

Review of Preparing Teachers for a Changing World, National Academy of Education by Sonia Nieto

I want to begin my review by enthusiastically commending the authors for the high quality volume they have produced. Well organized, meticulously researched, and well written, it is even engrossing to read, not something one can always say about such reports! I have no doubt that Preparing Teachers for a Changing World will make a significant contribution to the field of teacher education. Once it is published, I plan to consult it often and to recommend it wholeheartedly to my colleagues.

The authors have done an exceptionally good job of capturing the major trends, differing perspectives, and many challenges of teacher education today, while putting forth a vision for the future that is solidly grounded in research and in current and evolving knowledge. The first chapter is especially powerful. For example, unlike other more shallow treatments of “what works,” the authors of this chapter present a carefully nuanced introduction to the text by emphasizing that “what works” is based on many factors (context, individual differences, varied experiences, etc) rather than on a set of prescribed activities or courses. This tone is apparent throughout the volume. Also, the focus on what students need is a welcome departure from other reports where schools, colleges of education, the business community, or others are placed front and center. Moreover, I like how sociocultural theory is woven throughout several of the chapters. The numerous vignettes and examples add considerably to the appeal and potential usefulness of the volume. “Becoming Aware of Different Learning Trajectories” (Chapter 2) and “Professor Anderson Holt’s Teacher Education Course,” as well as all the examples in Chapter 7, are particularly effective, as is “Language in the Life of One Teacher” in Chapter 4.

Although I read the entire volume, I concentrated on those areas in which I have a special interest and expertise, that is, diversity and language. I will focus on these issues in my comments below, beginning with a number of concerns and then mentioning a few minor points.

In general, I found that the authors have done a very good job of integrating the discussion of diversity into most of the chapters, mirroring the text’s recommendations concerning how diversity should be treated in the teacher education curriculum (i.e., not only as a stand-alone course but also infused throughout the teacher preparation program). An exception is Chapter 12, where a more in-depth discussion of diversity is especially warranted, as this may be the chapter to which policymakers pay most attention.

I was disappointed that there is little mention of education as social justice in the text. Although most chapters allude to diversity in some way, the assumption in

some of them seems to be that when teachers learn about cultural, racial, and gender differences, social injustices will automatically be addressed. This is certainly true to some extent. However, a focus on different cultural issues in and of itself will not prepare prospective teachers to confront and do something about the tremendous structural inequality that exists in schools and society. For instance, there is an almost total lack of attention paid to social class in the volume. This is an aspect of “diversity” that is often overlooked, yet it is closely linked with race and ethnicity and deeply implicated in most social and educational inequities. These include inequitable school funding, the assignment of the least qualified teachers to the neediest districts, differential expectations of student achievement based on students’ social class and cultural capital, tests such as SATs that are heavily skewed in favor of wealthier students, high-stakes standardized tests that negatively and disproportionately influence the future of poor students, disciplinary practices that unfairly impact economically disadvantaged students, and so forth. Accordingly, teachers should understand that it isn’t simply a matter of prospective teachers knowing different “funds of knowledge,” as important and necessary as that may be, but also of thinking about how cultural practices (including speaking other languages and dialects) carry different levels of status and acceptance (Chapter 4 does a good job of addressing the issue of language). As a result, cultural practices may disadvantage some students over others not because they are inferior but because they are viewed as such. Prospective teachers thus need a sophisticated understanding of how to affirm students’ differences while at the same time knowing why those differences exist in the first place, figuring out how to handle them in the classroom, and learning how to work to change inequitable practices. This perspective is evident in some of the chapters, but not in all. Ana María Villegas and Tamara Lucas, in their 2002 *Journal of Teacher Education* article, and their 2002 book, do a great job of addressing these concerns. Both are listed in the references in the text.

Related to the above, discussions of power, particularly institutional power, are missing throughout most of the volume. For example, in Chapters 5 and 6, where these issues could be meaningfully approached, there is little mention of the political nature of the curriculum. Questions about who makes curriculum decisions and why, who decides what’s important, and who benefits from these curriculum decisions are not addressed to any great extent. Prospective teachers need to understand that it’s not just a question of incorporating more cultural knowledge into the curriculum (what could be described as “browning the curriculum”), but of understanding the political nature, impact, and consequences of the curriculum. In addition, throughout the text there is an emphasis on the individual nature of change. As a result, while the discussions about racism are fine as far as they go, they tend to concentrate on individual changes in attitudes, perspectives, and values. As a result, prospective teachers may be led to believe that if they change their particular attitudes and beliefs and become anti-racist

and more sensitive to diversity, inequities will disappear. It seems to me that the unequal impact of institutional policies and practices also need to be included in the teacher education program, and this can happen in several of the chapters. My recent article, "Profoundly Multicultural Questions" (*Educational Leadership*, v. 60, n. 4, December 2002/January 2003, pp. 6 – 10) articulates some of these issues more fully..

There are a number of minor points that I'd like to mention as well:

The fact that the practices of several teacher education programs are mentioned in the text will give readers concrete examples of the ideas mentioned in the various chapters. In this regard, I'd like to suggest an article that you may want to include. Written by my colleagues and me, it is included in a book that you already cite and it describes how a teacher education program can prepare all teachers to work with students for whom English is a second language, and it might be helpful particularly in Chapter 4. The citation is:

Gebhard, M. Austin, Nieto, S., T. & Willett, J. (2002). "You can't step on someone else's words": Preparing all teachers to teach language minority students." In Z. Beykont (Ed.). *The power of culture: Teaching across language difference* (pp. 219-243). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Publishing Group.

I appreciate your citation of several of my books and chapters. Here is an updated citation for one of them: Nieto, S. (2004). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 4th ed. As you'll note, both the edition and the publisher have changed. (On p. 7 of Chapter 7, you cite the first edition, 1992, and on p. 9 of Chapter 9, you cite the 2nd edition, 1996).

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this volume and I learned a lot from it. I hope that my comments will be helpful to you as you prepare it for publication.