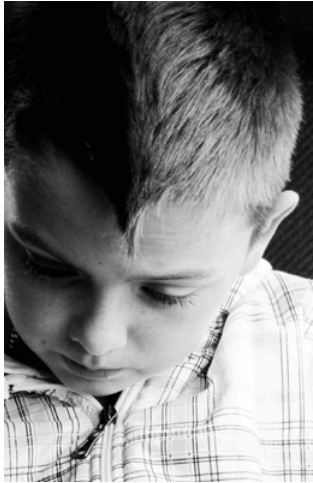


Diversity Education: Lessons For A Just World

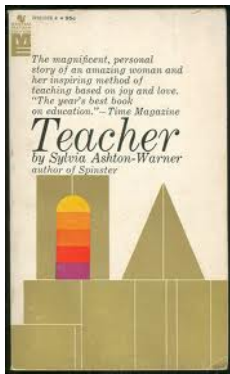


Multicultural education, intercultural education, nonracial education, antiracist education, culturally responsive pedagogy, ethnic studies, peace studies, global education, social justice education, bilingual education, mother tongue education, integration - these and more are the terms used to describe different aspects of diversity education around the world. Although it may go by different names and speak to stunningly different conditions in a variety of sociopolitical contexts, diversity education attempts to address such issues as racial and social class segregation, the disproportionate achievement of students of various backgrounds, and the structural inequality in both schools and society. In this paper, I consider the state of diversity education, in broad strokes, in order to draw some lessons from its conception and implementation in various countries, including South Africa. To do so, I consider such issues as the role of asymmetrical power relations and the influence of neoliberal and neoconservative educational agendas, among others, on diversity education. I also suggest a number of lessons learned from our experiences in this field in order to think about how we might proceed in the future, and I conclude with observations on the role of teachers in the current socio-political context.

Introduction

Although many of my examples are based on the U.S. context and on my research within that context, much of what I have to say is familiar to others in different societies around the world because the power relations and social injustices in the other countries I mention may be similar to the U.S. experience, especially South Africa which, like the United States, also has a history of racial discrimination. Moreover, increasing globalization is making our world smaller and more connected than ever. As a result, whether education is taking place in a large urban school in Johannesburg, a suburb of Boston, a colegio in Buenos Aires, a rural school outside Beijing, a sprawling high-rise community on the outskirts of Paris, or in numerous other places around the world, we face many of the same

challenges, problems, and possibilities brought on by the post-colonial condition and by immigration and global economic issues.



Sylvia Ashton-Warner's 'Teacher'

Although diversity education is widely recognized as having its origins in the mid-twentieth century United States in what was called the intergroup relations movement (Banks, 2005), glimmers of what could loosely be understood as multicultural education were also taking place in other countries around the world. For instance, Sylvia Ashton-Warner's 1963 book *Teacher* chronicled her innovative work with Maori children in New Zealand. Eschewing basal readers and other materials that had little connection to the lives of the children she taught, Ashton-Warner undertook what she called '*organic teaching*', that is, teaching based on the discourse and realities of her students. At the same time, Paulo Freire's (1970) groundbreaking literacy work with Brazilian peasants, in which they learned to '*read the word and the world*', was beginning to have an impact on both literacy and liberation movements around the world. Although neither of these authors used the words now associated with diversity education, they were both concerned with providing students with an education based on the principles of social justice and critical pedagogy, central tenets of what most people today would define as diversity education.

What came to be known as multicultural education in the United States, intercultural education in Europe, antiracist education in the U.K. and, later, nonracial education in South Africa, began with a focus on race. This focus is historically logical and understandable. In the United States, the field has its roots in the civil rights movement while in the U.K. it was a reaction to the

tremendous educational inequities faced by young people from former colonies. In South Africa, the anti-apartheid movement provided a basis for the nonracial movement, and it is still, according to Mokubung Nkomo, Linda Chisholm, and Carolyn McKinney (2004) the underlying basis for the movement which was *'born out of a conscious effort to transform undemocratic apartheid culture and practice by replacing it with a democratic, inclusive education ethos founded on a human rights culture'*. More recently, the focus of diversity education has expanded beyond race alone to also include ethnicity, gender, social class, language, sexual orientation, ability, and other differences. Although there is by no means general agreement on this more inclusive definition of diversity education among either scholars or practitioners in the field, there is a growing recognition that there are complex and important intersections among all social identities that need to be accounted for in diversity education.

Definitions and parameters

For the purposes of convenience, and to be as inclusive as possible, in this paper I refer to the movement that is now most commonly called multicultural or intercultural education with the more neutral term diversity education. Needless to say, there are numerous perceived and real differences among all the terms mentioned, but because I do not want to spend all my time discussing the nuances among these differences, I instead propose some general parameters that I believe most of us in the field would agree with. At the same time, I am mindful of the tremendous differences in context, condition, and history of each society in relation to diversity education. In some nations, diversity education has been concerned primarily with marginalized people of colour, as is the case in the United States. In other nations, particularly in Europe, xenophobia towards both long-term and short-term immigrants is the defining issue (Santos Regó & Nieto, 2000). In South Africa, integrating an immense population that was legally excluded from the full benefits of citizenship looms much larger. Hence, diversity education has not been experienced similarly across distinct contexts. As Crain Soudien, Nazir Carrim and Yusuf Sayed (2004) have argued, *One size does not fit all because citizens are not located in homogeneous, symmetrical and stable social, economic, and political positions. How one addresses the differences and the different kinds of inequalities thrown up by the complex social contexts in which people find themselves is a strategic matter.*

In the broadest terms, diversity education recognizes the pluralism that students

embody (racial/ethnic, social class, gender, and other) as resources to be used in the service of their education. At the same time, multiculturalism is not simply the recognition of group identity, although it has been used in this way in some places, most notably in the United States. Rather, I use diversity education to mean multiculturalism as public policy, as the term is used in Canada and Australia, among other nations (Castles, 2004; Hill & Allan, 2004). Diversity education, used in this way, acknowledges that structural inequalities in society impede equitable outcomes in education, not to mention in life, and it recognizes the role of the state in addressing such inequalities.

