class dojo or through email.

Much Peace,
Mr. [REDACTED]




Figure 1. Explanation of Culture Bag Ethnic Identity Exploration Project

Mr. Moore wants his students to “know who they are.” He said firmly, “If you don’t know your ethnic background, if you don’t have a good sense of self, it’s hard to move forward.” He used the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Pablo Neruda, and Langston Hughes to help his students make connections to literature and to their ethnicities. He said, “I would think that it would be very defeating if you went to school and never saw reflections of yourself in the curriculum.” In his “Identity” unit, first, his students read and discuss, “The changing face of America” (Funderburg, 2013), about the complexities of racial difference in the U.S. Second, they watch and discuss the video, “Seeing An Opportunity in a Question: ‘Where are you Really From?’” (NPR Staff, 2013), about two brothers from a multi-ethnic and multiracial family wrestle with ethnic identity issues. Third, they write a sentence of six words that represent their identity, and then they write an essay that explains their choice of the six words. Finally, students identify a fictional poem, song, or story and discuss its connection to their identity. He shared his delight at his students’ positive responses, saying,

You can see how some of the students jumped up when the poem came in Spanish. They responded to the Chilean poet, Neruda; and some students who normally don’t participate, I had their attention for at least a few minutes as I was working on that poem.

An African American female student in his senior English class declared, “this is the first example of African American literature that I have read in my whole high school career. Thank you very much for this.”

3.2. Racial prejudice and discrimination

Using a racial segregation simulation, Ms. Millan initiated a discussion of racial prejudice and discrimination with her kindergarten (primary) students. As her students were returning to the classroom from their lunch, she met them at the door and handed each of them a red or green-colored card. She explained:

So, they come in and they think, well, what is this card? They sit down and then all of a sudden there’s this big split. I seat all of the kids with the red card on floor in the front. I tell them, ‘there are new rules,’ and ‘school is going to be different now.’ ‘The kids with the red cards are going to have all these privileges, like being able to drink water here in the classroom. But if you have a green card you have to drink water outside at the water fountain.’ So for them, it’s like, what, what? And they start asking, why is she doing that?’

Over the course of one day, she had her students feel the sting of racial segregation—the privileged group, those with red cards, being allowed to walk freely around the classroom, sharpening their pencils whenever they wish, asking questions and getting answers from their teacher, accessing learning materials as often as they liked from wherever they were in the classroom. Those with green cards had to stay in their seats; they were generally ignored by their teacher; when their hands were recognized, the responses from their teacher were harsh; they could not sharpen their pencils without permission or access learning materials, such as paper, workbooks, etc. without the expressed permission of the teacher. The teacher,

however, purposefully spent most of her time with the privileged students, the ones with the red cards. She heard the students with the green cards complain, “this is not fair,” and she saw what appeared to be compassion and frustration on the faces of the children with the red cards, as they whispered, “why is she doing this?” But they could do nothing about the condition of their friends who they thought were being treated unfairly.

Ms. Millan does this simulation every year as a part of the Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations because she wants her students to know the reality of the past. She explained that, “there was a time when America was very harsh, America was very cruel. America didn't respect everybody.” She has a multicultural classroom, with students who are Filipino, Chinese, Vietnamese, Somali, White, and Mexican. She explained that with the racial discrimination came racial segregation. She told her students, “This classroom didn't exist in the past. I couldn't be your teacher. I wouldn't be able to teach you because of the way America was. Everybody would be with their own, that's how America looked at the world.” As a part of processing the red and green card racial segregation simulation event through discussion, Ms. Millan played the Martin Luther King Jr. speech, “I Have A Dream,” for her students. Reflecting on the children's responses to the speech, she stated,

I have never had kids talk about Martin Luther King, and have him be such a big presence in the classroom, as has happened since I began doing the red card green card experiment. Because I have shown them, they are very engaged with it because they can't believe that that really happened.

The children had a heightened interest in Martin Luther King and racial discrimination as a part of their ethnic identity because they had experienced it, and because they had been able to make connections to their lives and their families' experiences.

Another aspect of discrimination in America's past, Ms. Millan explained, was punishing students who spoke languages other than English in school. After learning that Cesar Chavez had been punished for speaking Spanish in school, she said, “so many children reflected out loud, ‘oh wow, Cesar Chávez was punished for speaking Spanish, that means I would have been punished for speaking Spanish.’” Other children asked, “I speak Vietnamese, was that true for them too?” “Oh yeah, any other language, not just Spanish speaking kids were punished, this applied to everybody,” she told them. She reflected on their responses saying, “What is amazing to me is, they get it, because it applies directly to them. And it directly applies to their grandma speaking another language, their mama speaking another language. They speak another language.” While all the children learned that discrimination related to language was a part of the ethnic identities of various ethnic groups, some children were able to make personal connections to this type of discrimination. It is likely that this discussion prepared these kindergarten, primary school children for language discrimination that presently exists in the United States and in some other countries.

