Designing an Anti-Racist Curriculum
For Middle School Students in Texas via
The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and
Latino/Latina Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract
This paper describes how Latino/Latina critical pedagogy (LatCrit) can be incorporated into the Texas’ middle school curriculum. The author demonstrates how the Texas Essential Elements (TEKS), a scheme of cross-curricular goals and objectives can be used to design an anti-racist curriculum. Moreover, instructional strategies for teaching an anti-racist curriculum are provided.

Today, one of the primary goals of the middle school teacher is to help young adolescents learn and appreciate cultural diversity, and for most teachers, multicultural education is the instructional medium implemented to achieve this goal. However, as more and more teachers become exposed to critical pedagogy through their graduate studies, the need to help them become comfortable with applying this theoretical framework to their daily teaching practices is paramount. Unfortunately, the academic milieu found in most elementary, middle, and secondary schools as a whole is not receptive to the exploration and use of non-traditional pedagogical theories in the American classroom. This article attempts to help Texas’ middle school teachers realize that implementing critical pedagogy into their daily curriculum is doable via the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), a scheme of cross-curricular goals and objectives designed for each grade level and adopted by the Texas Education Agency (2002).

Second, the paper aims to link the theoretical foundations of Latina/Latino critical pedagogy (LatCrit) an offshoot of critical pedagogy to the everyday middle school curriculum. 3

Critical Pedagogy
Critical pedagogy can be defined as a teaching approach that encourages students to question and challenge existing beliefs and values prevalent in today’s societies. In short, via this pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, teachers can assist their students in developing a critical consciousness by giving them the freedom to question ideologies and practices that they (the students) deem oppressive inside and outside of school. In addition, critical pedagogy requires the teachers to help the students transfer and apply the knowledge that they have learned in the classroom to the outside world (Apple, 1990; Nieto, 2002).

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) perhaps the most renowned critical educator is responsible for heavily impacting critical pedagogy. He championed the need for teachers and students to ponder

3 The author has recently completed a four-year longitudinal study with students enrolled in alternative education programs. For the first fourteen months of the study, she designed and taught an anti-racist curriculum to the students. This paper focuses on this period of the study only. Although the author has had her research on the effects of this curriculum on the students’ development of a Chicano consciousness via Latina/Latino critical pedagogy published, she has never listed or described the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) that were incorporated into the anti-racist curriculum until now. Colleagues and teachers over the past two years have prompted her to write this article describing how the TEKS were used.
critically about education and to understand how the education system has impacted their views on society and its political infrastructure (Freire, 1970). Supporters of critical pedagogy argue that it affords students opportunities to realize that we are living under an unjust social order that has denied poor young people the opportunities necessary to move out of poverty. Apple (1990) suggests that through dialogue and reflection in the classroom teachers can enable their students to realize that an inequity surrounding the opportunities and resources afforded to impoverished people exists.

Scholars in the field of education argue that we need to make the American curriculum more meaningful to students of color; that we should celebrate cultural diversity; and be willing to challenge and re-define the American curriculum for the betterment of our youngsters (Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Nieto, 1999; Delpit, 1995). In short, they posit that schools validate their students' cultural backgrounds in an attempt to enable the children to form their self-identities. For example, some researchers argue that children of Mexican descent who were born in the United States should be given opportunities to decide if they wish to be considered Americans, Chicanos, or Mexican-Americans (author, 2006; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). However, in order to form their self-identities, these youngsters need to be given opportunities to learn about ethnicity and racial classification (Duncan, 2002; Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, Parker, 2002, Valenzuela, 1999). According to Price (2005) young adolescents are capable of understanding racial and ethnic conflicts:

Take advantage of adolescent passion. Direct adolescents’ enthusiasm toward productive ends. A teen’s passion can become a bridge to learning about such topics as music theory, history, politics, race relations, or marketing (p. 25).