For some on the left, multiculturalism is little more than a distraction in the face of the massive global neoliberal retrenchment of the welfare state and the neoconservatives' outcry for a return to the past. Whether we agree with this assertion or not, it is important to be aware of the palliative nature of *'feel-good'* multiculturalism unaccompanied by a commitment to social and economic justice (Kalantzis, 1987). The danger of unquestioning loyalty to any particular cultural group may in fact lead to supporting policies and cultural practices that can be repressive; in the worst cases, uncritical cultural affiliations can result in extreme sectarianism and the fundamentalisms that inevitably slide into racism and exclusion of others. We are living with the results of these fundamentalisms in many countries around the globe. Amy Gutmann (2002) suggests instead that the primary social allegiance must be to social justice: *'Doing what is right'*, she says, *'cannot be reduced to loyalty to, or identification with, any existing group of human beings'*.

Related to the issue of group loyalty are competing notions of identity, or what has been called identity politics. Given the roots of diversity education as an attempt to address the scandalous condition of education to which many marginalized populations have been subjected, it is understandable that racial, ethnic, and linguistic identity became the defining features of diversity education. The implication, however, is that all students from a particular group behave and learn in more or less the same way, believe the same things, and share the same values. This assertion is problematic because it essentializes culture, assuming that culture consists of specific elements that can be applied mechanically to all within a particular social group. In turn, essentializing can lead to generalizations and stereotypes that get in the way of viewing students as individuals as well as of members of groups whose cultures are constantly evolving. One problem with a

static view of culture is that it fails to recognize that all societies are more heterogeneous than ever. With multiple identities growing ever more rapidly, it is impossible to speak about culture as lived today as if it were unitary. In fact, a static view of culture contradicts the very notion of diversity education today. A more accurate term to describe the cultural fusion that is a fact of life for millions of people in many nations today is hybridity, that is, the synthesis of various cultures to form new, distinct, and every-changing identities.

Acknowledging this reality aligns diversity education directly with social justice while it also challenges approaches - variously referred to as '*heroes and holidays*', '*tourist approach*', or '*polka and pizza*' - that simply affirm differences and include '*ethnic tidbits*' (Nieto, 2004) or mention cultural icons in the curriculum. Thus, segregation and other institutional policies and practices that separate students from one another are generally viewed as impediments to equitable education. This is particularly true in South Africa where, according to Nkomo and his colleagues, the dismantling of apartheid meant the dismantling of an inequitable education system predicated on the separation of the races: '*If race segregation was the defining feature of schools in the apartheid era*', they write, '*race integration became a defining aspiration in the postapartheid era*' (Nkomo, Chisholm, & McKinney, 2004, p. 5). At the same time, as Naledi Pandor (2004) suggests, the policy of '*first mix then engage*' was naïve. She writes, *The challenge is not simply racial integration. The challenge is the successful promotion of the values of dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. The challenge is to teach that skin colour is not a marker of superiority and inferiority and that we can all take pride in our cultures and heritages.*

In general, as my colleague Patty Bode and I have suggested elsewhere, access and equity must be the overarching framework for diversity education (Nieto & Bode, forthcoming). Absent this critical perspective, diversity education can too easily skirt the issues of inequality that make creating a just school system, and indeed, a just society, impossible.

Another aspect of diversity education that is especially challenging is bilingual and multilingual education. Both in seemingly homogenous societies as well as in more culturally diverse societies, language differences pose a unique challenge. In countries as diverse as Canada, Sweden, Japan, and the United States, policymakers and the general public have often viewed language differences as

problematic and as an impediment to social cohesion (Crawford, 2000; Cummins, 1998; Fishman, 1976; Ota, 2000). As a result, programs such as bilingual and multilingual education, immersion education in the national language, and second language instruction have been viewed with varying levels of suspicion, depending on whether they are perceived as adding to, or detracting from, national unity. South Africa is unique in having eleven official languages, and this too presents challenges and opportunities as each of the languages is associated with a particular ethnic group which in turn has a specific set of political, social, and economic conditions.

Although promoting multilingualism is an official policy of the South African constitution, realities such as the lower status and prestige of languages other than English (and to an extent, Afrikaans) and the social, cultural, and economic capital to be derived from them, are issues of particular salience in this context (Mda, 2004). Finding a balance between promoting language diversity and securing social cohesion is thus a conundrum that will need to be worked out, not only in South Africa but also in numerous nations around the world. What is evident to proponents of diversity education, however, is that an imposed language that neglects to recognize and affirm languages other than the lingua franca (such as is the case with English Only in the United States), is in direct contradiction of the very nature of social justice and equal rights.

