

structed and to participate in rethinking, reconceptualizing, and constructing knowledge. "The New World" and "The European Discovery of America" are two central ideas that are pervasive in the school and university curriculum as well as within popular culture. The teacher can begin a unit focused on these concepts with readings, discussions, and visual presentations that describe the archaeological theories about the peopling of the Americas nearly 40,000 years ago by groups that crossed the Bering Strait while hunting for animals and plants to eat. The students can then study about the Aztecs, the Incas, and the Iroquois and other highly developed civilizations that developed in the Americas prior to the arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century.

After the study of the Native American cultures and civilizations, the teacher can provide the students with brief accounts of some of the earliest Europeans, such as Columbus and Cortés, who came to America. The teacher can then ask the students what they think the phrase "The New World" means, whose point of view it reflects, and to list other and more neutral words to describe the Americas (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998). The students could then be asked to describe "The European Discovery of America" from two different perspectives: (1) from the point of view of a Taino or Arawak Indian (Rouse, 1992; the Tainos were living in the Caribbean when Columbus arrived there in 1492); and (2) from the point of view of an objective or neutral historian who has no particular attachment to either American Indian or European society.

The major objective of this lesson is to help students to understand knowledge as a social construction and to understand how concepts such as The New World and The European Discovery of America are not only ethnocentric and Eurocentric terms, but are also normative concepts that serve latent but important political purposes, such as justifying the destruction of Native American peoples and civilizations by Europeans such as Columbus and those who came after him (Stannard, 1992; Todorov, 1992; Zinn & Kirschner, 1995). The New World is a

concept that subtly denies the political existence of Native Americans and their nations prior to the coming of the Europeans.

The goal of teaching knowledge as a social construction is neither to make students cynics nor to encourage them to desecrate European heroes such as Columbus and Cortés. Rather, the aim is to help students to understand the nature of knowledge and the complexity of the development of U.S. society and how the history that becomes institutionalized within a society reflects the perspectives and points of views of the victors rather than those of the vanquished. When viewed within a global context, the students will be able to understand how the creation of historical knowledge in the United States parallels the creation of knowledge in other democratic societies and is a much more open and democratic process than in totalitarian nation-states.

Another important goal of teaching knowledge as a construction process is to help students to develop higher-level thinking skills and empathy for the peoples who have been victimized by the expansion and growth of the United States. When diverse and conflicting perspectives are juxtaposed, students are required to compare, contrast, weigh evidence, and make reflective decisions. They are also able to develop empathy and an understanding of each group's perspective and point of view. The creation of their own versions of events and situations, and new concepts and terms, also requires students to reason at high levels and to think critically about data and information.

Prejudice Reduction

The prejudice reduction dimension of multicultural education describes the characteristics of students' racial attitudes and strategies that can be used to help them develop more democratic attitudes and values. Researchers have been investigating the characteristics of children's racial attitudes since the 1920s (Lasker, 1929). This research indicates that most children enter school with negative racial attitudes that mirror those of adults (Aboud, 1988; Stephan &