Critical race theorists espouse the need for society to challenge the traditional ways in which children are taught and by reexamining the curriculum to make it more responsive to social and political change. In addition to supporting the need for addressing the issue of racism and racial/ethnic conflicts in the classroom, critical pedagogy embraces the need for weaving social justice into the fabric of the American curriculum. Social justice is “generally thought of as a society which affords individuals and groups fair treatment and a just share of the benefits of society” (Wikipedia, 2007, p. 1). Middle school students first need to recognize the inequities that exist in our society before they can address them later on as adults in the social and political arenas.

To many individuals, speaking about racism and racial/ethnic conflicts are topics to be avoided because they make people feel uncomfortable. Have we not heard at some point in our lives that politics and religion are two topics that should be avoided because they generate controversy? Have we not heard it said that we should all learn to get along with each other? This last statement although beautiful in theory is far too simplistic.

Conversely, critics of multicultural education and anti-racist curricula believe that teaching students about racial and ethnic diversity serves only to divide the population living in the United States. They believe that children should be taught that we are all Americans regardless of our cultural differences—again another simplistic notion (Lasch, 1995). When people of color suffer discrimination, they are made to feel that they are not part of the Caucasian American experience. Therefore, to ask them to accept the idea that we are all the same is unrealistic. So, how do we learn to get along? Perhaps one of the ways to bring this goal to fruition is to encourage our youth to learn about racism and to explore their feelings and attitudes toward this topic.
Applying Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom

Most researchers working in the social sciences today would agree that education is a primary vehicle to producing future citizens who value diversity, and who are cognizant of the racial and ethnic disparities that exist in our world. Yet, despite their calls for change in the American curriculum and in the pedagogical arena per se, schools across the nation do not implement critical pedagogy. Granted, there are some classroom teachers who do incorporate critical pedagogy into their instructional lessons and classroom practices, however, these educators are in the minority. It takes an emotionally strong teacher to overcome the worries associated with the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom, notably, critical pedagogy is too difficult to design, critical pedagogy promotes disharmony in the school community, and loss of employment.

Critical Pedagogy is Too Difficult to Implement

Several teachers have expressed to the author that they would incorporate the tenets of critical pedagogy into their daily instruction if they knew how to do so successfully. As Priscilla a fifth-grade teacher enrolled in the author’s graduate course on curriculum wrote:

Critical pedagogy is too difficult to do in a classroom. I enjoyed learning about this theory and Paolo Freire in my graduate classes, but it’s hard to do. I wouldn’t know how to begin. Do school districts provide teachers with training to understand critical pedagogy? I know my school district doesn’t.

Critical Pedagogy Promotes Disharmony in the School Community

This second concern is based on the belief that discussing racism in the classroom will yield friction and dissension among school communities consisting of administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents. Educators who hold this opinion are worried that an anti-racist curriculum may actually lead to an increase in racial and ethnic tension in schools. Unfortunately, these individuals do not realize that refusing to address this topic serves only to perpetuate this tension. Maintaining a culturally sensitive and harmonious climate in schools is dependent upon a willingness to engage in dialogue on racial and ethnic issues and not by avoidance.

Loss of Employment

A third factor that prevents Texas’ teachers from implementing critical pedagogy in their classrooms is the fear that doing so will result in the termination of their teaching contracts. In short, they are afraid of upsetting their school principals, parents, school boards, and the Texas State Board of Education. In essence, they are afraid that addressing topics such as racism in the classroom may place them in jeopardy of losing their jobs because regrettably for many school districts challenging the status quo is frowned upon. Therefore, we cannot blame teachers for their concern. It is not easy to stand outside the box and teach to your convictions. Having been a classroom teacher for seventeen years, the author knows how challenging it can be for teachers to bring critical pedagogy into their classrooms for fear of being disciplined by the school administrator. However, she was able to have her fourth-grade students learn about Che Guevara and have them re-enact a strike against produce growers in California to celebrate Cesar Chavez’ birthday, without any reprisals from school district personnel. The author believes that her supervisors were willing to cut her some slack since they viewed her as an effective teacher in the classroom. In Texas, designing an anti-racist curriculum is doable because the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) make it possible.
Method

Description of Locale and Participants

Four years ago the author began a longitudinal study in which her primary goal was to motivate 52 Mexican and Chicano students (40 males and 12 females) enrolled in a middle school alternative education program to become reengaged in learning. The school is located in a neighborhood on the U.S.-Mexico border in which 99% of the population is of Mexican descent and the primary language spoken in the family is Spanish. The students’ misbehavior in school or in the community was responsible for their enrollment in the alternative education program.

