

# Affirming Diversity



EDITION

7

# Affirming Diversity

*The Sociopolitical Context of  
Multicultural Education*

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*This book is dedicated to all those teachers who teach, believe in, and love their students, and to the students in our schools today, with the gifts of curiosity, energy, resilience, determination, and awe they bring to our world. They are, after all, our future.*

*—S. N. and P. B.*



# About the Authors



Photo credit Mark Moriarty

**Sonia Nieto** has dedicated her professional life to issues and social justice. With experience teaching students at all levels grades through graduate school, currently she is Professor Emerita Literacy, and Culture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She has written numerous journal articles and book chapters, and has received awards for her research, advocacy, and activism, including the Educator of the Year Award from the National Association for Multicultural and the Social Justice in Education Award from the American.

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# Brief Contents

*Foreword* xiv

*Preface* xvii

## I

### Setting the Stage: Multicultural Education Within a Sociopolitical Context 1

**1** Understanding the Sociopolitical Context of Schooling 3

**2** Defining Multicultural Education for School Reform  
by Sonia Nieto 30

## II

### Developing a Conceptual Framework for Multicultural Education 47

**3** Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students' Achievement 49

**4** Structural and Organizational Issues in Classrooms and Schools 91

**5** Culture, Identity, and Learning 135

**6** Linguistic Diversity in U.S. Classrooms 184

**7** Understanding Student Learning and School Achievement 215

## III

### Implications of Diversity for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society 247

**8** Learning from Students 249

**9** Adapting Curriculum for Multicultural Classrooms by Patty Bode 289

**10** Affirming Diversity: Implications for Teachers, Schools, Families, and Communities 321

References 341

Index 355

# Contents

Foreword xiv

Preface xvii



## Setting the Stage: Multicultural Education Within a Sociopolitical Context 1

### 1 Understanding the Sociopolitical Context of Schooling 3

#### Assumptions Underlying this Text 3

Identity, Difference, Power, and Privilege Are All Connected 4 • Multicultural Education Is Inclusive of Many Differences: Lenses of Race, Ethnicity, and Language 4 • Teachers Are Not the Villains 5 • Quality Public Education Is a Cause Worth Fighting For 5

#### Defining the Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education 6

#### Task 1: Clarifying Three Goals and Four Key Terms of Multicultural Education 6

Defining Key Terms in Multicultural Education 7

#### Task 2: Dissolving Myths About Immigration and Difference 12

**What You Can Do** Your Story and the Stories of Others: Immigrant Nation 14

#### Task 3: Naming the Underpinnings of Educational Structures 14

School-Level Policies and Practices 15

#### Task 4: Studying the Demographic Mosaic of U.S. Schools and Society 16

**What You Can Do** Explore Your Own Heritage and the Heritage of Others 19

#### Task 5: Using Qualitative Research to Understand Students' Sociopolitical Contexts 19

Choosing Methodology: What Are Case Studies? 19 • Beyond Generalizations and Stereotypes 20 • Learning from the Case Studies and Snapshots 21

#### Task 6: Examining Political Struggles—Multicultural Education, Backlash, and Legislation 21

The Back-to-Basics Argument 21 • Eroding the Traditional Educational Canon 22 • Political Struggles of Legislation and Policy 23

#### Conclusion 28

To Think About 28

Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 28

#### Chapter 1 Notes 29

### 2 Defining Multicultural Education for School Reform by Sonia Nieto 30

#### Why School Reform? 31

#### A Definition of Multicultural Education 31

Multicultural Education Is Antiracist Education 32 • Multicultural Education Is Basic Education 35

#### **About Terminology:** The Conundrum of Race 36

Multicultural Education Is Important for All Students 37 • Multicultural Education Is Pervasive 38

#### **What You Can Do** “Multiculturalize” Your Lessons 39

Multicultural Education Is Education for Social Justice 39 • Multicultural Education Is a Process 40 • Multicultural Education Is Critical Pedagogy 41

