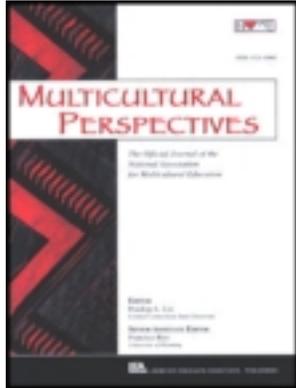


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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Multicultural Perspectives

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hmcp20>

Joy is here, indeed: A Review of Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms

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Published online: 18 Feb 2014.

To cite this article: Joan Wink (2014) Joy is here, indeed: A Review of Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms, *Multicultural Perspectives*, 16:1, 50-52, DOI: [10.1080/15210960.2013.872927](https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2013.872927)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2013.872927>

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PART IV

Creating a Multicultural Library



Joy is here, indeed: A Review of *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms*

Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms. Sonia Nieto, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2013, 200 pages, \$22.00 (paperback), ISBN-10: 0325027153, ISBN-13: 978-0325027159.

Introduction

Thriving Teachers, Diversity, and Change. The Interviews.

In her remarkable new book, Sonia Nieto shares insightful research, based on teachers' experiences, which she then uses to critique educational reforms from outside. She highlights a broad range of teachers who all feel relentless outside pressure, but still find ways to thrive with a joyful pedagogy based on "realism and hope" (p. 32).

Part 1: Recognizing the Current Context of Public Education

Chapter 1: Surviving in Today's Schools: Taking Stock of Where We Are

In her first chapter, Nieto compares schools of today with those of the past 30 years. She demonstrates how standardization of schools, teachers, and students often is viewed through an ideological lens, which helps create

biases and stereotypes. Teachers can feel discouraged when they are blamed for the complexities and realities of their community and society. However, as her research demonstrates, teachers have a powerful influence over student learning, particularly when they courageously "push back on a toxic policy context and negative expectations" (p. 17).

However, as her research demonstrates, teachers have a powerful influence over student learning, particularly when they courageously "push back on a toxic policy context and negative expectations" (p. 17).

Chapter 2: Professional Development: Preparing for the Real World

The focus of Chapter 2 is teacher preparation, professional development, and teacher evaluation. The problem is that teachers feel unprepared as their preparation and continuing professional development often is not grounded in the principles and practices of social justice.

Part 2: Profiles of Thriving Teachers

In Part 2, Nieto highlights the lives of 22 teachers in diverse contexts. It is from the daily lives of these teachers that the reader comes to understand what it means to be a joyful and critically-grounded teacher. Nieto links the teachers through her use of themes, one of which is found at the end of each chapter. Themes include: teaching is an act of love; teaching is an ethical endeavor; teachers thrive when they keep learning; teaching is honoring students' identities and believing in their futures; teaching is challenging the status quo; and teaching is advocacy.

Chapter 3: It's Whom You Teach, Not Just What You Teach

Chapter 3 brings back the legacy of John Dewey, as a teacher declares, "Start where the students are." For readers who have wondered what it means to be a critically and caring-ground teacher, Nieto offers two different models through the lives of two of the interviewed teachers, both of whom live the theme of this chapter: *Teaching is an act of love*.

Chapter 4: "If I Haven't Taught Them How to Be Good People, That's Failure": Teachers' Perspectives on the Moral Dimensions of Teaching

Chapter 4 brings to life the missing piece of the top-down, corporate-led school reform movement and the moral dimensions of teaching. The teachers raise the question for those who do not live in schools: "What about all of the non-quantifiable ethical factors like empathy, care, and courage?" The theme of this chapter is: *Teaching is an ethical endeavor*.

Chapter 5: The Quest for Knowledge: Teacher Learning In and Out of the Classroom

Chapter 5 is filled with the voices of teachers who believe that one must continue to grow and learn in order to thrive as a professional. Nieto and these teachers offer many paths to life-long learning (e.g., self-initiated learning and learning from and about students). The theme of this chapter is: *Teachers thrive when they keep learning*.

Chapter 6: "I Hope I Can Become That Teacher": Teaching to Honor Language and Culture

In Chapter 6, the reader meets emergent bilingual students and their impassioned teachers who thrive in multiple languages. In preparing this chapter, Nieto interviewed nine outstanding teachers from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA. These teachers make visible the innumerable small and thoughtful acts for students and their families that don't make the headlines, but which truly are the indelible game-changers. The theme of this chapter is: *Teaching is honoring students' identities and believing in their futures*.

Chapter 7: Teaching to Nurture Students' Dreams

Yes, teaching is content, and yes, teaching is pedagogy, but it is also about looking below the surface of what may be apparent, to the hidden factors which affect students' identities. Teaching is the ability to see into an unknown future where the hopes and dreams of students live. The teachers in Chapter 7 live in the present and help students build their paths to the future. The theme of Chapter 7 is: *Teaching is challenging the status quo*.

Teaching is the ability to see into an unknown future where the hopes and dreams of students live. The teachers in chapter 7 live in the present and help students build their paths to the future.

Chapter 8: Teaching as Social Justice and Advocacy

Chapter 8 leads readers to understand what it means to bring life to social justice in the classroom. The concept of social justice in the classroom is defined and illustrated by listening to three specific teachers, who each embody the concept in their own unique manners. The theme of Chapter 8 is: *Teaching is advocacy*.

Part 3: Lessons Learned

In Part 3, Nieto looks more deeply at the six themes, which she garners from the lives of the teachers whom she interviewed for Part 2.

Chapter 9: Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: What Does It Take?

In this chapter, Nieto expands upon and deepens her discussion of each of the six themes of Part 2. Teachers everywhere need the affirmation of these definitions of teaching.

Chapter 10: From Dispositions to Actions: Becoming Culturally Responsive Teachers

Nieto believes that other teachers can benefit from learning what these particular teachers do in order to be *culturally responsive teachers*. She connects the dots from their dispositions to their actions: First, she highlights the knowledge, attributes, dispositions, and actions. Next, she states that when teachers move from dispositions to actions, they become *culturally responsive professionals*.

Chapter 11: From Surviving to Thriving: The Role of Hope in Teaching

In order to move from surviving to thriving, the interviews with teachers lead Nieto and the readers to understand what it takes to find, create, and maintain hope and happiness in the classroom and profession, even

if it does not always feel like this for individual teachers. To be a culturally responsive teacher, it takes not only resilience, but also specific knowledge, skills, aptitude, and behaviors. Nieto concludes the last chapter of the book by sharing her advice:

Learn about yourself.
Learn about your students.
Cultivate allies.
Have a life.

Conclusion

If you are a teacher, professor, or researcher, I feel you will find that Nieto takes care to include many new critically-caring voices. Nieto lays out a varied group of present-day teachers who can articulate what it means to live a life of JOY with students of diverse backgrounds. Sonia Nieto has listened to the wisdom of these teachers, and she paints a lasting image of courage and joy, while in the midst of teaching and learning, which can be messy and, yet, magnificent.

Acknowledgements

Joan Wink wishes to thank Angela Ostrander, Librarian of Faith, South Dakota and Dr. Ari Sheris, Professor of Bilingual Education of Texas A&M University—Kingsville for their careful reading of and their perceptive suggestions for this book review.

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