

Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode: *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (5th ed.).

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Tatyana Kleyn

One might wonder why a review of a book that does not have ‘No Child Left Behind’ (NCLB) in its title or as its central premise would appear in the current issue of *Language Policy*, specifically dedicated to this educational law. Actually, NCLB is only mentioned intermittently throughout the book and, according to the index, appears explicitly in a mere 17 of over 400 pages. But it is precisely those “other” pages that paint the background of the larger sociopolitical climate that frames NCLB, much of which is ignored in the discourse of policymakers who crafted and/or continue to defend the act. This book illustrates the limited scope of NCLB as an act that holds students, teachers and administrators accountable, while disregarding the historical and structural obstacles that perpetuate an inequitable system.

Affirming Diversity is a seminal text on multicultural education, now in its fifth edition. This version brings forth a range of changes, most notably the addition of a second author. Nieto selected Patty Bode to co-author and eventually continue with the revisions of the book; Bode’s most visible contribution stems from her background in aesthetic education, which comes across in the variety of students’ artwork displayed at the onset of each chapter, and implicitly speaks to the importance of the arts in a time when they are being removed from U.S. schools. The updated text also exhibits two new chapters: the first provides an overview of the sociopolitical context of education in the U.S., which includes “laws, regulations, policies, practices, tradition and ideologies” (p. 4), while the second provides examples of curriculum units which fall within the framework of multicultural education.

The text is organized into three parts. Part 1 lays the foundation, describing multicultural education and the context in which it exists. The authors define key terms in the field, many of which have become cliché. They provide explanations of social justice, equity (as a concept different from, but leading to, equality), and the “achievement gap” (their quotations, as we are reminded that the gap primarily results from limited resources and lowered expectations, and is not simply a description of academic performance). The authors also tackle the rationale and issues associated with labeling racial and ethnic groups.

Part 2 takes a closer look at controversial educational approaches such as tracking students into ability groups that predetermine opportunities for higher education and employment; grade retention, which increases the eventual likelihood of student dropout; and, standardized testing. The authors argue that such detrimental practices have become a cornerstone of education while ultimately limiting the opportunities of poor and minority students. Dominant theories related to educational outcomes are explained and analyzed for their shortcomings. The authors examine economic and social reproduction theory of schooling, which posits that schools merely replicate

the class and social status of students' families, rather than helping them increase their societal position. Mismatch between home and school is also presented as a theory that problematizes the disconnect in culture, language, and overall worldview of minority students and the predominantly White, middle-class, Standard English speaking females who teach them.

Finally, Part 3 offers students' voices and concerns about the assimilationist approaches of schools that aim to erase cultural and linguistic differences. Students express conflicted feelings about their identity and discuss the mixed messages they receive in school about differences. The chapters also provide concrete ways for teachers to affirm the backgrounds of students, both in their pedagogy and curriculum. Another chapter provides examples of curriculum units that make explicit connections between students' cultures and content areas, while meeting standards.

Many chapters conclude with case studies and snapshots of successful teenagers who vary along racial, ethnic, religious, geographic, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class lines. The students' stories are told in their own words and analyzed by the authors, who weave in theory to explain individual realities. After I used this text in a graduate class on multicultural education, the students felt that these individual accounts were the most powerful part of the text, making the book equally student-based and research-based.

Nieto and Bode show that there are ways for educators to teach from a multicultural framework that includes the cultures of students and fosters critical thinking and social consciousness, while also meeting government-mandated standards and exams. The "What You Can Do" sections disbursed throughout Parts 2 and 3 provide concrete suggestions for teachers, such as to remain cognizant of hidden messages in available text and trade books. They encourage educators to engage students in "uncomfortable" conversations about racism and to only use standardized tests minimally and appropriately, while simultaneously providing students with the skills to succeed.

Although *Affirming Diversity* cannot be fully inclusive of all social and human differences that matter in education, the fact that it is in its fifth edition in a field where new books on the topic are published regularly is a feat which speaks to its enduring relevancy in a nation where education has not met its promise of being "the great equalizer." It is an excellent text for pre-service teachers to learn about the context of U.S. education. The book would also serve as an important reminder to experienced educators who may have been swept into the deficit theory approach, which blames the cultures of students and their families for a perceived lack of educational preparedness, instead of looking at how the system, including policies such as NCLB, privilege students from the mainstream as it simultaneously places minority students at a disadvantage. Although the text is primarily aimed at educators, it should also be mandatory reading for politicians who enact broad, sweeping legislation that disregards differences in background knowledge, learning preferences, cultures and languages. Nieto and Bode support teachers who strive to avoid conforming to top-down acts such as NCLB, and empower them to transform the teaching and learning experiences of their diverse students.

Author Biography

Tatyana Kleyn is an Assistant Professor at the City College of New York in the Bilingual Education and TESOL program. Her dissertation focused on the intersections of bilingual and multicultural education in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Chinese and Russian bilingual classrooms. She also conducts research on the cultural, linguistic and educational needs of Garífuna in Honduras and the U.S.