'Profoundly multicultural questions'

When used in simplistic ways, diversity education fails to address the tremendous inequities that exist in schools. For example, to adopt a multicultural reader is far easier than to guarantee that all children will learn to read; to plan an assembly program of so-called '*ethnic music*' is easier than to provide music instruction for all students; to equip teachers with a few lessons in cultural awareness is easier than to address widespread student disengagement in learning; and to simply bring white and black students in close proximity in South African desegregated public schools, is far easier than interrogating the quality of post-apartheid contact. Although these may be useful activities and initiatives, they fail to confront directly the deep-seated inequalities that exist in schools and society. Because they are sometimes taken out of context - isolated as pre-packaged programs or '*best practices*' - diversity education can become a bandaid approach to serious problems that require nothing short of major surgery.



Diversity in Education

Diversity education is also not simply about culture and cultural differences, although of course it does embrace these concerns. But a focus on culture alone, as if everyone from the same background behaved in the same way or held the same values, is in the end ineffective (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). The same can be said of the kind of diversity education that focuses on the past glories of marginalized populations. If we agree that it is centrally about access and equity, then we need to accept that some culture-centric approaches based on romantic notions of an idealized past can simply obfuscate the primary goals of diversity education.

Instead, I want to suggest that diversity education is primarily about what I have elsewhere called '*profoundly multicultural questions*' (Nieto, 2003a). That is, it needs to address questions that at first glance may not seem to be about diversity at all:

- Who's taking calculus?
- Who's in talented and gifted programs?
- Do all schools receive equal funding?
- Do all children have access to quality integrated schools?
- Are all teachers prepared to teach - and do they value - children of all
- backgrounds?

I define these as '*profoundly multicultural questions*' because they concern first and foremost equity and access. In addition, they imply that hidden dimensions of education, including low expectations of students of marginalized backgrounds, are equally vital to consider.

Diversity education must also take into account how asymmetrical power relations position pluralism in schools and society. A simple '*celebration of diversity*' is not enough because it fails to address how some groups benefit from unearned power and privilege based on their race, gender, social class, or other social difference, and how such power and privilege are used against the very

same people whose diversity is being celebrated. The antiracist movement, first in the U.K. and Canada, and later in the United States, is a case in point, particularly because multiculturalism without an antiracist perspective has been viewed by some as simply a way to manage disruptive groups of people of colour (Troyna, 1987).

Social justice

It is clear, then, that if diversity education is to go beyond a simple recognition of differences, it must be aligned with the concept of social justice. Yet this term, although frequently invoked, is rarely defined. Bandied about as if there were universal agreement as to its parameters, social justice has become little more than another mantra (such as the 'all children can learn' mantra in the United States that rarely leads to real changes in student achievement). For the purposes of our discussion, then, I want to make clear what I mean by the term. I offer the definition that my colleague Patty Bode and I use: we define social justice as a philosophy, an approach, and actions that treat all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity. On a societal scale, this means affording each person the real - not simply a verbalized - opportunity to reach their potential by giving them access to the goods, services, and social and cultural capital of a society, while also affirming the culture and talent of each individual and the group or groups with which they identify (so long as such groups are willing to live peacefully and respectfully with others).

In terms of education in particular, social justice is not just about '*being nice*' to students, or about giving them a pat on the back. Social justice in education includes four components: First, it challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination based on race, social class, gender, and other social and human differences. This means that teachers with a social justice perspective consciously include topics that focus on inequality in the curriculum, and they encourage their students to work for equality and fairness both in and out of the classroom.

Second, a social justice perspective means providing all students with the resources necessary to learn to their full potential. This includes material resources such as books, curriculum, financial support, and so forth. Equally vital are emotional resources such as a belief in students' ability and worth; care for them as individuals and learners; high expectations and rigorous demands on them; and the necessary social and cultural capital to negotiate the world. These

are not just the responsibilities of individual teachers and schools, however. Going beyond the classroom level, social justice means reforming school policies and practices so that all students are provided an equal chance to learn. As a result, policies such as high-stakes testing, tracking, student retention, segregation, and parent and family outreach, among others, need to be viewed critically. Social justice in education, however, is not just about giving students resources. A third component of a social justice perspective is drawing on the talents and strengths that students bring to their education. This requires a rejection of the deficit perspective that has characterized much of the education of marginalized students around the world, to a shift that views all students - not just those from privileged backgrounds - as having resources that can be a foundation for their learning. These resources include their languages, cultures, and experiences.

Finally, a fourth essential component of social justice is creating a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change. Creating such environments can provide students with an apprenticeship in democracy, a vital part of preparing them for the future (Nieto & Bode, forthcoming).

Maintaining the focus on social justice in diversity education, however, is not easy given the current sociopolitical context of schools and society, to which I now turn.

The sociopolitical context of education today

Given our globalized economy and huge population diasporas, the world is a vastly different one from what we knew just a few decades ago. Public education, often viewed by people around the world as the central way out of poverty and ignorance, will either gain from this unique time or lose its moral authority as the one place where young people of all backgrounds and conditions can expect to receive an education that will prepare them to live productive lives. Hence, understanding the sociopolitical context of schools and society will be decisive in helping chart the course of diversity education in the years ahead.