#### **What You Can Do** Learn About, and Practice, Critical Pedagogy 42

#### Conclusion 45

To Think About 45

Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 45

#### Chapter 2 Notes 46



## Developing a Conceptual Framework for Multicultural Education 47

### 3 Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students' Achievement 49

#### Racism and Discrimination: Definitions and Dimensions 49

Critical Race Theory and Other Frameworks 50  
 • Obstinacy of Conventional Norms 50 • Institutional Practices 51

**What You Can Do** Directly Confront Racism and Discrimination 53

The History and Persistence of Racism in U.S. Schools 53 • Manifestations of Racism and Discrimination in Schools 54

#### Racism, Discrimination, and Silence 56

**Multicultural Teaching Story** Immigration Rights and Family Stories 57

#### Expectations of Students' Achievement 61

**SNAPSHOT** *Aiden and Daniel O'Carroll* 62

**About Terminology:** White Privilege 63

**What You Can Do** Start Early 64

#### Considerations About Research on Teacher Expectations 65

#### High Expectations as Antiracist Teaching 65

**SNAPSHOT** *Kaval Sethi* 66

**What You Can Do** Promoting Racial Literacy in Your Classroom and School 68

#### Conclusion 69

To Think About 69

Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 69

#### Chapter 3 Notes 70

##### CASE STUDIES

Delilah Rogers 71

Linda Howard 77

**About Terminology:** Whites, European Americans 85

Rashaud Kates 86

### 4 Structural and Organizational Issues in Classrooms and Schools 91

#### Tracking 92

**What You Can Do** Detrack Extracurricular Activities 94

#### Retention 95

#### Standardized Testing 96

**What You Can Do** Be Proactive About Tests 98

#### The Curriculum 99

**What You Can Do** Use the Curriculum Critically 102

#### Pedagogy 103

**What You Can Do** Punch Up Your Pedagogy! 105

#### School Climate 105

School Climate: Social and Emotional Learning 106 • School Climate: Anti-Bullying Initiatives 106 • School Climate: Physical Violence and Safety 107 • School Climate: School Buildings, Physical Environment, School and Class Size 109

**What You Can Do** Enliven Your Environment 110

#### Disciplinary Policies 110

**What You Can Do** Create Inclusive Disciplinary Practices 111

#### The Limited Role of Students 112

#### The Limited Role of Teachers 113

**Multicultural Teaching Story** Boston Teachers Union School: Teacher Leadership and Student Achievement 114

#### Limited Family and Community Involvement 118

**What You Can Do** Vigorously Promote Family Outreach 118

#### Conclusion 119

To Think About 120

Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 120

#### Chapter 4 Notes 120

##### CASE STUDIES

Avi Abramson 121

Jasper and Viena Alejandro-Quinn 128

**About Terminology:** American Indians, Native Americans, Indigenous People 133

### 5 Culture, Identity, and Learning 135

#### Countering Color-Blind Classrooms 135

#### Defining Culture 137

#### Hybridity: Another Way of Understanding Culture 138

Beyond Race and Ethnicity 139

#### Influence of Culture on Learning 139

#### Learning Styles, Preferences, Intelligences, and Power 142

Power Differences 143 • Multiple Intelligences and Multicultural Education 143

### Communication and Pedagogy 144

**What You Can Do** Teach Through the Transformational Inquiry Method 145

**What You Can Do** Research Families' Funds of Knowledge 147

### Cultural Discontinuities and School

#### Achievement 147

Discontinuities in Language 147 • Discontinuities in Perspectives on School Achievement 148 • Confronting Myths to Address Discontinuities 148 • Historical Causes of Discontinuities 149