Data Acquisition

For the first fourteen months of the study, the author designed and taught an anti-racist curriculum for four hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The content areas that were integrated into the curriculum were language arts and social studies. Due to the fact that the author was teaching at the university and could not spend all day with the students, she was unable to teach the students mathematics or science. As a result, both content areas were not included in the anti-racist curriculum.

The quantitative and qualitative methods used for collecting data throughout the fourteen month period consisted of videotaped and non-videotaped class discussions, pre- and post-questionnaires, student interviews, student journals, student work, and drawings. The class discussions that were not videotaped were transcribed. The director of the alternative education program and the author took notes of what was said. After they had transcribed the discussions, the director and the author compared notes. When there was a discrepancy, the students were asked to clarify the content that had been transcribed. University colleagues specializing in anthropology and cultural studies reviewed the videotapes and provided their input. Teachers were not interviewed because this study was only to determine how youngsters enrolled in the alternative education program could become reengaged in learning. Also, the author did not receive permission to ascertain how the students were doing once they left the program and returned to the regular education program.

In the beginning of the investigation, many of the students had stated that school was boring and in an attempt to make learning fun, she began designing lessons and activities founded on the constructivist principles of teaching and learning in an attempt to motivate these youngsters to learn. During the first week of the study, however, the author became aware of the students’ strong resistance to learning in English. Many of the youngsters held the opinion that speaking in English was a betrayal of their Mexican heritage. In fact, during the initial weeks of the study, the investigator was regarded as a “gringa” by the students because she spoke English well. The author soon realized that oppositional culture was at work. Massey et al. (1991) define the theory of oppositional culture as a human condition in which:

Involuntary minorities compare themselves with native majority members and are painfully aware of their disadvantaged status, which generates negative feelings toward the mainstream values and institutions. . . .Involuntary minorities thus come to perceive knowledge of and participation in the dominant culture and its institutions as a betrayal of group loyalty and a threat to identity. They develop a defiant position vis à vis mainstream institutions and feel alienated from schools, learning, and education. . . .(p. 8).
Research has shown that oppositional culture is the result of racism and this fact is well-documented in the literature (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 1991; Fordham & Ogbu 1986; Matute-Bianchi, 1986).

In an attempt to help these youngsters realize that speaking English is not a betrayal to their cultural heritage, the author decided to meet oppositional culture head-on and began designing an anti-racist curriculum based on Latina/Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit).

Solorzano and Bernal (2001) provide a definition of this theoretical framework:

LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino panethnicity. . . . LatCrit is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos’ multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (p. 311-312).

LatCrit addresses topics and issues that affect Latinas/Latinos on a daily basis. There are five themes that shape the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of the LatCrit framework in education.
1. The interdisciplinary perspective.
2. The centrality of experiential knowledge.
3. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.
4. The commitment to social justice.
5. The challenge to dominant ideology (pp. 312-315).

Designing an Anti-Racist Curriculum via LatCrit for Middle School

In Texas, it is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) that drive the curriculum. Teachers are required to teach these cross-curricular goals and objectives outlined by the Texas Education Agency. Adopting LatCrit as the theoretical framework of the curriculum required the author to incorporate the five themes into her design of lessons and activities along with the TEKS.

