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PART V
Guide to New Resources

Guide to New Resources

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Weaving Cultural Past into the Present in Multicultural Education

A review by James C. Jupp
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C. Sleeter. (2015). *White Bread: Weaving Cultural Past into the Present*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense. 283 pages, \$28.00 (paperback). ISBN: 9789463000659.

Perhaps more than any other scholar, Christine Sleeter has consistently advanced a body of critical multicultural research for teaching and learning across differences in public schools. As a Professor Emerita at California State University Monterey Bay, Sleeter has provided another breakthrough for critical multicultural research with her pedagogical novel, *White Bread: Weaving the Cultural Past into the Present*. This novel

has two distinct features. First, the novel provides personal narrative that inspires preservice and in-service teachers to trudge toward cultural competence and political advocacy in public schools. Second, the novel provides a composite representation for the most up to date research in White teacher identity studies that helps advance critical multicultural education research in the field.

Before reviewing Sleeter's novel, it is important to situate the novel within her on-going contributions to critical multicultural research literatures. Given the trajectory of Sleeter's contributions over the last three decades, it is impossible to provide a complete overview of her contributions to the multicultural research literatures. Her early works help theorize multicultural education (Grant & Sleeter, 1986; Sleeter & Grant, 1987/2008), foundational research in White teacher identity studies (Sleeter, 1992, 1993, 1995), understandings of the narrowing and Whitening effects of curriculum standards (Sleeter, 2002, 2004), and comprehensive literature reviews on multicultural teacher education (Sleeter, 2001, 2007, 2008b). Her more recent works emphasize social justice education (Sleeter, 2009, 2010), theorizations of ethnic studies (Sleeter, 2011b), and understandings of White identity through critical family history (Sleeter, 2008a, 2011a, 2014). Sleeter has published twenty books that expand the multicultural inquiries and her textbook *Turning on Learning* (Grant & Sleeter, 2009) has gone through five editions in the last 15 years. Sleeter's *White Bread* emerges from her recent critical research on White identity through family history.

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In *White Bread*, a novel published as part of Patricia Leavy's social fictions series with Sense Publisher, Sleeter invites readers to join in Jessica's journey "into her family's past, into herself, and into the bicultural community she teaches" (back cover). Jessica, a fictional White fifth-grade teacher, takes up the challenges of cultural competence in planting the question, "Who were those kids, and who was I to them?" (p. 2). Working in a predominantly Latino urban elementary school in California, Jessica finds out that teaching and learning make new demands on her personal, professional, and social identities. Inspired by her mentor and Chicano activist colleague Esteban, Jessica undertakes a journey of coming to understand White identity and cultural competence in teaching and learning. At first tongue tied regarding White identity, Jessica responds to Esteban's provocation by saying "I'm just plain white bread American, that's what I know and that's what I teach" (p. 3). To this race-evasive response, Esteban challenges Jessica to situate her teaching within a serious study of herself, her students, the community, revisionist U.S. history, and Chicano history.

Reinvigorating the intellect and curiosity that drew her into teaching in the first place, Jessica responds to Esteban's provocation and begins the journey toward cultural competence. The first part of Jessica's journey attends to understanding her White identity and the Latino identities of her students. Serendipitously, Jessica finds a bundle of letters between Mary and Annie from whom she realizes she must be a descendant, and she begins to dive into her family's past. In doing the family research, Jessica begins to see the anti-German sentiment during World War I that resulted in the subtraction of her German heritage and language. Learning in her research that she was part of German Methodist communities once spread all over the Midwest, Jessica learned not only of the forced cultural subtraction of her German heritage and language but also of structural inequalities and violence that assailed African Americans in the Midwest. Studying White and African American historical contexts, Jessica begins to unpack what is hidden in the term "white bread" that she had used to describe herself previously. In addition to understanding White identity in social and historical context, Jessica also challenges herself to come to know her students and their parents' culture, heed Esteban and other school activists' leadership, and study revisionist and Chicano history (Acuna, 1972; Martinez, 1991) and literature (Anaya, 1972; Hinojosa, 1973/1994, 1977; Rivera, 1971/1987). Jessica's self, social, and historical study of students, their parents, and communities are important in Jessica's journey to cultural competence and advocacy.