### Culturally Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Education 150

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy 150

### A Critical Appraisal of Culture-Specific Accommodations 151

#### Conclusion 152

To Think About 153

Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 153

#### Chapter 5 Notes 153

### CASE STUDIES

Yahaira León 154

**About Terminology:** Latinos, Hispanics, and Others 162

James Karam 162

Hoang Vinh 169

Rebecca Florentina 177

## 6 Linguistic Diversity in U.S. Classrooms 184

Definitions and Demographics 184

Language Diversity in U.S. Schools: A Brief History 186

Language Diversity, the Courts, and the Law 186

Linguistic Diversity and Learning 189

Understanding Language in a Sociopolitical Context 190

 **SNAPSHOT** *Liane Chang* 192

Approaches to Teaching Emergent Bilingual Students 193

**About Terminology:** Asians/Pacific Islanders 193

Understanding Language Development and Second-Language Acquisition 194

Developing an Additive Bilingual Perspective 194

**What You Can Do** Accept Students' Identities 195

Consciously Fostering Native-Language Literacy 195

Program Models for Teaching Emergent Bilinguals 196

Structured English Immersion (SEI) 196 • English as a Second Language 196 • Bilingual Education 196

Problems and Challenges 198

**What You Can Do** Accept Students' Language 199

Conclusion 200

To Think About 200

Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 200

Chapter 6 Notes 201

### CASE STUDIES

Manuel Gomes 201

Alicia Montejo 208

## 7 Understanding Student Learning and School Achievement 215

Caring Relationships, Hope and Healing 216

Caring as Hopeful Power to Transform Trauma 217

Teacher Expectations and Asset-Based Pedagogy 218

Asset-Based Perspectives in Policy and Systemic Change 219

Out-of-School Factors 220

Economic and Social Reproduction and Out-of-School Factors 220 • Communities Respond to Out-of-School Factors 220 • Out-of-School Factors (OSFs) and Policy Proposals 221

**What You Can Do** Build Collegial Relationships for Solidarity Rooted in Research 222

Discipline Disparities and Restorative Justice 223

Resistance, Discipline Disparities, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline 223 • Restorative Justice Practices in Schools 224

**What You Can Do** Engage in Collaborative Research to Promote Teaching as Intellectual Work 225

 **SNAPSHOT** *Nini Rostland* 225

**About Terminology:** Mixed Race/Multiracial/Multicultural/Multiethnic 227

Student Identities Within School Structures 227

Racial Opportunity Cost and a Re-Examination of "Acting White" 228

**Conclusion** 230  
 To Think About 230  
 Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 231

**Chapter 7 Notes** 231

**CASE STUDIES**

Paul Chavez 232  
 Latrell Elton III 241



**Implications of Diversity for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society** 247

**8 Learning from Students** 249

**Redefining Success and Achievement** 249  
**Pride and Conflict in Culture and Language** 250  
 Conflict and Ambivalence 251 • Self-Identification and Conflict 253

**SNAPSHOT** *Gamini Padmaperuma* 254

Creating New Cultures 255 • Identity and Learning 257  
**What You Can Do** Become Knowledgeable About Arab and Arab American Students 258

**Beyond Academics** 258  
 Keeping on Track 259  
**What You Can Do** Widen Horizons by Acknowledging What You Do Not Know 260  
 Shields Against Peer Pressure 260 • Developing Critical Thinking and Leadership Skills 260 • Belonging 261

**Family, Community, and School Environments for Success** 262  
 The Crucial Role of Family 262  
**Multicultural Teaching Story** Dr. Renee Spanos Klein and Teacher Caring 264  
 Teachers, Schools, and Caring 267

**Conclusion** 268  
 To Think About 268  
 Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 269

**Chapter 8 Notes** 269

**CASE STUDIES**

Nadia Bara 270  
 Savoun Nouch 276  
 Christina Kamau 282

**9 Adapting Curriculum for Multicultural Classrooms by Patty Bode** 289

**Curricular Adaptation 1: A Study of Cambodia and the Cambodian American Experience** 290  
 What We Don't Know 291 • Preparation 291 • Goal Setting 291 • The Work of Learning 292  
**What You Can Do** Teach for Interreligious Understanding in Your Multicultural Curriculum 297

