

# How to Teach Whiteness in the Classroom?

## An Approach to Multicultural Education Based on Whiteness Studies

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### Introduction

In the 1990s, a new discipline named whiteness studies started to develop in the academic world. Because the goal and conception of whiteness studies are different from scholar to scholar, it is possible to define whiteness from various aspects. For example, Ruth Frankenberg describes some characteristics of whiteness as follows:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “stand point,” a place from which people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.

(1)

In spite of the spread of whiteness studies in the academia, there are some problems. First of all, whiteness studies is designed on the basis of the idea of group identity. I don't mean to deny the significant role identity politics has played in achieving equal rights of minority groups. At the same time, however, it should be noted that identity politics is profoundly connected with what is called essentialism, because it involves an idea that everyone belonging to the same group shares the same attributes, mindsets and sentiments.

Second, although whiteness studies has contributed to developing new theories in reexamining racial relationships in American society, how to apply the achievements of whiteness studies to practical teaching is not fully developed (Hyttén & Adkins 440).

Third, teaching whiteness in the classroom is so embarrassing to many students, especially to white students, that careful practices are required in order to prompt educational effects. I would argue that embedding the student's personal reactions into the coursework is a desirable way to make multicultural courses more productive. In this thesis, I also would like to suggest a number of pedagogical principles and strategies helpful in teaching whiteness.

### 1. The Historical Background of Whiteness Studies

Why were American scholars interested in whiteness studies in the 1990s? A main reason lies in the criticism of scholars against the ideas of multiculturalism which developed in the 1960s and 1970s. So, I would like to think about why multiculturalism had a great

influence on education, and why multicultural education in the 1960s and 70s evoked criticism among whiteness scholars.

### 1.1 Multiculturalism

The United States witnessed big social changes in the 1960s. In 1964, with the enactment of the Civil Rights Act, African Americans won civil rights at the level of legislation. Influenced by the success of African Americans' civil rights movement, other culturally minority people such as women, Native Americans, and homosexuals started to insist on their own rights.

A challenge we face in talking about multiculturalism is that its conception is very elusive, and cannot be defined as a clear-cut idea (Rosado 3). In its first stage, multiculturalism advocated appreciating "the presence of diverse groups" and celebrating each group's contributions to the history of America. In this point, its concept is similar to that of "cultural pluralism" (Jay, "What is Multiculturalism?" 3). I would like to refer to this type of multiculturalism as liberal multiculturalism. The transition from assimilation policies into multicultural policies was welcomed by many Americans as the latter policies recognized the fact that America was a nation composed of diverse ethnic and racial groups, each of which had impacts on American culture.

### 1.2 Conflicts Surrounding Liberal Multiculturalism

With the emergence of liberal multiculturalism, school and college teachers tried to change their curriculums. Controversies on the curriculum reform at Stanford University are a good example of conflicts between liberal multiculturalists and conservatives. In March 1988, some students at Stanford University required the administration to reform the curriculum of a class in the general education course. This reform was very modest, and, as Matsuo points out, other universities followed Stanford University's curriculum reform, starting to change their curriculums (Matsuo 81). But, these reforms evoked antipathy among conservative scholars, who attacked them as what would destroy Western culture.

Along with conflicts between liberalists and conservatives, there appeared another opposition in the 1980s within the camp of multiculturalists. The new type of multiculturalism, which I would like to call critical multiculturalism, is similar to liberal multiculturalism in that both emphasize the importance of the distinctive cultures and histories of minority groups. But, whereas liberal multiculturalism regards as ideal the equal treatment of every race and ethnicity including the white race, critical multiculturalism denies a notion of national identity as oppressive, instead trying to claim separate identity of every minority group. The basic stance of critical multiculturalism—the stance of seeing Eurocentric culture as oppressive to minority groups—paved a way to the development of white studies in the 1990s.

The hot controversy conducted between Diane Ravitch and Molefi Kete Asante indicates the uncompromised opposition between the two forms of multiculturalism.<sup>1)</sup> Ravitch published an essay "Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures" in 1990, and Asante accused her in his paper

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1) To analyze their debate, I used a paper written by Konishi Nakakazu as a reference (271-277).

"Multiculturalism: An Exchange" in 1991.

In her essay, Ravitch classifies multiculturalism into two types: "particularistic multiculturalism" and "pluralistic multiculturalism." She argues that it is important to promote a pluralistic perspective, celebrating minority groups' contributions to American art, literature, music, sports, etc. In the mean time, however, she blames particularists for ignoring the existence of "a common culture" in the United States (340).