Defining the sociopolitical context

The sociopolitical context to which I refer includes the ideologies, conditions, laws, regulations, policies, practices, traditions, and current events that define a society. In many cases, these ideologies, laws, traditions, and so on, support the status quo and keep structural inequality in place, although they could just as easily promote equality and social justice. In the South African context, the

apartheid ideology supported and enforced laws regarding the promotion of white supremacy and the subjugation of all those who were not whites. Moreover, taken-for-granted societal ideologies, assumptions, and expectations – which are often related to people’s identities, including their race, ethnicity, social class, language, gender, sexual orientation and so on – may work in tandem with the material and concrete conditions in society to create barriers to (in the case we’re concerned about here) educational progress. Although there is never complete consensus concerning these assumptions and ideologies (if there were, change would be impossible), they nevertheless help define what a society collectively believes that people from particular groups are capable of doing and worthy of receiving.

At a personal level, we take in the ideologies and beliefs in our society and we act on them whether we actively believe them or not. In the case of the ideology of racism, for example, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) has aptly described it as *‘smog in the air’*. She goes on to say: *Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in. None of us would introduce ourselves as ‘smog breathers’ (and most of us don’t want to be described as prejudiced), but if we live in a smoggy place, how can we avoid breathing the air? (p. 6).*

At the societal level, these laws, traditions, assumptions, and ideologies determine who counts? That is, who has access to education? Health care? Employment? Housing? And what counts? That is, whose language is *‘standard’*? Whose lifestyle is *‘normal’*? At the school level, we must consider questions such as: How do school policies and practices (i.e. curriculum, pedagogy, disciplinary policies, hiring practices, parent outreach, etc.) benefit some students over others? For instance, in terms of curriculum, whose knowledge counts? What knowledge does the curriculum reflect? Whose perspective is represented? Who benefits? Who loses?

The South African experience shows that in many desegregated public schools, white upper/middle class cultural values have become a normalized and at times required school discourse (Chisholm, 2004; Vandeyar, 2008a; Vandeyar, 2006) to such a degree that the schools prioritize these cultural values, thus marginalizing those from outside this dominant discourse. It becomes a case of systematic assimilation of black students into white culture in order to be part of the school.

At the individual level of biases and expectations, the sociopolitical context

manifests through teachers' and administrators' practices and decisions. For instance, in terms of teachers' relationships with students, who is favoured? This is particularly evident in the United States where research has shown that pre-service teachers expect - and want - to teach students much like themselves (Irvine, 2003). And since about 90% of all teachers are white, middle-class, and English monolingual speakers, that leaves little room for immigrants, those who speak languages other than English, the poor, and students of colour. Decisions about who is gifted and talented and who needs to be in special education are also affected by teachers' biases. For example, in the United States, black and Latino students are chronically underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented, being only half as likely to be placed in a class for the gifted as are white students, even though they may be equally gifted (Harry & Klingner, 2006.).

Changing demographics and diasporas

The current sociopolitical context also includes dramatically changing demographics in both the society in general and in classrooms in particular. Whether we live in small hamlets or large urban centers, whether we are from Africa, Europe, South America, Asia, or anywhere else, our world has changed enormously in the past several decades, and it will continue to do so. For example, what were once fairly homogeneous populations are now characterized by a tremendous diversity of race, ethnicity, and language, among other differences. In some cases, such as the United States and South Africa, diversity has always been a fact of life - although it has not always been acknowledged, accepted, or adequately dealt with. In other nations, the demographic changes have proven to be cataclysmic, challenging the sense of nationhood and community that once seemed fairly straightforward and secure. In all these contexts, children living in poverty, children of backgrounds that differ from the majority, and those who speak native languages other than the common language are now becoming the majority in urban centers and urbanized suburbs, and even in rural areas. Numbers alone, however, as may be seen from the experience in South Africa, will not change the status quo. And even when there is a significant power shift, as has happened in South Africa, it will take many years for changes to be felt by the majority of the population. This is certainly the case in the area of education.

Structural and social inequality

Another aspect of the sociopolitical context concerns the long-standing and

growing structural and social inequality throughout the world that invariably results in poverty, inadequate housing, joblessness, poor access to health care, and the attendant racism and hopelessness experienced by many people on a daily basis. In South Africa, the post-apartheid government's adoption of the neoliberal ideologies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund through the macroeconomic policy known as Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR), has placed the socio-economic conditions and the prospects of social mobility of the poor in a precarious situation in this new democracy. (Although GEAR has been recently replaced by the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA), neoliberal principles are also inherent in ASGISA). This macroeconomic policy has been favourably reviewed by the World Bank, but it has had the effect of economically disempowering poor South Africans (Bond, 2004; Desai, 2002; Gumede, 2005). Since education does not take place in a vacuum, this economic inequality trickles down to public schooling, especially because most public schools in poor townships of South Africa have not yet recovered from apartheid inequalities, even though the education budget has increased in all nine provinces (Ndimande, 2005).

In the United States, educators Jean Anyon (2005) and David Berliner (2005), as well as economist Richard Rothstein (2004) have all argued that it is macroeconomic policies, that is, policies that regulate such things as the minimum wage, job availability, tax rates, health care, and affordable housing, among others, that are chiefly responsible for creating school failure because educational policies by themselves cannot transcend these larger policies. While none of them deny the importance and necessity of school reform, they make it clear that what schools can accomplish will be limited if these larger macroeconomic policies do not change. In his report released in June 2006, *'Reforms that could help narrow the Achievement Gap'*, Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., asserts that education reform without complementary investments in early childhood education, health care, housing, after-school and summer programs, and other social and economic supports (more jobs and a liveable minimum wage would also no doubt help), the so-called achievement gap will never be closed. He goes on to warn about the pitfalls of creating a society that is increasingly characterized as having a very few 'haves' and many 'have-nots'. He writes: *If as a society we choose to preserve big social class differences, we must necessarily also accept substantial gaps between the achievement of lower-class and middle-class children. Closing those*

gaps requires not only better schools, although those are certainly needed, but also reform in the social and economic institutions that prepare children to learn in different ways. It will not be cheap.