Interdisciplinary Perspective

Teaching across the disciplines is important to helping students learn about race and ethnicity because these topics can be covered in various content areas, and the more instruction children receive on these issues the better informed they will be. Researchers have demonstrated that integrating content areas enables students to become more successful in school because they realize that concepts found in one discipline can also appear in other disciplines as well (Emmer & Gerwels, 2002; Vaughan, 2002; Deeds & Allen, 2000; Carlin & Ciaccio, 1997; Wolfinger & Stockard, 1997). In effect, the children come to realize that curriculum is seamless. The author selected social studies, English language arts, and the fine arts as the content areas to integrate into her curriculum. The TEKS provided in each of these subjects are excellent gateways for teaching students via critical pedagogy. Although mathematics and science are content areas that can be taught successfully via critical pedagogy, time constraints did not allow the author to teach these subjects to the students.

Social Studies Disciplines 6-8

The disciplines listed under social studies for the middle school curriculum are history, geography, economics, government, citizenship, culture, science, technology, society, and critical
thinking skills. These content areas lend themselves readily to the development of an anti-racist curriculum.

Due to the fact that the alternative education program was a student pull-out program in which students came from grades sixth, seventh, and eighth, the author selected the seventh grade as the focus of her anti-racist curriculum. She reasoned that if she needed to upgrade or lower the level of difficulty of content, she would be able to do so. After analyzing the TEKS for all three grade levels, the author found that the goals and objectives for the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were similar, except that the levels of difficulty increased. Due to the large number of TEKS, only a sample of the objectives that are germane to designing an anti-racist curriculum will be discussed.

The Social Studies TEKS are ideally suited for designing an anti-racist curriculum because the objectives afford teachers the opportunities to discuss terms such as invasion, conquests, colonization, immigration, and trade. For example, in history, the students are expected to “describe characteristics of selected contemporary societies such as Bosnia and Northern Ireland that resulted from historical events or factors such as invasion, conquests, colonization, immigration, and trade” (Sixth Grade Social Studies-History, Section A). This objective gives teachers the opportunity to discuss key elements associated with colonization, namely, conquest and oppression.

Also, the seventh grade social studies TEKS expects students to be able to “contrast Spanish and Anglo purposes for and methods of settlement in Texas” (Seventh Grade Social Studies-History, #2). In addition, students are required to “understand how individuals, events, and issues shaped the history of Texas during the 20th century and are expected to trace the civil rights and equal rights movements of various groups in Texas” (Seventh Grade Social Studies-History, #2-F). During the author’s study, she had students read chapters from Guadalupe San Miguel’s book Brown, not white: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston (2001) in addition to reading the social studies textbook. The students were surprised that the textbook provided only a superficial description of the struggles facing Mexicans and Chicanos living in Texas during the 20th century. Conversely, they stated that San Miguel’s book afforded a more comprehensive discussion of how discrimination and racism impacted the lives of Mexicans and Chicanos decades earlier, and that unfortunately, discrimination against Mexicans and Chicanos still continues. Moreover, the students often stated that they were proud of the Mexicans and Chicanos in Texas who challenged discrimination.

The eighth grade history TEKS also serve as gateways to teaching an anti-racist curriculum. Students are expected to “explain the major issues and events of the Mexican War and their impact on the U.S.; and identify areas that were acquired to form the United States” (Eighth Grade Social Studies-History, Secs. D-E.) The author selected the work of Richard Santos (1982) to accompany the textbook. The students found Santos’ account of Santa Anna’s role in the war against Texas most intriguing. According to the students, the textbook portrayed Santa Ana as a man whose only goal was to end the war and end the bloodshed. In addition, the students said that they enjoyed reading history books written from people of Mexican descent because it was refreshing. They complained of always having to read historical accounts written by Caucasian Americans. Although the students were aware of the fact that there are people of Mexican descent who do not support the struggle against oppression, and in fact, support the status quo, the students were still pleased that people of Mexican descent write books.

Geography also gives teachers avenues for developing an anti-racist curriculum. Students in the seventh grade for example, are required to understand the characteristics, distribution, and migration of population in Texas in the 19th and 20th centuries. In essence, they are expected to
“analyze how immigration and migration to Texas in the 19th and 20th centuries have influenced Texas (Seventh Grade Social Studies-Geography #11-B). The students in the study participated in class discussions on how Mexican immigration has contributed to the U.S. economy.