According to her, particularists are obsessed with ethnocentric ideas, allegiant only to their own racial or ethnic group. Afraid of the possibility that America might be disunited as a result of the spreading of separatist ideas, she emphasizes the necessity of recognizing a common American culture and national identity shared by general citizens (341). Arthur Schlesinger expresses the same warning (Schlesinger 205).

Ravitch's attack on particularistic multiculturalism is also aimed at essentialism involved in the idea of group identity (342). Gregory Jay defines the politics of identity as follows: "Identity politics refers to the tendency to define one's political and social identity and interests purely in terms of some group category: race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, religion, etc." (Jay, "What is Multiculturalism?" 3). It is clear that Ravitch's accusation of particularistic multiculturalism is connected with her suspicion of identity politics. What is important for identity politics is to create a group identity. However, identification only on the basis of the group one belongs to generates problems. Gregory Jay says: "This movement for group solidarity did in many cases provide individuals with the resources to defend their interests and express their values, resources that as disparate individuals they could not possibly attain" (4).

Asante counterattacked Ravitch's criticism of "particularists" in the next year. Particularly, he rejected Ravitch's idea of "a common culture," arguing that the common culture she tries to defend is virtually Eurocentric culture (270-271). Arguing against Ravitch's idea that particularism is no more than ethnocentrism, Asante asserts that an ideal society is "cultural pluralism without hierarchy" (271).

The development of whiteness studies is interconnected with that of critical multiculturalism: The former focuses on the privileges whites have enjoyed, and the latter blames white culture for subordinating minorities. Another similarity seen between whiteness studies and critical multiculturalism is that both raise a question about the legitimacy of the categorization of race conception. After the 1960s, people have attained a critical viewpoint on what it seems to be natural. Race and ethnicity are usually thought to be genetically determined, but it has turned out that race is artificially defined depending on the social and cultural situations surrounding each group.

Liberal multiculturalism was generally welcomed in school and college education because it celebrated every race and ethnicity, whereas whiteness studies or critical multiculturalism embarrassed a number of teachers because it entailed a viewpoint of anti-whites. The idea of identity politics and the criticism of hegemonic culture involved in whiteness studies also made it difficult for school and college teachers to incorporate the achievements of whiteness studies into their teaching practices (Konishi 277).

## 2. College Education on Whiteness

### 2.1 Background

How and why were whiteness-based pedagogies incorporated into higher education? In this connection, there are two kinds of historical vectors.

The first type of multicultural education is the one which, recognizing the impact of racial diversity on American society, attempted to reorganize the curriculums of existing courses on the basis of the ideas of liberal multiculturalism. Although these classes sometimes use the insight of whiteness studies to deepen the student's understanding of increasingly diversified American society, they rarely focus on whiteness itself.<sup>2)</sup> Nowadays, the majority of schools teach multiculturalism in some of their courses. According to the survey of the Association of American Colleges and Universities on diversity requirements (August 2000), 62 percent (340 total) of the total number of the surveys either have a diversity requirement or are in the process of developing one. Considering that only 196 colleges and universities had multicultural education courses in 1992, the number will increase in the future.

Apart from the former type of multicultural education course—the one in which the instructor puts stress on the reality of racial diversity and celebrates it—, a new type of multiculturalism emerged, influenced and spurred by whiteness studies. The new type of multicultural pedagogy incorporates the achievements of whiteness studies into teaching practice, raising a radical question in the area of higher education.<sup>3)</sup>

In this connection, a survey by Nora E. Hyland, "Being a Good Teacher of Black Students? White Teachers and Unintentional Racism" is helpful for understanding the importance of whiteness studies. In her study, she makes it clear that white teachers have some whiteness mindsets on students of color, such as low expectation for students of color, unconscious feelings of superiority over the students, the trait of regarding themselves as 'good teachers,' and their dominant attitude to the students.

The fact that the number of white teachers in American schools is so large is an obstacle to utilizing the outcomes of whiteness studies in the classroom. According to a research of the National Education Association, white teachers account for 87 percent.<sup>4)</sup>

On the other hand, the number of students of color has been growing, as a result of which there is a possibility that negative effects caused by unconscious racial prejudice will continue over generations in educational settings as well as in families, social institutions, and

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2) For example, we can see this type of education in the syllabus of Gina Masequesmay at the University of California, titled "Race, and Racism and Critical Thinking"(Spring 2011).

