Cultural Autobiography

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EDMUL 205
Dr. Gilbert Park
December 8, 2011
The theory and push towards equality for all is something that can be admired greatly. In the twenty-first century, tolerance is becoming more and more important. We have seen an explosion of individualism recently. Different groups of people, whether it is race, class, religion, sexual orientation, or gender, continue to become more and more individualistic and pronounced. This is a great thing, but if tolerance and understanding are not taught early on in a person’s life then they typically become prejudice against certain groups of people without fully comprehending what it is they are judging. The fact that everyone comes from a different background provides a great deal of variety within society but at the same time can create controversial issues. Not every person grows up with the same morals and judgments instilled in them across the board. I tend to be a very accepting person when it comes to individual differences, which is strange considering my contradictory upbringing.

I was brought up in a typical middle class white family. My parents are fortunately still together and raised me jointly, along with my older sister and younger brother. I grew up in a wonderful home that my parents built living a very typical childhood. I grew up with pets, which is also very typical of the average middle class family. Fortunately, I was able to grow up in an area between the city and country. We were far enough away that we lived a country life but close enough that we could easily enjoy city life. I enjoyed normal childhood activities like playing outside in the woods, swimming, playing sports with neighbors, bike riding, and many other activities. We often had to come up with our own entertainment because of the location of our home. It was, as I mentioned, far enough away from the city that it was very much like country life. This ended up being a great thing because my siblings and I were able to grow up away from pressures associated with city living that may have negatively affected our outcome.
For this I am very thankful. I think it is safe to say that I grew up in a very safe and nurturing environment for a child with limited exposure to negative pressures.

The city that I grew up in, Huntington, is a majority white community. For a very long time it was rare to see anyone who was not white. Recently this has changed dramatically as we have seen an increase in African Americans, Asians, Mexicans, and Indians. For the first six years of schooling all of my classes were made up of white students only. It was not until fourth grade that two African American students transferred to my elementary school. It sounds terrible, but I can remember this being odd because I was young and had not really ever seen many African Americans before. The thought was never one of prejudice though; I think it was more curiosity than anything. I never felt that the students were in any way inferior I was simply trying to figure out the different things in the world at that time. Again, this was because I was young and unaccustomed to differences. Just as the Conchas article mentioned about Latinos performing poorly in schools because of low expectations, low incomes, and poor curriculum, I can remember that a few of these minorities never really excelled in school. They often just barely got by which I think was due to a lack of concern at home. The importance of school was not instilled in them from their parents. This unfortunately helps to solidify the stereotype that the Conchas article suggests.

My family was never really racist in any way. I did grow up hearing derogatory jokes that were not the greatest, but they were never serious. My parent’s philosophy has always been that the content of a person’s character is more important than their skin color. They knew from experience that race did depict whether a person was kind or worthy. This was good for me because I knew this and grew up with the same mindset. My parents were a great influence in
the level of tolerance for differences, including race and other aspects that will be discussed later, that I now have and I am thankful for that.

I have always felt that I belong to the middle class group based on my upbringing. I never judged people based on class because I understood early on that that is not fair due to the fact that everyone is fighting a different battle. I knew that not everyone was born with the same opportunities that I was. My mother worked in the Prosecutor’s Office for the Court House so I was exposed to several different levels of class from an early age. I saw children born into families that were very low class, but they were some of the nicest, well-meaning people one could meet. However, I knew that those kids would never have the same opportunities as I would so why would it have been fair for me to judge them based solely upon the cards they were dealt?

I will say that I had somewhat of an anger towards high class people because of negative experiences with them. I met and interacted with a lot of well-to-do people that were some of rudest, meanest, and insincere. I also had some well-off friends growing up that were so spoiled rotten that they could not see straight. They would judge lower class people for what they looked like or their intellectual abilities not realizing where they had come from and the obstacles they faced every single day. It always irritated me because I was friends with all classes of people and I had a bit more empathy for those suffering with challenges because I went through some of those challenges.

At one point in high school after the recession really hit hard, my family was affected like never before. My mother lost her job of twelve years which had great insurance, benefits she had worked up to, and financial security. Overnight it was all gone. We did not know what we
were going to do. My family struggled to stay afloat for a very long time. Every penny was stretched to its maximum. We went without health insurance so if anyone would have become ill we would have lost everything. It was hard because my parents worked for years to have the things they now do and those things were almost taken away so easily. I understand what it is like to live just barely hanging on, certainly not to the extent of a lot of people, but enough so that I have empathy towards them. This is why it was so irritating when those high class friends would say things and judge people without truly understanding a situation. It really disgusted me.