3.3. Race

“Race” was also discussed in the elementary/primary and secondary classrooms. Mr. Hernandez discussed race with his students, using the euphemism, “skin tone.” He expressed his reluctance to using the term, “race:”

I didn't want them to be categorized, and have to pick one or the other. I didn't want to tell them, 'ok,' there's only three or four racial groups. I wanted them to fully explore this since this was the first chance to formally do this at school.

Yet, he revealed that the students introduced at least two race-related terms into the classroom discussions:

A lot of our kids are literal, like when they say, 'I'm black,' they don't mean like they're African American or Dominican or they're whatever, they mean their skin color is darker. So, they feel like they are Black. Others say, 'My skin is light so I must be White.' Then some students be like, 'well, I'm brown, so where do I fit in?'

Mr. Hernandez asked students “if it were possible for two people to have different skin tones and belong to the ‘same’ ethnic group.” Most students answered, “yes.” He also stated, “I asked the students who said ‘no,’ why, and some students said because their parents are that tone as well.” Mr. Hernandez recognized that his six- and seven-year-old students were wrestling with the concept of race. While the students did not have the language to express it, they appeared to understand that “race” is a category based on physical characteristics. Some of these primary school children also realized that the language that is presently in vogue to discuss racial identity is inadequate for some individuals. The students believed that race was not only related to “ethnic group,” but determined one's ethnic group. Although the students were paying attention to race, it seems that they had not seen parents who were lighter or darker than their children.

While Mr. Hernandez avoided the use of the term “race,” Mr. Bernard freely discussed race and encouraged his students to ask questions about race and other related topics. Following two days in which the students had read and discussed, “White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack” (McIntosh, 2003), a student asked, “when do people become conscious of race?” Mr. Bernard then called on students who volunteered to answer the question. A White student said she became conscious of race in the second grade when a Black girl stole her pencil. A Latina says race consciousness came for her in the third grade, when she was placed in a class where everybody spoke English and her language was Spanish. A White student says she went on a trip from California to Kansas to visit relatives and they went to a restaurant and all the people were White. She said she became conscious of race because she had never been in a restaurant where all the people were White. After calling on a number of students, Mr. Bernard summarized this brief discussion by emphasizing that the circumstances contributing to race consciousness are different for all individuals. Indeed, as these stories illustrate, the consciousness event may result from recognizing a language difference, or experiencing a negative event (theft or a microaggression) or a common event (eating out) in which one sees what one has never seen before.

Mr. Bernard used three readings to initiate a unit of lesson designs on racial and ethnic identity: “White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack” (McIntosh, 2003), and the “Introduction” and the chapter, “Race Words and Race Stories,” from *The heart of Whiteness: confronting race, racism, and white privilege* (Jensen,

2005). While Mr. Hernandez discussed the physical characteristics of race, “skin tone,” Mr. Bernard asked his students to think about the racist treatment that individuals and groups received on the individual and institutional levels as a result of differences in race. The Jensen reading prompted a discussion of institutionalized racism in the U.S., such as limited access to college and university for students of color. Mr. Bernard read a quote from Jensen and asked students to respond to it:

At the current pace, blacks and whites will reach high school graduation parity in 2013, six decades after the Brown v. Board of Education school desegregation decision. And college graduation parity wouldn't be reached until 2075, more than 200 years after the end of slavery. (p. 6)

A White male student responded that legacy programs contributed to fewer numbers of students of color being admitted to colleges and universities. Legacy programs allow admissions officers to award more admission points to students whose parents or siblings graduated from the institution, thus increasing their chances of being admitted (see Gross, 2019). As students of color and their families have a lower college going rate than White students, students of color are less likely to be able to benefit from legacy programs. A White female student asserted, “I don't think it's necessarily the university's fault. If minorities are coming from a bad neighborhood, probably the Black people from there aren't going to get in because of how they have been prepared.” Mr. Bernard asks if the universities should let the cycle continue or institute programs to improve the education that students receive in those neighborhoods. A White male student interjected, “They're not going to bring somebody in that's not that financially secure. They want three or four years of tuition money. They don't want somebody that's gonna drop out.” These students were unable to see connections between race, racial discrimination, a lack of high-quality education at a majority of the nation's schools where students of color are enrolled, legacy programs that benefit White students primarily, and fewer numbers of students of color enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities. Consistent with the larger society's reluctance to see race as contributing to a lack of college graduation parity between students of color and their White counterparts, these students identified inferior student of color educational preparation and the university system's preoccupation with sustained funding.