⟨<http://www.csun.edu/aas/syllabi/Omatsu-AAS%20201%20Fall%2009.pdf>⟩

3) As an example of a whiteness-based syllabus, we can count a syllabus by Audrey Thompson at the University of Utah, titled "Whiteness Theory and Education"(Spring 2009).

⟨<http://www.pauahtun.org/6624-7624.S09.html>⟩

4) On the other hand, the percentage of black teachers is 7, and other minorities account for 7. National Education Association (2005-2006).

⟨<http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/2005-06StatusTextandAppendixA.pdf>⟩

the media (Adair190). I wouldn't argue that all white teachers have prejudice against people of color. But, given that white privileges are "invisible" to ordinary whites, whiteness studies will be able to contribute to the realization of an equal society.

Considering today's situations concerning multicultural education, teaching the conception of whiteness at universities or colleges is essential for those students who intend to work as a teacher in the future.

## 2.2 Classes on Multiculturalism

Paul C. Gorski's paper, "What We're Teaching Teachers: An Analysis of Multicultural Teacher Education Course Syllabi" gives us good information about the way in which multicultural education is conducted in teacher education. In this research, he analyzes 45 syllabuses in teacher education courses on multicultural education and addresses its related topics taught in teacher education programs across the United States.

He categorizes all multicultural education syllabuses into five— (1) "Teaching the Other," (2) "Teaching with Tolerance and Cultural Sensitivity," (3) "Teaching with Multicultural Competence," (4) "Teaching in Sociopolitical Context," and (5) "Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice" (312). Furthermore, he categorizes these labels into conservative, liberal, and critical multiculturalisms. He distinguishes them according to differences in the objective of multicultural education. According to him, conservative multiculturalism involves (1), liberal multiculturalism involves (2) and (3), and critical multiculturalism involves (4) and (5).

What he calls critical multiculturalism corresponds to whiteness education – the teaching focusing on the meaning and functions of whiteness. Since the key concept of this approach is centered around the hierarchy of racial relationships and the invisible advantages of whites, it is worth while referring to what Gorski calls critical multiculturalism (313). In "Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice," he comments: "Most [courses are] often organized as described under "Teaching in Political Context," but with an emphasis on deconstructing and acting against oppression" (316). Judging from the key concept of this approach, we can guess how many courses actually reify critical multiculturalism in the classroom.

According to Gorski's analysis, 16 % of multicultural education courses at colleges are conservative, 58 % are liberal, and 29 % are critical (312). As we can see from this result, the critical multiculturalist approach doesn't account for the majority.

## 2.3 Curriculum Issues

While the institutions of higher education have been more conscious of the significance of multicultural education, they are faced with a number of challenges.

One of the challenges is that there is a gap between the student's indifferent, or even resistant, attitude toward multiculturalism and the teacher's strong enthusiasm for it. What Gerald Graff (2003) calls "volleyball effect" can be the case with multicultural education. He says: "students become a kind of volleyball, batted back and forth in an intellectual game whose rules change without notice from course to course" (66). In his opinion, the main

concern of many college students is only to get credits, so it doesn't matter for "smart" students whether what they hear in the classroom is conservative, liberal, or radical.

The second problem involved in multicultural education is that it is doubtful that its educational effect will continue after students graduate. Most students joining courses of multiculturalism are freshmen or sophomores.<sup>5)</sup> When they have a chance to become teachers and educate their students in the future, it won't make any sense if they have forgotten everything they learned as college students (Sleeter 99).

#### 2.4 A Variety of Contents

Since whiteness studies involves a variety of disciplines, college courses focusing on, or is related to, whiteness are also various. Furthermore, depending on course objectives, these multicultural courses can be classified into the two categories as is defined by Paul C. Gorski in his "Teaching in Sociopolitical Context," and "Teaching as Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Practice." The diversity of disciplines and educational goals makes it difficult to give a general description of the actual practices of multicultural education.

However, there are some similarities in terms of teaching materials. Considering the syllabuses I have collected,<sup>6)</sup> most of the classes are constructed by reading essays and books, watching videos, class discussion, writing essays for the purpose of promoting educational effect. Each instructor teaches his/her students through the combination of these approaches.