Religion is the area that I am most uncomfortable with discussing. I have always felt uneasiness towards religion. My family was never a faithful every Sunday church going one. In fact, I have never been to a Sunday service with my family. When I was about eight I started going to Wednesday night youth group at a church with my neighborhood friends. I remember doing more activities than actually learning about Christianity. This lasted for about three years. When middle school came around I began going to another youth group with a good friend. I began to get heavily involved in this church’s events but again I never really learned much about religion. By the time I got to high school I was dedicated to trumpet playing and the church band was just another ensemble to get more practice in. So, I played in this ensemble for four years. As I got older and consequently a better player I was in higher demand for this church. I began to play in Sunday morning worship bands but rarely stayed for the actual service. Since I have gotten to college I have really stopped going to church at all. I never went faithfully and I never really learned the basic concepts of religion, in this case Christianity. That being said, I do not understand religion much and I have a lot of issues with it. I am fine with people being involved in religion but I do not want it to be forced on me.
Observing from the outside, I do not understand how one religion can be chosen as the correct one. To me they are all contradictory. For example, one religion may say that if you are gay you are going to Hell and another may say that God is accepting and loves you still. I just feel that often time religion causes more disunity and aggravation than positivity. And this is not necessarily because religion is a bad thing but more because as humans we choose to stick to what we know with little give in looking beyond the scope of what we can see. We are the reason that religion becomes an issue. Rather than working together with other religions we are the first to tear apart another religion and speak the truth about why it is wrong. I do not understand this. I believe that this is just as bad as being an unproductive member of society. I have always lived by the philosophy that if I know I am doing the best I can as the human I am and living up to the morals I idealize and basically being the best person I can be, then I am doing alright. I have never felt that I need a religion to tell me what I am doing right and what I am doing wrong. I understand and respect that it is extremely helpful for some people and creates a sense of community which some desperately need, but it is not what I need. I just strive to do things the right way and be the best I can be.

I became very heated in class after watching the prayer in school video and discussing the topic in class. In that discussion, and still today, I felt very strongly that religion is not something that belongs in the classroom. We have church for teaching religion; that is its purpose. School is for teaching Math, English, Science, History, Art, Music, etc., but not religion. If a Theology course is offered as an elective I am okay with that but I do not believe that it is ever okay for it to be a required course. Religion is a touchy topic for a lot of people that brings about debate and rivalry. Debate and rivalry are fine but from what I have seen religious debates never turn out well. Someone usually ends up feeling oppressed. Like I have
mentioned before, religion is something that seems to bring about more trouble sometimes than
good because of the fact that we are human and must always be right. For one person to be right
another must be wrong. If we are trying to create a cohesive and peaceful environment for our
students then religious issues would just disrupt that unity. I do not feel comfortable with
religion and will never force it upon or discuss it with my students.

My views of sexual orientation have dramatically changed over the past seven years. Sexual
orientation never really became prevalent in my life until high school. Prior to that, I had never
really thought about it. When I was in high school I chose not to date because I wanted to:focus on academics and music. I knew I was going to college and had to dedicate every ounce of
effort I had to that goal. I also knew at that time that I did not want to end up with someone from
Huntington. I have always had a heavily romanticized view of love and knew early on exactly
what I wanted. I have always wanted someone with a different background than mine. I have
felt that I would be extremely bored in a typically expected relationship and have always wanted
something unique and different. I also thought that dating in high school was pointless because
the likelihood of ending up with the person you date then is incredibly slim. All this being said, I
never dated and consequently one of my high school’s most well known lesbians thought that I
was in fact a lesbian as well. This made me extremely uncomfortable and for a while I had an
issue with homosexual people. I think it was mostly that I wanted to avoid them because I did
not want people to think that my sexual orientation was that way. I just wanted to get through
high school unseen in terms of dating.

At this same time I became friends with a boy who was at the time dating a girl but we all
knew that it was all a matter of time before he came out. Having him as a friend was great for
me. We spent a lot of time together and I loved his company. I became very accepting of the
homosexual lifestyle and lost my insecurity about it thanks to that one person that tried to peg me as gay. He eventually came out and all of his friends were very supportive and accepting because we all had seen it coming for a long time.