Mr. Bernard and his students also discussed connections between race, racial discrimination and inequalities in Black homeownership and Black male incarceration in the U.S., as well as the targeting of Black and Latinos by banks for subprime home loans in the U.S. A white female student told the class:

I feel like this goes all the way back to slavery in the sense that the Black population in this country was put on pause from developing. I feel like as conditions for White people were developing, Black people weren't involved in it, they were like separated. And so, now more white people are in college than Black people. More Black people are going to high school, but they're still behind. White people are moving forward without having to catch up.

Mr. Bernard agreed with her, saying,

You opened up your statement with, ‘this goes all the way back to slavery.’ And it does. You may hear people say, ‘the Black plight is their own doing because slavery ended in 1865. That's so long ago in the past, it doesn't even affect you today. You're just making excuses.’ But that past, certainly just a couple of hundred years ago,

still affects our present, and will affect our future; and if we're going to change the future for the better, that's the first step.

Mr. Bernard asked his students to think critically about the history of racial discrimination in the U.S. and its connection to present-day social inequalities. He wanted this ethnically diverse group of students to see connections between racial practices in the past, their hurtful manifestations in the present, and their implications for the future. Some students voiced their grasp of these connections; others, remained silent. After this discussion of one hour, it was striking to see 34 sixteen- and seventeen-year-old students, on a Friday morning, repack their backpacks and leave the room in silence. Perhaps some were unchanged by the discussion of race; others verbalized that they had begun to think differently about the impact of race on their identity and their lives.

3.4. Multiethnic/multiracial identity

Mr. Moore viewed and discussed with his students the video, “Seeing an opportunity in a question: ‘Where are you Really From?’” (NPR Staff, 2013). The multiethnic/multiracial students in his class identified with the brothers in this video who, although they were from the same family, identified differently. Mr. Moore explained:

These two men were Jewish and Ukrainian and White and Japanese. And by starting with that a lot of the students enjoyed coming up with like their own identity or going with their traditional identity of what their parents have told them is their identity or what they would be identified as by an outsider.

Some of the multiethnic students who had felt constrained by the ethnicity ascribed to them by their parents felt liberated by the story of these brothers who not only identified differently than their parents, but also identified differently from each other. One of Mr. Moore’s students asked, “I’m coming from the background of one of my parents is Chinese and my other parent is Black and where do I fit into that?” The identity unit assists students as they wrestle with this question and others related to, “developing a national identity but preserving your background” as Mr. Moore put it. These students, and others like them, are struggling in a society that overtly asks them to choose one ethnicity or race—and the one that would be obvious to outsiders.

One of Mr. Moore’s students expressed the pain of being Mexican American: “Being Mexican American means that you would be treated bad by Mexicans and Americans because you are not truly American or truly Mexican.” There is no expression of joy in this statement; there is nothing here about the excitement of two cultures coming together, with their different customs, traditions, and celebrations—only an expression of “notness,” not truly American or truly Mexican. At sixteen, he summarizes his multiethnic identity saying, “There are times when you are not treated like an American by Americans or Mexican by Mexicans.” The safe environment of his school classroom, with the support of his teacher and other

multiethnic students, and a curriculum that included identity, afforded this student the courage to express his isolation.

By contrast, a Filipino American, six-year-old student in Mr. Hernandez' class was proud and excited to discuss his multiethnic identity when it was his turn to present his Culture Bag. To represent his Filipino American identity, this student brought in a Filipino flag and an American flag, and beamed with excitement as he discussed his ethnicity while displaying these flags. To further affirm this student's ethnicity, a few days after the presentation, Mr. Hernandez hung a huge Filipino flag in the back of the classroom. He said the student, "Loved it. He lit up like a Christmas tree." He said he hung the flag in the room because, "I wanted him to feel like, dude, your cultural group matters and it's important. Perhaps this kind of affirmation early in students' schooling experiences would alleviate some of the rejection and isolation related to ethnicity felt by some students like the one in Mr. Moore's class.

Mr. Hernandez was surprised when a Mexican American female student, who he thought was "100% Mexican," announced that she was White. He spoke with her mother and learned that the student's biological father is White. The mother revealed that the student had seen the father only once, but "was so infatuated with the father's Whiteness that she really wants to be like her dad." Recounting the event to me, he declared, "Who am I to tell you what your racial group is? How you identify is cool!" His focus was on guiding students into an exploration of their identity, rather than telling students what their ethnic or racial identity is—even when he questioned the choices that they made. Exploration is critical here, so that students' early experiences with ethnic identity are positive. This experience reveals how important it is for teachers to resist judging their students' ethnic and racial identification choices; they should focus, instead, on supporting their students' ethnic identity exploration.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the themes of the discussions that teachers used to support their students' exploration of ethnic identity in elementary and secondary schools. The teachers explained ethnic identity and had age-appropriate whole class discussions on the themes and topics discussed below.