#### 2.5 Three Goals of Multicultural Education

By examining the syllabuses I have collected, it turns out that there are mainly three types of course objectives: "to develop critical thinking,"<sup>7)</sup> "to understand whiteness issues through analyzing them,"<sup>8)</sup> and "to make students consider about practical challenges on whiteness issues."<sup>9)</sup>

As to these three objectives, each of them has educational merits if we consider the context of whiteness studies. But, we must not forget that the most important thing in teaching

- 5) Most of the classes related to multiculturalism are conducted as part of general education requirements. For example, California Institute of Technology has 14 requirements, and a course of multiculturalism has been positioned as the 11th requirement titled "Humanities and Social Sciences Requirements."  
(<http://admissions.caltech.edu/uploads/File/general/Core.pdf>)
- 6) To make clear how many whiteness-based courses are/were held at colleges and universities, I have tried to collect syllabuses on the internet. The number is 20.
- 7) For example, there is a syllabus by Gina Masequesmay at University of California, titled "Race, and Racism and Critical Thinking" (Spring 2011).  
(<http://www.csun.edu/aas/syllabi/Omatsu-AAS%20201%20Fall%2009.pdf>)
- 8) For example, there is a syllabus by Kristine Boeke at University of Notre Dame, titled "A History of Whiteness in the United States, 1850-2004" (Fall 2003).  
(<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-afro-am&month=0402&week=b&msg=IkfwMHcKqlqDmdmeeMVfsQ&user=&pw=>)
- 9) A good example is a syllabus by Deborah Piatelli at Boston College, titled "The Social Construction of Whiteness" (Spring 2011).  
([http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/schools/cas\\_sites/sociology/pdf/2011S/SC303Piatelli.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/schools/cas_sites/sociology/pdf/2011S/SC303Piatelli.pdf))

whiteness is to understand the fact that in any class there are a variety of students having different cultural backgrounds, different racial experiences, and different ideas about race relations. To be sure, paying attention to different reactions of each student in class activities is always required in any educational setting. But in the case of dealing with a very sensitive issue like whiteness, it is crucial for teachers to know how each of their students reacts to the coursework. There is a possibility that unexpected, or in some cases opposing, reactions might occur in the classroom.

### 3. How Should We Reform the Class?

#### 3.1 What Should Teachers Be Careful about in the Classroom

To make whiteness-based education more productive, there are a couple of key points for teachers to take into consideration. In my view, there are four points teachers should consider.

First of all, they should avoid falling into the trap of overemphasizing the ideas some of whiteness studies scholars proposed. For example, John T. Warren criticizes *Race Traitor's*<sup>10</sup> slogan, "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity," saying that the concept of humanity has been used to cover up white privileges (Warren 45). Historically, the ideal of humanism has been appropriated by dominant white groups as a means to universalize whiteness. Emphasis on humanism or humanity in multicultural education can end up making white privileges invisible again. From this perspective, college teachers need to understand that what seems to be universal ideals can be a cover-up of privileges of whites.

The second problem with whiteness-related education is that in teaching whiteness in the classroom, there is a possibility of simplifying the image of whiteness. In some cases, teaching about whiteness can provide students with stereotyped pictures of both whites and blacks.

For example, the misrepresentation of a race can occur when a teacher addresses whiteness only by using literature. In their paper "Whiteness Studies and the Multicultural Literature Classroom," Gregory Jay and Sandra Elaine Jones try to deconstruct the generally accepted image of blackness by using novels such as Toni Morrison's (114). Of course, there are a lot of good points about their pedagogical practice because using literary works can make it easier for students to envisage the life of black people and have empathy for them.

But, at the same time, there are some problems with this kind of pedagogy. In this connection, Troy Richardson and Sofia Villenas argue that "it is problematic to extrapolate the entire black community, or any community, from one novel" (263). Their argument is that those whites who are not familiar with different cultural backgrounds are likely to grasp "otherness" only through what is depicted in fiction. The vivid description of people of color

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10) *Race Traitor* is a magazine which advocates the abolishment of whiteness. The main editor is Noel Ignatiev. (<http://academic.udayton.edu/race/01race/traitor.htm>)

in a novel can evoke an illusion that the fictional world they are reading is a real one.

The third point – and in my view this is the most problematic issue – is that many white students show strong resistance against the teaching of whiteness. If teachers fail to overcome the resistances in the first stage of their courses, their teaching won't function well.

The followings are some examples of the resistances students show in the multicultural classroom: "We've already done racism!" (Hyttén & Adkins 445); "my parents were racists but I'm not" (446); "There are no minorities in my school" (445).