When I got to college I had my first homosexual professors and the friends that I had of this lifestyle dramatically increased. Some of my closest friends today are gay and I love them deeply. We get along very well and really have more in common than differences actually. I can confidently say that I am one hundred percent accepting of the homosexual lifestyle. I personally am not gay but if I was then I would hope that people who love me would be supportive. I cannot imagine the hurt of being singled out because of my lifestyle choice. When it comes right down to it, no one can control who they fall in love with. Like I said, I am not gay so I do not know what those people go through with trying to validate their love, but I have been in a situation rather recently actually that may not have appeared to be too acceptable to many looking in from the outside. The situation was unexpected but I could not help it, I was hooked and fell completely in love. For us, it was never odd or weird or awkward. It worked very well and we were comfortable with one another. There was no discomfort whatsoever. I could not make some people understand this though. They could not see past the “oddities” I suppose of what the relationship was. I would imagine that this is how homosexual people feel sometimes. They feel perfectly comfortable and valid in their relationships but have to continuously explain to others why they love who they love. It is not fair that anyone should have to do this. We as a civilization should be accepting of this. I will say exactly what I told the person I was with: “How does it make sense for us to be apart and miserable hating our lives and the world just because people do not agree with what we are when we can be together happily creating more love and good in the world. Isn’t that the ultimate goal, to create love in the world?”.
people for loving the “wrong” person is one of the ultimate displays of hatred and disapproval in my eyes. As teachers we must keep in mind what the Kumashiro article emphasizes. Students who are oppressed for being homosexual are probably facing other forms of oppression as well that all accumulate and potentially cause them to do harm to either themselves or others. There must be an understanding as to why these students choose the lifestyle that they do and I believe that better education on these types of issues to the observer really helps the oppressed because those who do the judging end up with a better understanding of what it is they are really judging. Often times people make judgments without knowing anything about a situation which is ignorant and wrong. I will never in my life criticize or judge those who love someone of the same sex because I think love is one of the most beautiful things we as humans are able to experience. I am a romantic. Everyone deserves to love and to be loved no matter who or what the situation.

That all being said, there is only one issue that I have with homosexuality and it is the exact same issue that I have with heterosexuality. I cannot stand heterosexual people flaunting about all the men or women they have slept with or whatever else. I feel strongly that personal things are just that, personal. They should be kept between you and your partner. Those are special moments that should not leave the security of you or your partners mind. On that same token I cannot stand homosexual people who do the same thing. These are often coined the “flamboyant gays”. I do not want those things shoved down my throat whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. I feel strongly that those are moments and actions that should be kept to oneself.

Gender is a topic very near and dear to my heart. The Banks article states that a second purpose of multicultural education is to promote equal educational opportunities for both males
and females which I completely agree with. I have always believed in equality among the sexes. My coined phrase is “an equal splitage of the pants”. I have always been very strong willed about this and I am trying to remember just where it started. I do believe that it stemmed from my opposition to relationships because I never wanted to feel like a man’s property or to be treated inferior to a man because I am a woman. I knew I would never and will never be any man’s “woman”. I believe that women are just as capable as men if given the appropriate support and encouragement. Oftentimes girls are told that they just cannot do something or will not do it as well as a man because they are female. I completely disagree with this philosophy. I believe that girls should be given every opportunity that a boy is given without doubt or hesitation. My high school did an excellent job of preparing strong independent females for the real world. I was never discouraged academically, in fact I was encouraged and outperformed males a lot of the time. Maybe it is because I have always been so independent and strong willed that I feel this way. I have always done things on my own and have always strived for the very best in everything I do, especially in academics and music. I do believe that gender equality is necessary for the twenty first century. I have a perfect example of just the way women are perceived sometimes in comparison with men.

I am female and I play trumpet which is predominantly a “masculine” instrument. I have worked very hard over the years and have put in many hours of practice so I am quite good at the instrument, and I do not mean to boast at all, I am simply saying that I have worked hard and my efforts have paid off. It is always fun for me to go into auditions because A.) the auditioners are usually men and B.) I am a tiny little female. When I go into auditions I always smile because I am never taken seriously and I can see it in the auditioners mannerisms that they simply want to hurry and get me out of the room to move on. And then I start to play….I cannot tell you how
many times I have been in an audition and I begin to play and the pencils go down and they eyes are wide and just watching the entire time. No one ever expects to hear what comes out of my horn because of the expectation that I’m going to be a terrible player since I am in fact female. It really works to my advantage! But still though, that stereotype is there.

The way that I define Multicultural Education within the classroom is very simple. A true multicultural education should be one that emphasizes a safe learning environment where all students can feel safe, worthy, and capable. This means that if students exemplify different beliefs in race, class, religion, sexual orientation, or gender, these aspects of the student should not feel threatened but should rather be incorporated and used educationally. I think if you were to ask someone off the street what multicultural education means they would simply say that other cultures besides one’s own are incorporated into the classroom or that students of different cultures are allowed to be in the classroom. This is too general a description. For me, multicultural education refers to a variety of topics/classifications, including the ones listed above, that resemble differences among people in seemingly large ways. I want to create a safe psychological environment for all students regardless of lifestyle choices. Since I will be teaching music this should be a bit easier for me since the arts are one of the top avenues for expression and students who practice the arts are typically more open minded and used to and willing to accept differences.

My upbringing has been incredibly healthy and beneficial to the way I have turned out. I was exposed to enough hardship, variety, and differences that I am now very empathetic and understanding of individualism. The differences in race, class, religion, sexual orientation, and gender that we all share should be valued and exemplified, not scorned. What a boring world it would be if everyone was the same. The differences we have are what make us uniquely human.
Thanks to my upbringing the ideas that I possess work very well for the crazy sometimes controversial world I live in.