It is clear, then, that dramatic inequalities exist in the access that students around the globe have to an excellent, high quality education, inequalities that are lamentably too frequently based on race, social class, language, and other differences. No matter how much schools change to accommodate student differences, they cannot, by themselves, completely overcome these structural realities. Moreover, given the current political realities we are facing in the world, it is clear that it will take concentrated work at many levels - institutional, state, national, and international - to turn the situation around.

Neoliberal and neoconservative politics

Current global conditions may have even more of an impact on education than local or national policies. Neoliberal and neoconservative movements around the world, for instance, have had a devastating impact not only on diversity education, but on education in general, not to mention on national policies and practices that affect all other arenas of life. In his book, *Educating the 'Right' Way* (2006), Michael Apple describes how right-wing neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies have had a powerful and negative impact on public education around the world. The right, according to Apple, is not a unitary force, but rather a coalition of sometimes strange bedfellows. It includes, for instance, neoliberals (defined by Apple as '*capitalism with the gloves off*'), who believe in a 'weak' state and view the world through a market lens and define freedom as individual choice; neoconservatives, who believe in a '*strong*' state and tend to hold a vision of an idyllic past that they yearn to return to; and religious fundamentalists who want to bring God (or, more accurately, their version of God) into public institutions. Then there is the New Middle Class/Managerial Class, which tends to swing back and forth in the Alliance, based on where they benefit with their managerial skills. Together, this amalgam of ideologies forms the '*new right*', or what Apple calls conservative modernization: *Conservative modernization has radically reshaped the common sense of society. It has worked in every sphere - the economic, the political, and the cultural - to alter the basic categories we use to evaluate our institutions and our public and private lives.*

There are numerous examples of how neoliberal and neoconservative policies have impeded progress in diversity education, particularly as it relates to social

justice. In South Africa, Ndimande (2006) has made the case that the influence of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism has partly contributed to the lack of resources in township schools and has impeded school access and equal educational opportunities. In Australia research in urban secondary schools shows that the introduction of community languages had very positive effects not only at the school level but also in the community (Kalantzis, Cope, Noble, & Pynting, 1990). Notwithstanding their success, many of these programs were dismantled in the 1990s when neoliberal educational policies began to be implemented around the world (Castles, 2004).



No Child left behind

A growing standardization, bureaucratization, and privatization in education are also part of the international sociopolitical context. Needless to say, diversity education has suffered in this sociopolitical context. For instance, the conservatives' vision of '*traditional values*', narrowly defined to include only the values of the majority, denies any credibility to multiculturalism. The loss of local authority and a concentration of central control through high-stakes tests and a national curriculum are other important elements of neoconservative ideology. The contribution of neoliberals has been a determined focus on privatization through vouchers, charter schools, and other such schemes. In the United States, the No Child Left Behind legislation is a perfect amalgam of these forces, but it is clear that the United States is not alone in forging such policies. England, New Zealand, Canada, and other nations have also felt the effects of this new agenda (Apple, 2006; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). In the United States, this has meant, among other things, a growing pressure to '*teach to the test*', influenced by the No Child Left Behind federal legislation that is, in fact, leaving many children behind, particularly those that this legislation was supposed to help. Moreover, evidence is mounting that the testing frenzy, which is a direct result of the call for '*high standards*', is limiting the kinds of pedagogical approaches that teachers

use, as well as constricting the curriculum, especially in classrooms serving the most educationally disadvantaged students. Recent research has found that high-stakes testing, rather than increasing student learning, is actually raising dropout rates and leading to less engagement with schooling: Audrey Amrein and David Berliner (2002) reported findings from research in 18 states that student learning was unchanged or actually went down when high stakes testing policies were instituted.

From this discussion, it is evident that the sociopolitical context is a complex issue with many layers: it is an ideological problem, an institutional problem, and a personal problem. The solutions, therefore, have to be at all these levels as well.

Hard lessons learned

What to do with the chasm that exists between stated ideals and the grim realities of life is an especially vital question for nations and educational systems to consider. A common response, unfortunately, is to behave as if this chasm did not exist. Given the parameters of diversity education I outlined previously, however, I argue that the appropriate response is to confront these challenges directly at various levels, including the ideological, national, local, and classroom levels. I want to suggest some ways of doing so by proposing three lessons to be learned from our experiences with diversity education over the past half-century or so. One is the obstinate power of asymmetrical relations, the second concerns how changing the situation is easier said than done, and the third is how teachers - in spite of the sometimes stifling and unsupportive contexts in which they work - have an immensely crucial role to play.

The obstinate power of asymmetrical relations

One of the toughest lessons that proponents of diversity education have learned is that, in spite of admirable intentions and enormous passion, no program, approach, or perspective will, by itself, change the sociopolitical status quo in either schools or society. Put another way, power relations do not disappear simply because we implement diversity education. We certainly have many examples of this throughout the world, including attempts to integrate schools in the United States (Orfield & Lee, 2006), address inequality in Brazil (Gonçalves e Silva, 2004), or reform the curriculum in South Africa to include topics concerning social justice (Moodley & Adam, 2004).