These reactions illustrate that in their personal perspectives they think that they have nothing to do with racism, believing that America is now a "color-blind" society. To be sure, they can accept the discourse of "liberal multiculturalism" which teaches them the dignity of each racial group, its cultural contribution to American society, and the importance of racial equality. But whiteness studies discloses the advantages and privileges which whites still enjoy, and is likely to blame whites for creating social injustice.

Another reason why white students feel uncomfortable about multicultural education is that they generally regard themselves not as whites but as Americans (Jay, "Taking Multiculturalism Personally: Ethnos and Ethos in the Classroom" 621-623). It is quite understandable that the notion of "whiteness" seems strange for the majority of white students as they haven't considered themselves as "white."

Considering the resistances white students show and the difficulties college teachers face, it is necessary to figure out an effective pedagogy to overcome these challenges. Studies on the model of racial identity development are helpful in finding educational methods about how to deal with the possible hostility which can be shown in the multicultural classroom. Gregory Jay and Sandra Elaine Jones describe the model of racial identity development proposed by Howard G.<sup>11)</sup> According to their summary of Howard's model, there are seven stages in regard to racial identity development: "pre-contact," "initial contact," "disintegration of identity," "conflicted identity of connection-repudiation," "reactionary defensiveness," "the missionary position," and "commitment to change and social justice" (Jay & Jones 112-113).

Although whites rarely recognize that they have a racial identity as whites in the "pre-contact" stage, their encounter with racially different people provides them with a chance to recognize that they have some racial identity and privilege. In this stage, they try self-defense, and they feel "anger, denial, and confusion" (112). Knowing that "I'm white," and having white supremacy, they have feelings of guilt. This is the stage of "the disintegration of identity." At the same time, a negative spiral takes place, and many of them suffer the same mental conditions as oppressed people do. This stage is called the step of "the conflicted identity of connection-repudiation." They are also afraid of losing their previous positions. This can lead to the self-defensive stage again, for they suffer from anxiety or a guilty sense, and as a result, they regress to the first stage of reactionary defensiveness. This stage is a key point for teachers. If students can't get out of this negative circle by themselves, they can't reach the

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11) As an explanation concerning models of racial identity, it is useful to see a paper written by Carole L. Lund "White Racial Identity Development Model for Adult Educators."  
(<http://www.adulterc.org/Proceedings/2009/proceedings/lund.pdf>)



next stage of “the missionary position.” Teachers have to keep observing students’ inner conflicts carefully, and promote their identity development (Nichols 5-7). If students can overcome the stage of “the conflicted identity of connection-repudiation,” the next step is easy for them to reach. They try to “help” oppressed people, though many of them are not ready to engage in the activities of reforming the social systems which have produced race problems (113).

As to the students who have reached the stage of “the missionary position,” teachers need to appreciate their positive attitude toward other races and ethnicities. And as the final step, teachers need to help students start to think about what they should or could do by themselves to achieve social justice. In this stage of “commitment to change and social justice,” students succeed in acquiring a new identity. The development of this sort takes a long time. But the teacher in the multicultural class is expected to guide students into the final stage.

The fourth challenge facing multicultural education comes from the fact that racial stratification of the student body is different from community to community. The designing of the coursework should be different according to what kind of experience students have had in terms of race relationship. If one approach is successful in one school, it doesn’t mean the same approach will go well in another school (Jay & Jones 103-104).

In addition, in order to make multicultural education productive, it should be taken into consideration that white people don’t always see themselves as privileged. On the contrary, some white students see themselves as an oppressed group (Allen 126-127). Given that a number of white students have an unconscious fear about the possibility of the collapse of white identity, multicultural education should be conducted by considering the white student’s covert fear of multiculturalism. The teacher should pay attention to the complicated psychological mechanism of white students and try to avoid hurting them on the individual level.

Coincidentally, in my view, it is also problematic that whiteness studies has been promoted mainly by white scholars. A letter Gregory Jay receives from a black woman indicates the possibility that whiteness studies and whiteness education may not represent the viewpoints of black people.<sup>12)</sup> Whereas whiteness scholars hope to solve racial problems, it may lapse into egocentric studies if they don’t listen to the voices of the other.

### 3.2 Traps of Whiteness Studies

In his paper “Taking Multiculturalism Personally: Ethnos and Ethos in the Classroom,” Gregory Jay refers mainly to two issues. First of all, he grants that one’s personhood is socially and culturally constructed, which means that one’s personality includes the social. On the other hand, however, he argues that a person is not utterly determined by totalizing social structure such as economy or culture, and that multiculturalists should recognize distinction between “persons and cultural identities” (615-616). Denying the ideas of identity politics and

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12) “Letters to the Whiteness Studies. Web Site, with Responses.”