4.1. Introducing ethnic identity exploration

Grade level, maturation of students, and subject matter influenced the ways in which teachers introduced discussions of ethnic identity. As teachers are prepared to discuss ethnic identity with their students, it is important that they not stereotype entire groups because of traditional practices observed within individuals. Secondary school students will likely have more experience with the complexities of ethnicity, race, discrimination and other topics related to ethnic identity. They will likely have a

more advanced and nuanced vocabulary to discuss the meanings, importance, and benefits of achieving and claiming a positive ethnic identity.

4.2. Racial prejudice and discrimination

Primary school children, as young as five years old were able to discuss racial prejudice and discrimination. They felt the pain of segregation, and the helplessness felt by some who are caught in this system. They learned early what it meant to have one's needs ignored by one whose job it was to meet one's needs. They felt the unfairness and frustration that some in privileged groups, as well as minoritized ethnic groups, feel today as racial prejudice and discrimination endures.

They learned that racial discrimination is a part of their ethnic and American identity. Ethnic identification includes a recognition of historical events that influence and shape the path and existence of one's ethnic group socially, materially, geographically, psychologically, emotionally.

Significantly, Ms. Millan reports that her students were "very engaged" as they discussed about the realities of racial prejudice and discrimination, and she admitted that she was amazed that they understood discrimination. It is likely that other teachers will be amazed that such young children will understand the reality of racism and discrimination. The idea that such young children are too young to understand racial prejudice and discrimination is a farce. Such thinking is inconsistent with the present research and reality. Because children do understand the reality of racial prejudice and discrimination, teachers must be prepared to provide answers to their questions about what this reality means for their membership in minoritized, as well as dominant ethnic groups.

As the Vietnamese, Mexican, Somali, Filipino, and Chinese children learned that all of their ethnic groups were targets of discrimination, they also learned one of the ways in which the histories of some ethnic groups are similar. The reality is that those children are growing up in a world in which language discrimination is still prevalent.

4.3. Race

The children in this study had not learned to conflate racial identity and ethnic identity. If other six and seven-year-old children in the U.S., Spain, and other parts of the world, are thinking and talking about race, it would be reasonable and beneficial for teachers to promote intercultural education by teaching students correct terms and definitions for concepts such as "race," "ethnicity," and "ethnic identity" that they are wrestling to understand.

Some students can and want to discuss race. It is the adults that seem fearful of broaching this subject with students and having them discuss it openly in classrooms. The primary/elementary years represent a critical opportunity to teach children to value and appreciate individuals in different racial groups, rather than

learn to demean and belittle individuals and groups because they are racially different.

The discussion in which some secondary school students were reluctant to name race revealed their need to develop a critical consciousness that is borne, in part, out of patient listening to different experiences and perspectives from individuals of different ethnic and racial groups. Ethnic identity exploration within the context of intercultural education seems to be a fertile environment for facilitating critical consciousness development.

4.4. Multiethnic/multiracial identity

By giving students opportunities to express their feelings, and to hear the perspectives of others who share their ethnic status, ethnic identity exploration, in the context of intercultural education, will help to reduce and perhaps to eliminate the isolation that some multiethnic and multiracial students feel.

5. Conclusion

This study provides evidence of including ethnic identity exploration discussions in the intercultural education curriculum. Participating in discussions about ethnic identity guided by their teachers, these students had opportunities to hear many different perspectives about salient issues in our society and they gained critical knowledge about living in a multiethnic society. The positive nature of the dialogue and classroom interactions, and the absence of verbal rancor or disapproval, suggest that students were gaining the requisite new knowledge, accompanied by positive feelings for the culturally different groups that were discussed. The topics discussed by students and teachers in this study will also assist students in developing a critical consciousness.

These data suggest that within the context of teacher training in intercultural education, teachers should be equipped to 1) introduce ethnic identity exploration discussions in age-appropriate ways to students at all levels, 2) explain “race” and related concepts such as “ethnicity” and “ethnic identity,” 3) discuss historical and current examples of racial prejudice and discrimination, 4) guide students into healthy expressions of their feelings about their own or others’ multiethnic/multiracial identity statuses. The heightened engagement of students in this study while discussing ethnic identity themes suggests that schools and teachers that elect to promote ethnic identity development within the context of intercultural education will likely see increased student engagement.

One focus of future investigations should be the importance of student perspectives regarding ethnic identity development and related constructs such as race.

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Cómo citar este artículo:

Branch, A. J. (2021). Ethnic identity pedagogy intercultural. *Profesorado. Revista de Currículum y Formación de Profesorado*, 25(3), 69-89.
DOI:10.30827/profesorado.v25i3.21634