Culture is another content area listed under social studies in which students can learn to become critical thinkers regarding race and ethnicity. The TEKS require students to understand the concept of diversity within unity in Texas. Students are expected to “describe how people from selected racial, ethnic, and religious groups attempt to maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to the larger Texas culture” (Seventh Grade Social Studies-Culture #19-B). This objective was a wonderful conduit to having the students learn and discuss the ways in which Latinos attempt to maintain their ethnic and racial identities in this country. The children were especially interested in learning about lowriders and how Mexicans and Chicanos living in the U.S. use art as a medium for self-expression. The students enjoyed reviewing the artwork and photographs provided in several issues of the journal Aztlan.

**Experiential Knowledge**

The second theme of LatCrit emphasizes the need to acknowledge the importance of experience, and the TEKS recognize this need, also. In effect, a student is expected to “compare text events with his/her own and other reader’s experiences” (Seventh Grade English Language Arts & Reading, #12-A).

Working with children, teachers observe their students’ behavior and are able to contribute valuable knowledge to understanding how children learn and how they respond to the curriculum. For example, teaching an anti-racist curriculum requires teachers to not only listen to their students’ comments but to observe their facial and bodily gestures as they learn about racism in an attempt to determine how their students are feeling.

Also, teachers must recognize the experiential knowledge their students bring with them from home and the world outside school. Students who have felt discrimination come with a prior knowledge or experience that must be acknowledged. Some of the students in the study stated that they were racists and hated whites or “gringos” as they preferred to call this group. Five of the students stated that they had personally suffered discrimination at the hands of whites (author, 2006). Some students often expressed anti-Anglo sentiments during their discussions. As Jorge wrote:

> I don’t dislike anglos, I hate them scence (since) the day I was born because they are the badest persons in the world because they discriminate my raza and ones (once) you mess with my people you mess with me. I don’t care about nobody only (“Mexican” … white or Americans are eating because of Mexican people who are in the fields taking chiles, sevollas, and all that so some trash can eat (Discrimination) is the word of my hate to white or (“American trash”)! (author, 2006, p. 8).

The other students said that their knowledge and understanding of racism came from their parents, grandparents, and other family members. Since these students came with some prior knowledge of racism, it was relatively simple to teach the students about racism through readings and discussions. Teachers who discount their students’ knowledge and opinions regarding racism because they believe that they are too young to have formed an opinion on racism are doing their students a major disservice. Youngsters can experience discrimination as well as adults. The student’s statement clearly demonstrates that anti-racist curricula are needed. Even minority students can be racist.
Throughout the study, the students were often given opportunities to conduct group discussions on racism and topics that were important to them such as teen suicide, substance abuse, gangs, and teen violence. Giving students the chance to conduct these discussions gave them a voice and helped them to feel empowered in the classroom. The author and the director of the alternative education program were often silent during these discussions to give the students the freedom to express themselves.

**The Centrality of Race and Racism and their Intersectionality with other Forms of Subordination**

This theme was the most challenging to weave into the fabric of an anti-racist curriculum because of its complexity. Teaching students about race and racism was fairly easy. However, helping children to understand how racial and ethnic discrimination connect with other forms of discrimination including that of gender, alternative lifestyles, religious beliefs, and poverty made the task more difficult. Although there are no TEKS specifically aimed at addressing the issues of gender inequity, alternative lifestyles, religious beliefs, and poverty, the author was able to fit these topics under objectives that were broad and offered the author a wide range of latitude.

The Language Arts and the Fine Arts TEKS were used primarily to weave this theme into the curriculum because literature and the arts provide a wide variety of genres that can be used to link racism with other forms of oppression. Currently, there are paperback books on the market that address cultural diversity and human sexuality and can be easily used to augment the middle school language arts curriculum.