What often happens when marginalized communities make a claim for equitable treatment in housing, employment, education, or other institutions (through

uprisings, court cases, or other means) is that authorities, while seemingly paying attention to these claims, end up providing a watered-down version of what was demanded, thus subverting its original intention. In the United States, while segregation was outlawed through the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, states were so slow in acting that there was little change for many years. In the end, after years of stalling, some desegregation did in fact occur but in the decades to follow, there was continued resistance to desegregation, '*white flight*' from urban areas where most black students lived, and so many other ways of getting around the requirement for integrated schools that segregation once again prevailed. In fact, schools in the United States are even more segregated now, in total, than they were over 50 years ago.

South Africa is a unique case because there was no watered-down version of reforms as the post-apartheid government was always committed to democratic change. Yet a formidable challenge and resistance comes from the right, especially those who have the financial power and access to information to manipulate, for instance, school zones so they can keep their own districts segregated (Jansen, 2004). Racism is still evident in South African public schools (Vally & Dalamba, 1999), including a 2008 racial incident at the University of Orange Free State where white students urinated on a plate of food and duped or intimidated black workers into eating the urinated food. Other white students who appeared on national television claimed that this despicable act was an expression of their opposition to racial integration on what they still consider '*their*' university campus, especially in '*their*' white dormitories.

In England, uprisings in 2001 led to the Cattle Commission Report (2001). The report, while agreeing that there was tremendous polarization and little meaningful interaction among various ethnic and racial groups, rather than suggesting diversity education instead recommended a renewed emphasis on the English language, a recognition of the contributions of all groups to the development of the nation, and primary loyalty to the U.K. According to Peter Figueroa (2004), *Yet, there is scant evidence that a lack of English language or of loyalty to the U.K. were important factors in causing the riots. Instead, social and economic deprivation, discrimination, Islamaphobia, resentment between the White and Asian communities, and political activity by the far right all seem likely contributing factors.*

Another example is what in the United States is referred to as the '*achievement*

gap', that is, the disproportional achievement rates among various groups. The '*achievement gap*' refers to the fact that some students, generally those from the dominant class or race or ethnic group, achieve substantially more than students from the marginalized and dominated classes. This situation, of course, is not unique to the United States. Although the so-called '*achievement gap*' is generally positioned simply as a problem of students' motivation, culture, race, or community, or of teachers' competence to teach, I want to suggest that it could just as legitimately be called the resource gap or the caring gap: the resource gap because achievement is usually tied to widely varying resources provided to students based on where they live and who they are, and the caring gap because it is too often influenced by teachers' low expectations, lack of caring, and inability to teach students who are different from them. Yet we persist on calling attention to the so-called '*achievement gap*', once again laying the blame squarely on the children rather than on the system that created the gap in the first place.

Del dicho al hecho hay gran trecho

The Spanish phrase *del dicho al hecho hay gran trecho*, literally translated as '*there's a big difference between what people say and what they do*', or in more colloquial terms, '*easier said than done*', is another lesson learned from the state of diversity education in the world today. In spite of enormous differences in history and culture, diversity education is a taken-for-granted reality in many nations today. To quote Will Kymlicka (2004), *This trend is quite remarkable given the many obstacles faced by proponents of multiculturalism. These range from deeply rooted legacies of ethnocentrism and racism that denigrate the value of minority cultures to modernizing ideologies of nation building that privilege uniformity and homogeneity over diversity.*

Yet in many societies multiculturalism as a policy and practice has not taken root in any meaningful way. In many countries, diversity education is viewed either as threatening to the status quo or as irrelevant to the national interest. In other countries, if acknowledged at all, there is little more than lip service paid to diversity and social justice. But even in cases where the principles of social justice and multiculturalism are inscribed into a nation's most venerable documents, making these concepts part of the very way a nation defines itself, there is still a discrepancy between what is said and what is done. The '*policy gap*' (Sayed & Jansen, 2001) is thus a reality in even those nations that have written diversity and social justice into their constitutions. This is, for instance, the case with

Canada (Joshee, 2004) and South Africa (Nkomo, McKinney, & Chisholm, 2004; Vandeyar, 2006). Multiculturalism as public policy in Canada, for instance, dates back all the way to 1971, but the shift to the right in the 1990s also brought about changes in educational policies that made a commitment to diversity education difficult, if not impossible (Joshee, 2004). As a result, the fact that multiculturalism and social justice are public policy in no way guarantees that they will be carried out in practice.

Diversity education is also increasingly linked with citizenship education, and more recently, with the notion of democracy. Here too, the fact that multiculturalism is, if not accepted, as least grudgingly recognized, does not mean that it is a reflection of democratic practice in those nations. At a conference of major academics in diversity education that took place at the Bellagio Conference Center in Italy in 2002, one of the major findings was articulated by James Banks (2004), the convener of the conference:

In nation-states throughout the world, citizenship education programs and curricula are trying to teach students democratic ideals and values within social, economic, political, and educational contexts that contradict democratic ideas such as justice, equality, and human rights.