⟨<https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/gjay/www/Whiteness/letters.htm>⟩

cultural essentialism, he insists on the importance of personal choice, freedom, or voluntarism, and highlights “the difference between persons and cultural identities”(616). Whiteness studies can mislead both teachers and students, because it tends not only to see the race as a homogeneous category but also to refuse seeing the fact that there is a gap between individual selfhood and cultural identity. If one’s selfhood is completely identical with cultural identity, it means that people are deprived of subjectivity, personal choices and actions. According to Jay, cultural identity is just a part of one’s selfhood, which, because of containing contradictory selves, opens up possibilities (Ibid.).

But it will be misleading to say that Gregory Jay pays attention only to the existence of contradictions contained in one’s subjective position, for what he does first in his multicultural classroom is to ask students “to write an analysis of their own cultural identity”(621). According to him, many of white students argue that they don’t have a particular cultural identity, saying that they are “just Americans” or that they are “merely normal”(622). From their subjective perspective, they think of themselves as individual persons. Gregory Jay’s approach of requiring students to rethink about their cultural identity gives them a chance to be aware that they are whites, not just “Americans,” which in turn leads them to think about whiteness issues. In the process of Jay’s multicultural teaching, they end up recognizing that they are members of the white group, affected by America’s social and cultural system.

Awakening to the influence of the social system on individuals is very important in multicultural education because it can help students understand how the racial category has been created.

One tends to assume that there is an unsurpassable gap between “our group” and “their group.” Some of critical multiculturalists accept this assumption, defining whites as oppressors and people of color as oppressed. But the oversimplified picture of oppression and subordination makes it difficult to negotiate among different groups. “Otherness” and whiteness are not unchangeable constructs. People can demolish advantages of whiteness by changing the social system. The important thing in multicultural education is to teach students that whiteness and blackness are both social constructs, and at the same time to teach them that since America’s social system plays a crucial role in the construction of whiteness and blackness, it is necessary to change cultural, educational, institutional systems. By so doing, as Gregory Jay says, both white students and students of color can understand their own social positions and selfhood objectively (617-618).

### 3.3 Principles on Designing of the Coursework

Then, how should teachers in multicultural classes design their coursework? There is no method which can be applied to every multicultural course. But in order to make their class activities productive, there are a number of key pedagogical principles. The principles include (1) providing students with opportunities to rethink about their own personal identities, which I would like to call “the person-oriented approach,” (2) putting stress on the idea that personal identity is deeply related with group identity, but not determined by it, (3) giving information about “white advantages” which remain in today’s America, (4) dealing with local issues concerning racial problems, (5) trying to develop the student’s critical thinking.

### 3.3.1 Person-oriented Approach

In my view, multicultural education will be in vain if teachers only give general knowledge of whiteness. The course should begin with an activity in which students are required to think about their identity. As I mentioned above, Gregory Jay regards writing about one's cultural identity as the most important thing to do in his class (Jay, "Taking Multiculturalism Personally" 620). His pedagogy comes from his suspicion of essentialism which is usually emphasized in identity politics or in whiteness studies. Identity politics, although helping empower minority people in the political scene, has a fault as a pedagogical theory: It presumes that a person's identity cannot be changed because anyone belonging to the same racial group has the same and single identity. But, is it true that our identity is determined by the racial group we belong to? Or, is it true that our consciousness is constituted by a single identity? I agree with Jay in that one's ethos is more important than the deterministic idea of essentialism, because multicultural education courses should be aimed at changing the student's attitude toward other races (Jay, "Taking Multiculturalism Personally" 626). In my view, rethinking about one's identity—more correctly identities—necessitates viewing multiculturalism more personally. At the same time, students, by recognizing the possibility of changing selfhood, will be able to transform themselves into more responsible persons.

### 3.3.2 The Importance of Teaching Cultural Construction of Personal Identity

In addition to encouraging students to rethink about the nature of their own personal identity, the multicultural classroom should contain a process in which students notice that even if identity seems personal, it is also affected, or in some cases constructed, by social or cultural elements. In this sense, giving an assignment of reading the book by David R. Roediger, *The Wage of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, will be helpful for students.