**English Language Arts 6-8**

The TEKS for the English Language Arts program for all three grade levels contain the following skills: listening/speaking/purposes; listening/speaking/critical listening; listening/speaking/appreciation; listening/speaking/culture; listening/speaking/audiences; reading/work identification; reading/variety of texts; reading/vocabulary development; reading/comprehension; reading/literary response; reading/text structures/literary concepts; reading/inquiry/research; reading/culture; writing/purposes; writing/grammar/usage; writing/writing process; writing/evaluation; writing/inquiry/research; writing/connections; viewing/representing/analysis; viewing/representing/production; and writing/pennmanship/capitalization/punctuation/spelling. These skills, namely, those in italics are excellent conduits to developing an anti-racist curriculum. For example, implementing critical pedagogy into the curriculum requires that students be able to recognize how the media influences people and the TEKS for listening/speaking/critical thinking require teachers to give students opportunities to “identify and analyze a speaker’s persuasive techniques such as selling, convincing and using propaganda” (Sixth Grade English Language Arts & Reading, #2, B-C). In the study, the students viewed speeches given by local politicians and television commercials to determine the persuasive techniques used, if any.

Also, the goal of reading/text structures/literary concepts affords a student opportunities to “increase knowledge of his or her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures (Seventh Grade English Language Arts & Reading, #12-A). Throughout the fourteen-month study, students read stories depicting various cultures. For example, students read books such as Julie of the Wolves, Seedfolks, Shark Beneath the Reef, Hoops, and the Big Wave.

**Fine Arts 6-8**

A second content area that was used to address the centrality of racism and the intersectionality
of racism was the fine arts. The Fine Arts program for the middle school curriculum consists of three content areas, namely, art, music, and theatre. Each content area contains the same four basic strands: perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and critical evaluation. In critical evaluation, teachers are required to provide students with opportunities to make critical judgments and informed choices.

The strand of historical and cultural heritage is most helpful in getting children to understand that the oppressed often use the arts as a medium to express their suffering. The TEKS expect students to “identify in artworks the influence of historical and political events and to demonstrate in dramatic activities that theatre is a reflection of life.” (Sixth Grade Fine Arts, #3–A; #4A). Showing the movie The Color Purple (1985) to the students enabled them to see how a young Black girl grew up in the south during the early 1900s and how she encountered racism and gender inequities.

Commitment to Social Justice

Teaching students about race and racism involves the teaching of social justice as well. Young teenagers come to school already with some notions about justice. In short, they have some understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Yet, the traditional curriculum rarely allows students to explore and examine the ways in which people have been unkind to each other. Granted, students learn about the historical episodes, such as slavery, in which human cruelty has played a significant role in this nation’s history. However, students learn about slavery from a historical perspective. They memorize a series of dates and the causes surrounding the Civil War, but they do not allow our students to ask if the oppression of Blacks continues today, and if so in what way does this subordination continue?

The social studies TEKS allow teachers to incorporate social justice into their curriculum. In fact, the subject area ideally suited to teaching social justice is government. For example, students in the eighth grade are expected to learn about the impact of landmark Supreme Court Cases on American society. Students must “evaluate the impact of selected landmark Supreme Court decisions including Dred Scott v. Sandford on life in the U.S.” (Eighth Grade Social Studies-Government, 19-B). This objective is a gateway for middle school instructors to teach how the highest court in the land has played an important role in the lives of people of color. The key word in this objective is “including.” This word suggests that other court cases can be reviewed. In her study, the author had the students learn about Gong Lum v. Rice (275 U.S. 78), [1927] a case involving a child of Chinese descent who was not allowed to attend an all-white school. The Court ruled against her petition to attend the all-white school. The students also read about Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1 (413 U.S. 189), [1973] a case involving African American and Latino students who challenged a school system that practiced racial and ethnic discrimination. To simplify the content for the students, the author downloaded materials written for young people from the Inter Net instead of having them read the actual cases contained in the United States Reports (1928, 1972).