'Easier said than done', therefore captures the challenge we are facing if we want to make a difference in the life chances of young people around the world. Why have I focused on macro, policy, and institutional levels? I do so because otherwise we fall into the trap of thinking that teachers alone will make all the difference. Most reports about the 'achievement gap', for instance, focus on teachers, school administrators, and students: what teachers and principals are doing wrong, how their beliefs and biases affect student learning; how students' lack of motivation leads to their failure, how their families need to take more responsibility for student learning; and so on. There is some truth in all of this. But it is misleading, and I might say even immoral, to address the problem at only these levels if we do not at the same time look at the structural inequalities in schools that are, after all, simply a reflection of the inequalities in society. If we start at the teacher and student level, once again blaming them for student failure, we are being at best naïve, and at worst cynical.

Teachers change lives forever

Given the bleak sociopolitical context of education I have outlined, what is the role of teachers, and of those who prepare them, in confronting and challenging

social injustice in schools and society? I believe that teachers play an enormously significant role in the lives of students, and even in the life of a society. The final lesson from the past few decades of diversity education that I want to propose is that teachers can, and indeed to, make a difference, sometimes a life-changing difference, in the lives of students around the world. Because I have focused my remarks on the larger context in which education takes place, in what follows I shift my attention to the levels closest to learners, that is, the teacher and school levels.

I now want to turn to my final point: that teachers can and do make a difference in spite of everything. Although we need to also work to change societal ideologies and structural barriers, we cannot wait around for these things to happen. In the meantime, we know that good teaching can help to alleviate - although it certainly cannot completely overcome - the situation in which many children attend school. There is a growing body of research, for instance, that good teachers make the single greatest difference in promoting or deterring student achievement. In the United States, for example the landmark 1996 report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) found that *'what teachers know and do is one of the most important influences on that students learn'*. One widely-cited study, for instance, found that students who are assigned to several highly effective teachers in a row have significantly greater gains in achievement than those assigned to less effective teachers, and that the influence of each teacher has effects that spill over into later years (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Let me then briefly focus on the role teachers have in creating success in spite of societal inequities. Teachers, after all, are not apolitical actors in a neutral space. Education is always a political endeavour and teachers are significant players in this context. The most successful teachers with whom I have had the privilege to work are skilled in their pedagogy, well versed in their subject matter, and consciously political in the sense that they know their work makes a difference. Consequently, they embody particular behaviours and attitudes that help them both teach and reach their students, while at the same time they challenge inequities both in their schools and, more broadly, in their societies.

To define these behaviours and attitudes more concretely, I draw on my work with teachers over the past thirty years, and more specifically, on my research with teachers in the past decade or so (Nieto, 2003b and 2005). These are:

affirming students' identities; creating a sense of belonging; expecting the best from all students; teaching students to be critical; and understanding their own power as teachers. I focus on these not because they are the only behaviours that make a difference but rather because more bureaucratic responses to teacher quality such as certification tests and specific courses in subject matter assume that these alone will result in higher quality teachers. While recognizing that other elements besides behaviours and attitudes are equally important, I focus on these because they are equally significant. Subject matter knowledge, for instance, is crucial, but if teachers do not learn how to question it, they end up reproducing conventional wisdom and encouraging students to do the same. Knowing pedagogy is also necessary, but if teachers do not at the same time develop meaningful relationships with their students of all backgrounds, the students simply will not succeed. And if teachers do not understand the life-and-death implications of the work they do, no amount of certification requirements or tricks of the trade will help.

The first behaviour, then, is to affirm students' identities. Too frequently, students' identities - their race, culture, language, social class, and other characteristics - are treated as problems to be disposed of rather than as resources to be used in the service of their education. To affirm identities also means that teachers admire, respect, and honor their students' differences. This affirmation is manifested through the curriculum and pedagogy, as well as through teachers' relationships with students.

A related behaviour of successful teachers is creating a sense of belonging. Students who feel alienated from school find it difficult to claim membership in that particular social circle and they may instead look to other, sometimes more negative spaces, to claim membership. Creating a sense of belonging means making space for all students of all backgrounds. This sense of belonging is visible in classroom activities as well as in outreach activities with families.

Third is to expect the best from all students. The low expectations that teachers and schools have for some of their students based on both societal ideologies and personal biases make their way into pedagogy and other school practices. Numerous research studies over the past several decades, however, have demonstrated that when teachers hold high expectations for their students - in spite of the conditions in which students live or the lack of resources in schools - they meet, and even surpass, those expectations (see Nieto & Bode, forthcoming, for a review of this research).

A fourth behaviour is to teach students to be critical. Too often, controversial topics such as power and inequality are taboo subjects in schools, and this should come as no surprise. After all, as institutions schools are charged with maintaining the status quo and discussing such issues can be threatening. But schools in most societies also claim that a major goal of the educational system is to wipe out inequality. The contradictions between democratic ideals and actual manifestations of inequality need to be exposed, although it might make educators uncomfortable. Such matters are at the heart of a broadly conceptualized diversity perspective because the subject matter of schooling is society, with all its wrinkles and warts and contradictions. Students, therefore, must learn to challenge the *'regimes of truth'* (Foucault, 1980) perpetuated by societal institutions, including schools. Ethics and the distribution of power, privilege, status, and rewards are basic societal concerns. Students of all ages should be allowed to engage in conversations about these issues if we are serious about teaching for, and about, democracy. Moodley and Adam (2004) agree. They write, *We argue that problematizing the contested issues in the context of current debates makes for more relevant and effective learning about democracy than the abstract and idealized exposition of democratic values.*