**Curricular Adaptation 2: Expanding Definitions of Family** 298  
 Why the Topic of Family? 298 • Who Is Included? 299 • Avoiding Pitfalls 299 • First-Grade Curriculum Based on Big Ideas in Gina Simm's and Susie Secco's Classrooms 300  
 Middle School Interdisciplinary Curriculum on the Theme of Family 304  
**What You Can Do** Make Your School a "Welcoming School" 305  
**What You Can Do** Use Technology to Expand Multicultural Curriculum 309

**Curricular Adaptation 3: LGBTQ Literature: Expanding Topics for Inclusive High School Content** 310  
 Imagining Possibilities 310 • Student Requests and Requirements 311 • Student Voices 312 • Evolution of Curriculum 312

**Multicultural Teaching Story** Bill Blatner: Teaching Math with Belief in Every Kid 313

**SNAPSHOT** *Eugene Crocket* 317

**Conclusion** 318  
 To Think About 318  
 Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 319

**Chapter 9 Notes** 319

**10 Affirming Diversity: Implications for Teachers, Schools, Families, and Communities** 321

**Lessons from Students: Maintaining and Affirming Identity** 322  
 Supporting Native-Language Approaches 322 • Developing Comprehensive Multicultural Programs 323

**SNAPSHOT** *David Weiss* 324

**Support Beyond Academics** 325  
**Creating Affirming Environments for Learning** 325  
 Mutual Accommodation 326 • Teachers' Relationships with Students 326 • Working with Families to Promote Student Learning 328

**Expanding Definitions: What It Means to Be American** 329

Challenging “Heartbreaking Dilemmas” 329 • Toward Additive Multiculturalism 330 • A More Expansive Definition of American 330 • Eliminating shame and cultivating pride 331

**Levels of Multicultural Education** 331

Starting Out 332 • Becoming a Multicultural Person 332 • A Model of Multicultural Education 333 • Balancing Hope and Despair 337

**Final Thoughts** 338

To Think About 339

Activities for Personal, School, and Community Change 339

**Chapter 10 Notes** 340**References** 341**Index** 355

# Foreword

It is a privilege to be associated with this seventh edition of *Affirming Diversity*, a book that has exerted a profound impact on American schools and teacher education programs since its first edition in 1992. This is a textbook like no other. It refuses to “play it safe” by glossing over the historical and current realities of discrimination and exclusion in American and other societies. Over 25 years, it has drawn from the lives of teachers and students to illustrate the impact of overt racism and more subtle forms of institutional racism on the educational experiences of students of color. It has highlighted the challenges experienced by LGBTQ students as they negotiate their evolving identities in the face of widespread societal rejection. And it has exposed the irrationality of educational policies that encourage bilingual students to abandon their home languages despite extensive research evidence that the continued development of bilingualism and biliteracy promotes academic achievement (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006).

*Affirming Diversity* provides educators with a powerful set of conceptual tools to push back against these societal power relations that constrict the instructional space experienced by minoritized students. A central message throughout the book is that *teachers have choices*. Teacher agency is the key to implementing instruction that connects with students’ lives and affirms their identities. In their own classrooms, teachers *can* foster critical literacy and extend instruction to “uncomfortable” topics and issues. Many teachers, particularly in relatively affluent suburban schools, may prefer to avoid discomfort for themselves and their students. As one of the young people highlighted in this book, ninth grader Delilah Rogers insightfully observes, “Talking about race is like a ticking time bomb.” However, if we avoid talking about race, power, and multiple forms of diversity, are we simply transmitting a sanitized curriculum, rather than educating our students? Are we perpetuating and complicit with societal discourses that implicitly but clearly state that black lives *don’t* matter, that demonize immigrants and refugees, and that ignore the rapidly increasing gap between affluent and impoverished communities?