Challenge to Dominant Ideology

By far, this theme was the easiest to weave into the curriculum and the most fun. In general, direct instruction is commonly used to teach middle school students. The teacher’s primary role is to convey knowledge to the students and students answer teacher-directed questions. Having students complete worksheets or assignments provided in the textbooks are the common modes of student assessment.
In an attempt to challenge this dominant practice, the author adopted authentic instruction as the medium used to teach the anti-racist curriculum to the students and authentic assessment (author, 2006). The author taught the students on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while the regular teachers taught the children on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. In order to avoid confusing students regarding content, the author taught students the same concepts they were learning with their regular teachers. For example, if the social studies teacher was having the students study the Civil War, then the author had the students study the Civil War, also. However, the author would employ additional resources besides the textbook to teach the students. Students read articles downloaded from the Internet, and were introduced to books presenting different perspectives on the Civil War. Most school districts today use the textbook as the primary tool to teach social studies. The author challenged this common practice by consulting a variety of resources to gain information on the Civil War.

The authentic modes of instruction used to teach the curriculum included: 1) use of the cinema; 2) use of outside resources in addition to textbooks; 3) student empowerment techniques; and 4) the adoption of a student engagement vs. classroom management philosophy. A brief description of each follows.

The cinema is an excellent tool for teaching students about racism, prejudice, and how people stereotype others. The students viewed at least one movie a week. The middle school TEKS that enable teachers to use the cinema as an instructional medium fall under the content areas of English/Language Arts & Reading, and the Fine Arts. The English TEKS, for example, call for students to “evaluate how different media influence and inform” and to “interpret and evaluate the various ways visual image makers such as illustrators, documentary filmmakers, and political cartoonists represent meanings” (Sixth Grade English Language Arts/TEKS, #23-D). Also, under the Fine Arts TEKS students are expected to “explain the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in American society” (Sixth Grade Fine Arts, #3-B). These objectives give teachers wonderful opportunities to use the cinema in their teaching.

One of the movies that can be used to demonstrate how the media has portrayed people of Mexican descent in a patronizingly manner, is The Magnificent Seven (1960). This movie enabled the students in the author’s study to realize that the motion picture industry has played a major role in perpetuating the stereotypes associated with Mexicans and Chicanos. In this movie, the overall theme that the Anglo is the superior ethnic group comes across loud and clear. The Mexicans in the movie are dependent upon the Anglos for their assistance in ridding the village of some Mexican bandits. The most heated discussions occurred after viewing this movie. The youngsters were angry at how the Mexican farmers were portrayed as weak men who believed that they needed Anglo gunfighters to help them instead of standing up to these bandits themselves.

A second movie that was useful in helping the children expand their knowledge of racism was Glory (1989). This movie shows how African Americans were regarded as child-like by some whites, but also demonstrates the courage that these young Black soldiers exhibited as they fought the Confederacy. The movie was especially beneficial to the students in that it helped them learn that Blacks have also experienced a history of discrimination.
**Use of Outside Resources**

In addition to the textbook, teachers who wish to instruct via critical pedagogy need to go beyond this traditional staple of instruction and use other mediums to convey knowledge to students. The author found the use of paperback books, newspapers, the Internet, guest speakers, and field trips to be valuable modes of teaching. Students need to be exposed to different perspectives on issues in order to be able to make well-informed decisions.

Under the English/Language Arts & Reading TEKS, students are expected to “identify between a speaker’s opinion and verifiable fact” (Sixth Grade English Lang. Arts/TEKS, #10). Teaching this objective enables students to realize the need for holding public speakers accountable for their comments.

**Empowering students in the classroom is helpful in motivating students to work.**

Throughout her study, the author gave students opportunities to write about race and ethnicity. Students went to the library or used the Internet to acquire information on the topics that were of interest to them. For example, two boys wrote a paper on the racial and ethnic compositions of male and female prisoners in the United States. While they were incarcerated in the county Boot Camp Program, these boys noticed that the majority of the detainees were boys of color. As a result, they wanted to determine if this irregularity existed in adult correctional facilities as well.