Finally, teachers who make a difference understand their own power. Every day, around the world, teachers matter tremendously in the lives of their students. Let me quote the words of Karen Gelzini, a high school mathematics teacher I worked with a number of years ago. Karen, who taught in an urban high school in Boston, Massachusetts, was one of the teachers in an inquiry group I led that met for a year at various high schools in the city to reflect on the question of *'What keeps teachers going?'* On our final day together, we met at a beautiful retreat centre outside Boston. Karen brought a card for me to that final meeting. It said simply, *'Teachers Change Lives Forever'*. She did not really think about it until later that summer when she sent me a long email, only a small part of which I reproduce here: *'Teachers change lives forever' ... Driving home, thinking about the whole day, the verse on the front of the card hit me. I had looked at the verse: We change lives forever. What power! Of course, we all know it. But how often do we really think about it? Does it get lost in the papers that we correct? In the scores/grades that we write down? This has been another of the group's gifts to me.. I always knew teachers made a difference, a tremendous difference, and I've always taken the responsibility very seriously, but to think about it using these words: Teachers change lives forever and ever ... and ever ... lives ... To really*

think about that, for a long time, is frightening, that type of power, to use it day after day... We are going to change lives forever, one way or another, for good or for bad. Are we doing all that can be done? Despite everything in our way, why do some of us end up staying? Is it because our lives continue to be changed forever, for the better, by our students? What would my life be without Sonie? Without Jeramie? It's not a give-and-take; it's a cycle ... Once your life has been changed, you understand the power.

Conclusion

What are the implications of all these things for diversity education? And what are the responsibilities and roles of teachers, and of those who prepare them for the profession? Given the current context, I believe these are incredibly crucial questions. At present, most responses to them are bureaucratic: devise more stringent teacher tests; create rubrics, benchmarks, and templates; count the number of courses prospective teachers take; look at college grades to determine who will teach. While some of these may be important, they are certainly not enough.

Let me briefly mention some of the changes that need to take place at both the macro and institutional levels if diversity education is to succeed. Beginning with fair funding of education, for example, which would make a tremendous difference. In the United States, the richest country in the world, the most recent *Funding Gap Report* from Education Trust (2006) found that across the country US \$907 less is spent per student in the highest-poverty districts than in the most affluent districts. In the worst case scenario, *The Christian Science Monitor* (Huh, 2005) reported that the difference in annual spending between the wealthiest and the poorest districts has grown to a staggering US \$19,361 per student! Surely no one can say with a straight face that this difference does not matter.

Since South Africa allocates a large portion of its budget to education, it is important that this money be efficiently distributed and spent, especially on poor schools in the townships, instead of being returned to the Department of Treasury as surplus at the end of a fiscal year (MacFarlane, 2002). Most importantly there should not be a mismanagement of funds in departments of education (Jansen, 2005), funds which could otherwise be used to improve teaching and learning conditions. This would give children in poor neighbourhoods access to public schools with better resources, rather than transporting these children to suburban public schools with better educational resources (Ndimande, 2005).

At the institutional level, removing or reforming school policies and practices that get in the way of student achievement would also lead to a change in student learning. These policies and practices include curriculum, pedagogy, tracking, high-stakes testing, retention, the recruitment and hiring of teachers, parent and family outreach, and others. In teacher education, we can develop programs that encourage prospective teachers to learn more about the students who they will teach and the contexts in which they live, and to respect their families and communities (Vandeyar, 2008b). We can provide experiences - through courses, field experiences, and extracurricular activities - that will help prospective and practicing teachers learn to speak other languages and learn about cultures other than their own. We can create a climate through innovative courses and assignments in which prospective and practicing teachers can become critical thinkers. We can help practicing and prospective teachers understand - through dialogue in courses and seminars, through interactions with excellent veteran teachers, through critical readings, and through reflection in journals and essays - that teaching is more than a job.

Change is also possible if we reform the climate in universities and faculties of education. This is a tall order, but an absolutely necessary one if we are to make a difference. This means recruiting a more diverse faculty in terms of experience and background, as well as determining which attitudes and behaviours dispositions will best serve them if they are to be successful with students. At the societal level, we can advocate for teachers to be well paid for their work, and given the respect they deserve. This means committing the nation's economic and moral resources to the problem. Both the bureaucratization and the marketization of public education, I submit, are wrong-headed choices. Even diversity education, in and of itself, will do little to change things. What is required is a change of will - as well as a reorganization of national and international priorities - to address the tremendous inequalities that exist in our societies today. The struggle is long and difficult, but the result, I know, will be worth the time and energy we commit to it.

Acknowledgements

The author appreciates the comments of two anonymous reviewers. She also wants to thank Professor Bekisizwe Ndimande for a careful reading of the manuscript and for providing examples from the South African experience to strengthen this chapter.

About the author

Sonia Nieto is Professor Emerita of Language, Literacy, and Culture in the School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She has taught students at all levels from elementary grades through graduate school, and worked at the university level preparing teachers and teacher educators for over thirty years. Her research focuses on multicultural education and the education of Latinos, immigrants, and students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Her books include *Affirming Diversity* (4th ed., 2004), *The Light in Their Eyes* (1999), *What Keeps Teachers Going?* (2003), and two edited volumes, *Puerto Rican Students in U.S. Schools* (2000), and *Why We Teach* (2005). In addition, she has published dozens of book chapters and articles.

This essay has been published in:

Mokubung Nkomo & Saloshna Vandeyar - *Thinking Diversity, Building Cohesion - A Transnational Dialogue on Education*

Rozenberg Edition ISBN 978 90 3610 128 8

Unisa Edition ISBN 978 1 86888 567 1