As these questions illustrate, teacher identity is central to effective instruction. Despite many constraints imposed by federal and state policies, as teachers, we always have at least some degrees of freedom in how we interact with students, how we connect with their cultural experiences and language talents, how we involve parents in their children’s learning, how we adapt content to link with students’ background knowledge and experiences, and in the levels of cognitive engagement we try to evoke through our instruction. Alternative modes of assessment (such as portfolio assessment) can also present a counter-discourse to the inaccurate and misleading account of student progress and effort often reflected in standardized test scores. In articulating our choices, both individually and collectively, we rediscover and shape our own identities as educators and we also become aware of the identity options that our instruction helps construct for our students.

Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode open up a dialogical sphere of both affirmation and resistance: affirmation of student and teacher identity and resistance to coercive and misguided top-down control. When we realize that we *do* have choices, and when we articulate these choices explicitly, we take the first steps toward *empowerment*, which can be defined as the collaborative creation of power. Disempowered teachers are not in a position to create contexts of empowerment for

their students. We need to understand, and rediscover, the power that we bring to the classroom, not as instructional technicians who simply transmit the curriculum, but as *educators* whose instructional choices exert a dramatic impact on the lives of our students.

*Affirming Diversity* challenges us, as educators, to make explicit the image of our students and of our society that is implied by our interactions in the school context. What kind of people do we hope our students will grow up to be? What kinds of abilities and knowledge are accessible to them in our classrooms? What kind of society do we hope they will create? The answers to all these questions are written in the daily record of our interactions with our students. Our interactions with students and communities constitute a moral enterprise, whether we define it explicitly as such or not.

Students' and teachers' voices occupy a central place in this book. They complement and illustrate the theoretical analyses and remind us that the interactions between educators and students dramatically affect not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the creation of both student and teacher identity. Unfortunately, in many classrooms, the curriculum has been sanitized such that opportunities for critical reflection on personal and collective identity and on issues of social justice are minimized. The image of our students and society implied by this pedagogical orientation is an image of compliant consumers who will gratefully accept their place within the existing power structure and who can easily be manipulated to exercise their democratic rights to preserve that power structure.

A radically different image is implied by the pedagogical orientations articulated in *Affirming Diversity*. Students are viewed as critical thinkers capable of, and responsible for, creating change through action both in their own lives and in the broader society. Their interactions in school provide opportunities to collaborate across cultural and linguistic boundaries in the generation, interpretation, and application of knowledge. The curriculum orients students toward critical reflection on issues of social justice and how personal and collective identities are intertwined with historical and current societal power relations.

The term “multicultural education” does not figure prominently in the educational prescriptions of what historian Diane Ravitch (2013) has called the “corporate reformers” whose focus is increasing test scores and privatizing as much of education as possible. Multicultural education is frequently dismissed within this perspective as, at best, an off-task frill or, at worst, a radical challenge to fundamental values of American society. However, the alternative to multicultural education is monocultural education. The history of monocultural education is written in the certainties of the Crusades and the Inquisition, the smug brutalities of slavery, the casual eradication of the language, culture, and identity of generations of Native American children “educated” in boarding schools, as well as in contemporary claims of fundamentalist groups, from various religious persuasions, to have exclusive access to ultimate truths. Surely, 9/11 should have brought home to us the destructive power of monocultural fundamentalist belief systems and the need to figure out ways of living together in a global context where cross-cultural contact and population mobility are at an all-time high in human history.

*Affirming Diversity* not only constitutes an eloquent and forceful statement about the importance of multicultural education to our society, it also affirms the central role that individual educators play in nurturing and shaping the lives and identities of our youth. To be a teacher is to be a visionary—as we interact with our students, we envisage what contributions they will play in shaping a better society and we orchestrate our classroom interactions to enable them to realize these possibilities. The pages of this book resonate with the voices of educators whose vision of education encompasses equal opportunity for all students and whose instruction focuses on expanding minds as the primary means of attaining curriculum goals.