Roediger's book has educational merits in understanding the historical process of the emergence of whiteness. He examines in the book how Irish people—who were once called "poor white"—were recognized as a majority group of whites. To explore the process, he focuses on social changes around the Civil War in the United States. He reveals the change of racial identity of Irish people.

After the Civil War ended, the relationship between blacks and poor whites started to change. Before the victory of the North, blacks and Irish people had good relationships. With new economic system "capitalism" starting to prevail, however, their relation underwent a radical change, because blacks and Irish came to work together in the competitive market.

To examine the changing of Irish identity, he pays attention to the change in the usage of language. According to him, in the reconstruction period, Irish people came to represent themselves by creating the new combination of the words "white" and "worker."

According to Roediger, the words "white" and "worker" came to be connected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at first (Roediger 20). "White" is a racial category, and "worker" is related to class. Before the Civil War, the color of skin was not significant as a racial category (Hale 5). But, during the social confusions after the Civil War, freed white people started to use the

word “white-worker” to distinguish themselves from “blacks.”

By learning the historical entry of Irish people into the hegemonic majority of whites, students will understand that racial identity has been historically created, and that white identity has been established not only by the visible color of skin, but also by invisible things such as class, gender, and economy.

### 3.3.3 Thinking about White Privilege

McIntosh's paper, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” is also useful as a teaching material in multicultural education, as it can give students a good chance to think whether privileges are still embedded in white people's daily life. To uncover white privileges, she writes down 26 lists. For example, she mentions that “I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed”(1). These invisible advantages are ordinary and natural for privileged people, but for many others, these are not accepted as ordinary. The experience of reading her paper and talking with each other in the classroom about whether what she describes is legitimate or not can be educationally productive.

Another paper which is helpful as a teaching material in illustrating existing inequalities in America is Monica McDermott's “Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations.” She mainly refers to three inequalities in the United States—residential issues (6-7), the black-white racial divide issues at each school(8), and blacks' high crime rate(8). The various facts she mentions in her paper offer evidence that racial inequalities are rooted in and produced by the structure of American society.

### 3.3.4 How to Deal with the Student's Resistance

How should teachers do to cope with resistances from students when they try to teach about whiteness issues? It is necessary to teach them that racial problems are not “individual problems,” but “social systemic problems”(Nichols 7). Because of the term of whiteness, people often misunderstood that whiteness studies attack only white people, but through the progress of the studies, it is now recognized that the racial problem is not only concerned about white people. That is a problem for every person. Teachers have to encourage every student to think about the issue whether their students are white or not.

Furthermore, teachers have to know that students are more likely to show resistance when the instructor is non-white. Gregory Jay and Sandra Elaine Jones succeed in overcoming this type of resistance by teaching the idea that racial problems are not individual ones. They say: “Students should not be allowed to indulge in personal hostility toward the teacher”(108). According to them, this kind of resistance comes from “a symptomatic, illusionary expression of their fear of a loss of privilege and power”(109). As we can see from this approach, teachers have to think of the other side of the student's visible responses. When a student shows a strong resistance, it may be a sign of some negative feelings such as fear, or inferiority complex.

Also, although it is not a direct strategy, it is effective to give students good evaluation on studying the theme of multiculturalism (Hyttén & Adkins 447). It is important for teachers to be sensitive to students' resistances, but if teachers focus only on the negative

reactions by their students, the students will stop learning. For teachers, the important thing is “to sustain student engagement” (Ibid.). They have to focus on the student’s positive side.

### 3.3.5 Development of the Student’s Critical Thinking

Critical thinking should be a crucial part of whiteness education. In the class on whiteness studies, teachers should help students have the ability to see things from various angles. Here, I would like to consider how to develop the student’s critical thinking in the classroom.

From the two definitions on critical thinking by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking,<sup>13)</sup> and by Richard Paul and Linda Elder,<sup>14)</sup> we can say the following things: First, “critical” doesn’t simply mean criticizing, which has relatively a negative meaning. Rather, it means analyzing something objectively. This kind of practice is effective when teachers try to deal with students’ resistances. Second, the acquisition of critical thinking can give people the ability to think about themselves. By analyzing things objectively, people will be able to think about themselves objectively. In the person-oriented approach I mentioned above, this critical thinking is useful for developing each student’s analysis of him/herself.

Considering the definitions, it is clear that critical thinking is essential to multicultural education. However, there are some other points that teachers must pay attention to.