However, in addition to self, social, and historical study, Sleeter's *White Bread* unpacks Jessica's affective learning. Inextricably tied to Jessica's study of her White

identity and the Latino identities of her students outlined above, Jessica takes on a personal journey which is often ignored or omitted in transmissive approaches to multicultural research. Jessica's self, social, and historical study has real consequences in her marriage, relationships, and other aspects of her life. Further opening a breach between her White working class husband Tim, Jessica defends her family history research, her study interests, and the attentions to her students, their families, and community. Finding Jessica's research and study incomprehensible, Tim feels disgraced and humiliated by the suggestion of studying the history of his working class family background including his father's disappointments and his mother's sordid background and quiet submission to abuse. Confronted with Tim's incomprehension and distance, Jessica at first fantasizes to escape with Esteban only to face her own naïve self-deception about Esteban's affections. Finding no easy way out of the loneliness of Tim's incomprehension and rejection, Jessica is left to do the anti-patriarchal White identity work with the help of her school colleagues. What happens to Jessica, her family history research, the study of students and their parents, and her reading of critical histories hangs in the balance of her cultural learning and ability to be courageous regarding the difficult knowledge she is learning and the new identity she is taking on. What is left in the balance of Jessica's journey is a White teacher who has begun the journey of cultural competence and political advocacy. For the children and community, the stakes are high as many White teachers in Jessica's school hold deficit understandings of children, school, and community. Consciously or unconsciously, Sleeter provides a synthetic representation that drives at pedagogical insights from the most up-to-date White teacher identity research, sometimes called second-wave White teacher identity studies. Teaching the novel to preservice and in-service teachers provides teacher educators with the opportunity to engage their students in the most recent pedagogical insights from White teacher identity studies.

White Bread illuminates three main insights from the most up to date research on White teachers' race-visible cultural learning. First, by situating Jessica's White identity within historical and social intersections including her immigration history, social class, language, and geography, the novel resonates with recent research on White teacher identity that emphasizes identity complexity in pedagogical ways (Asher, 2007; Jupp, 2013; Jupp & Slattery, 2012; Laughter, 2011; Lensmire, 2011, 2014; Lensmire & Snaza, 2010; Milner, 2008, 2011; Raible & Irizarry, 2007; Ullucci, 2010, 2011, 2012; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). In addition, by narrating Jessica's identity challenges, the novel resonates with recent research on White teacher identity that suggests a process orientation for learning cultural competence

(Bueler, Ruggles Gere, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009; Horton & Scott, 2004; Johnson Luchuk & Mosley, 2011; McDonough, 2009; Mosley & Rogers, 2009). Finally, by narrating Jessica's cumulative education with her students, their parents, colleagues, and mentors, the novel resonates with recent research on White teacher identity that drives at Deweyan experiential learning as necessary for White teachers' coming-to-know cultural competence (Adair, 2008; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Milam et al., 2014; Moule & Higgins, 2007; Pennington & Brock, 2012; Safford & Bales, 2011; Seidl & Hancock, 2011; Ukpodoku, 2004; Waddell, 2011).

"Using her own experience of exploring her family's immigration history, Sleeter has crafted a captivating story that weaves together interrelated themes: investigating family histories, teaching children of diverse backgrounds, and forging personal relationships across lines of race and culture. After reading this engaging novel, readers may be motivated to delve into their own family histories and, along the way, to reflect on what it means to be an American in our complex, multicultural, and multilingual nation" (back cover blurb by Sonia Nieto).

"Refreshingly innovative, creatively telling, and heart-wrenchingly intelligent, *White Bread* not only captures the everyday minutiae of teaching in culturally diverse U.S. classrooms, it also documents the emotional, psychological, and spiritual transformation one undergoes when self-investing in racial justice" (back cover blurb by Cheryl Matias). "*White Bread* should be read by everybody, but especially teachers and teacher educators as they work to transform their practices to reach our increasingly diverse student populations. In particular, *White Bread* has the power to help White teachers explore their own identities and better understand how legacies of racism and oppression impact communities of color" (back cover blurb by Wayne Au).

Read it and use it with your students!

To order a copy of *White Bread: Weaving Cultural Past Into the Present*, contact Sense Publishers, P.O. Box 21858, 3001 AW Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Website: <http://www.sensepublishers.com/contact/>

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Investigating Family Histories, Teaching Children of Diverse Backgrounds, and Forging Personal Relationships Across Lines of Race and Culture: A “Novel” Perspective in Multicultural Education

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C. Sleeter. (2015). *White Bread: Weaving Cultural Past Into the Present*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense. 283 pages, \$28.00 (paperback). ISBN: 9789463000659.

Christine Sleeter’s *White Bread: Weaving Cultural Past into the Present* contributes to a newly developing genre within the field of multicultural research: the educational novel. Sleeter’s story charts the development of young White elementary teacher Jessica Westerfield. Jessica, unsure of how to meet the needs of her predominantly Mexican and Mexican American students, finds herself at personal and professional crossroads, unsure if she should teach the traditional Anglo-centered curriculum, or work with her colleagues, students, and school community to develop a more inclusive *Raza Studies* curriculum. At the onset of the novel, Jessica resists the latter, declaring to her colleague Esteban: “you might be teaching what you’re familiar with, but don’t expect us

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