A second tool for fostering student empowerment is allowing students to play more active roles in the classroom. Middle school students need to be given responsibilities such as collecting and passing out papers, taking roll, and leading class discussions. Allowing students to lead class discussions on racial and ethnic issues, for example, demonstrates to them that their teachers are willing to relinquish some of their control regarding what and how learning occurs in the classroom. When students realize that they share in the decision-making process, they feel empowered which can make them more willing to participate in learning and less prone to misbehaving in the classroom.

A third tool for empowering students is the use of authentic assessments to assess student progress. Using rubrics in which the criteria for evaluation is clearly stated enables the students to know exactly what they are expected to do (Tombari, 1999). In short, students learn to become responsible for their own learning because they know that doing well is contingent upon their willingness to meet the specified criteria. Students were also given opportunities to assess themselves and their peers using rubrics.

A fourth tool is cooperative learning. This instructional strategy allows students to work in groups to complete work. By assigning students particular roles to play such as time monitor, materials collector, the illustrator, the recorder, and the reporter, students learn to become responsible for completing their tasks in order to help the group. In effect, they learn the importance and value of teamwork (Emmer & Gerwels, 2002). In addition, the positive effects associated with successful teamwork leads to student empowerment because students realize that as individuals they can help the group succeed, and therefore, they come to see value in themselves.

A fifth strategy for fostering student empowerment is the endorsement of the notion that Knowledge is Power (KIP). Students need to realize that knowledge is an important criterion for empowerment. The more we know about a particular problem or situation the more capable we are of rendering well-informed choices or decisions. The author used KIP as a vehicle for helping students understand that speaking and learning in English is not a betrayal of their Mexican heritage, but a way of empowering themselves in this country. Through class discussions, reading,
and a series of guest speakers, most of the students came to the realization that since English is the primary language of parlance spoken in this country, it is prudent for them to learn the language in an attempt to be admitted into good colleges, and finding good employment (author 2006). Although speaking English well is not a guarantee of admittance to a good college or finding a good job, or breaking though the ceiling of discrimination, the students still need to learn this language in an attempt to “even the playing field.”

The final strategy used to empower the students was the adoption of a student engagement vs. classroom management philosophy. Researchers have come to the conclusion that keeping students engaged in learning minimizes their need to misbehave in the classroom (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2004). The author shares this view. Constructivist teaching enables students to build their own knowledge, and thereby helps them to realize that they are capable and responsible for their own learning, which in turn, gives them a sense of empowerment. When teachers do not afford students opportunities to become independent learners, they become dependent upon their instructors. Constructivist teaching allows children to become independent thinkers, which in turn gives them the self-confidence needed to believe that they can make a difference in their classrooms, schools, and in their communities.

**Conclusion**

Implementing critical pedagogy in a middle school classroom requires teachers to make sincere efforts at rethinking the way they teach in order to provide their students with opportunities to be critical thinkers and to appreciate all forms of diversity. Our children need to be better prepared to work with people from different social and cultural backgrounds because this nation is rapidly becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. Therefore, it behooves us to consider making the American curriculum more accepting of alternate ways to instruct our youth.

Although racism is universal, educators can attempt to dismantle this practice by educating the young people who will be inheriting our world in the future. In order to achieve this goal, we must allow our youngsters to learn about racial and ethnic conflicts and to recognize how racism and prejudice prevent societies from enjoying the benefits of diversity. However, before we can begin teaching our children about racism, school communities consisting of parents, teachers, and administrators, must be willing to commit to designing and implementing anti-racist curricula. Unfortunately, embracing such curricula will create controversy and intense public scrutiny in the social and political arenas. Yet, school communities must be willing to undergo this challenge in order to help children become more tolerant of all forms of diversity.

Designing an anti-racist curriculum in Texas is doable. If educators truly wish to teach via critical pedagogy, then it is up to them to examine their teaching methodologies, and to examine the curriculum that they are currently teaching in their classrooms. Given the political climate that we are in, doing so will not be easy. However, whoever said that teaching is for the faint of heart?
References


Gong Lum v. Rice, 275 U.S. 78 (1927).


(author, 2006).

(author 2006).