First, as Linda Elder points out in her definition of critical thinking,<sup>15)</sup> teachers have to design their classes to nurture “self-guided, self-disciplined thinking.” In the past, critical thinking education didn’t involve emotional aspects, but the recent pedagogy of critical thinking puts stress on helping students not only analyze issues, but also have some empathy.

Second, it is necessary that teachers don’t limit their educational goals only to the development of critical abilities against others. As Richard Paul and Linda Elder say, any teaching has some purposes, such as figuring out new ideas, solving questions, and negotiating on uncompromised problems.<sup>16)</sup> Thus, teachers should set these goals and help students develop critical thinking to achieve the goals of multicultural education.

As a practical way to create the student’s critical thinking, I would like to suggest giving an assignment at the end of the course. The assignment is meant for students to examine whiteness issues by themselves, and think about how to address them in their own ways.

To deepen the student’s interest in whiteness, it is also desirable to make them focus on local issues (Nichols 8). Whiteness studies should be connected with problems which occur in our daily life. It would be meaningless if we don’t apply acquired knowledge to our daily problems. By focusing on local and personal issues, students can feel that how whiteness issues are closely associated with their daily lives. This sort of activities will enable students to commit themselves to racial issues after they graduate from college.

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13) “Defining Critical Thinking.”

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>

14) Ibid.

15) Ibid.

16) “The Elements of Reasoning and the Intellectual Standards.”

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/the-elements-of-reasoning-and-the-intellectual-standards/480>

There is one more thing to note. As Dana Nichols suggests, I think it desirable to introduce a lot of materials and concrete examples into the coursework (Nichols 9-10). Teachers should not force their own ideas on students. Students must be allowed to select what they want or need from a large volume of information, and develop a set of values on their own. For example, John T. Warren suggests doing whiteness differently. He says:

To do whiteness differently requires an enactment of self that is reflexive, critical, and responsible. That is to say, I must constantly be reflective about my actions, my speech, and my world around me in order to see the mechanisms of whiteness that surround me and work through me. I must be critical when I see the power of whiteness, always asking questions and examining the ways I participate in the maintenance of domination. (465)

As he says, the final goal of multicultural education should be to generate “the self that is reflexive, critical, and responsible.”

### Conclusion

In this article, I focused on education concerning whiteness studies conducted at some universities and colleges to consider what is the best way to teach whiteness issues, especially by highlighting the student’s personal reactions. In developing my argument, I paid more attention to problematic aspects of whiteness-oriented education than to its good points.

Now, in conclusion, I have to say again that the whiteness studies and education led by identity politics are fruitless. In addressing whiteness issues in the classroom, the important thing is not to teach about whiteness only from knowledge-based approach, but to attempt to undermine identity politics or essentialism. Achieving their educational goals, teachers need to focus on students’ various emotions and racial experiences. Whiteness is a social problem, but, at the same time, it is a personal issue.

In the process of education, the most important point for teachers is how to make clear a connection between social and personal problems. Because most of students, especially white students, believe that they are in the individualistic society, they are unwilling to think whiteness issues as social problems. Therefore, teachers should always encourage students to think of whiteness as a personal matter. This is a difficult task, but they should not stop teaching until students develop their own ethics.

Incidentally, though I proposed a number of principles for making multicultural education better, I would have to say again that there is no predetermined pedagogy about multicultural education, because I think it should have flexible pedagogies. Thus, I won’t propose the best and ultimate pedagogy. It is necessary to change teaching styles and combine various types of materials according to the actual situations. Understanding students’ learning process, teachers need to grope for proper methods.

After I suggested some principles on multicultural classes, I also suggested the necessity

of giving an assignment to develop critical thinking. As I have already suggested, however, emphasis on critical thinking may lead to the creation of individualistic attitude. On the other hand, too much emphasis on whiteness may go back to essentialism. The important thing is to maintain a good balance, not to become one-sided. Teachers have to consider the both sides.

In some cases, courses on whiteness studies may fail to cope with students' resistance, or fail to keep balanced education between individualism and group identity. But, if teachers succeed in designing their classes more effectively while knowing some negative aspects of whiteness studies, their classes will give students a lot of benefits; students will be able to try to overcome stereotyped ideas about different races, and construct themselves into responsible persons.

Finally, I would like to point out that multiculturalism is an ethical issue. In order to develop the student's morality, teachers need to teach whiteness from multiple perspectives and avoid forcing their own views on students. To grasp whiteness from the angle of social system is difficult for students, but it is possible to help students understand what is whiteness, and to lead them to commit themselves to social changes.

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