*Affirming Diversity* does not supply prescriptions or formulaic solutions, but it does present extensive empirical research and invites us to think and talk about our own identities as educators and the potential and consequences of the choices we make on a daily basis. As such, it represents a powerful source of inspiration, ideas, and solidarity for all of us who see social justice and equity as important core values within our educational systems. *Affirming Diversity* also highlights the fact that our global society can use all of the multilingual and multicultural intelligence it can get. The consequences of squandering the intellectual, linguistic, and cultural resources that our students bring to school can be seen in our domestic prisons, in our battlefields abroad, and in the spiritual malaise that afflicts our society. This book does not provide a map, but it is a powerful source of inspiration—it breathes new life into those of us who believe that education is fundamentally an ethical imperative, rather than just an economic or bureaucratic exercise.

Jim Cummins  
University of Toronto

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# Preface

Much has changed in our society and in the world since the sixth edition of *Affirming Diversity* was published. The United States is still engaged in two long-running wars (in Iraq and Afghanistan), and most recently, the conflict in Syria, while the threat of violence and terrorism still looms large on the world stage. Interethnic, interracial, and interreligious hostility around the world, a leading cause of ever more conflicts and wars, remains rampant. As a result, the number of immigrants and refugees fleeing such conflicts is at an all-time high, and although they have been welcomed in some nations, they have been roundly rejected in others. The range of cultural and social differences in our communities, schools, and classrooms has increased tremendously over the past several decades. All of these issues have considerable consequences for our nation's classrooms. Moreover, with the election of a president in 2016 with seemingly little knowledge, or appreciation, of public education, the federal government's growing commitment to privatization, vouchers, and charter schools places public schools in a precarious position. These changes signal a dramatic shift in our nation's historic commitment to public education.

The changing landscape of our world, our nation, and our schools confirms the pressing need for interethnic understanding and cooperation, a need that is more evident than ever before. At the same time, while multicultural and social justice education are recognized by many as essential for living in today's world, many teachers and other educators are woefully unprepared to deal with the tremendous diversity they will face in their classrooms—diversity not only of race, ethnicity, and gender, but also of religion, ability, social class, life opportunities, and more. In addition, the growing inequality in our schools and society, an inequality leading to ever more alienation and anger among segments of the population who have been overlooked and underappreciated, is leading to more conflict in our streets, legislatures, courts, and, of course, our schools.

This leads us to the need for this book. It is not only about cultural diversity but also, and just as significantly, about why students succeed or fail in school. The subject of much research and debate, this topic has particular salience for students whose racial, ethnic, linguistic, or social identities differ from those of the dominant group. In this book, we consider these matters in relation to a comprehensive understanding of the current sociopolitical context. That is, rather than focus only on individual experiences or psychological responses to schooling, we explore how societal and educational structures, policies, and practices affect student learning, and we suggest some ways that teachers as well as other educators, individually and collectively, can provide high-quality education in spite of obstacles that may get in the way. For us, multicultural education needs to consider not just schooling but also the social, economic, and political context of the world in which we live.

In this seventh edition of *Affirming Diversity*, we continue to explore such matters as diversity, equity, and equality, bringing our discussion up to date by considering issues of current policy, practice, and legislation. For example, high-stakes testing, the growing standardization of the curriculum, vouchers, “choice,” charter schools, and a marketization of schooling have had a tremendous impact on public schools in the past several decades. Increasingly, education is being defined by policies far removed from daily classroom life but nevertheless having enormous consequences for teachers, students, families, and communities. The growing diversity in our nation and debates over immigration, the U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent wars in which the United States is engaged, the economic

recession and slow recovery, and its impact on many segments of the population, inter-ethnic and interracial strife here and abroad, regional wars around the world, global warming, the devastation of the environment—all of these call for a different way to interact in the world. Not coincidentally, burgeoning awareness and militancy have developed among educators who have tired of the unjustified blame they receive for many of the problems in education. Their growing militancy is evident in numerous organizations focused on calls for social justice in education and teacher empowerment, sometimes through teacher unions and many times separate from them. This, too, is a significant situation that must be considered in writing a book on education in today's world.

Given the situation briefly sketched above, we believe teachers and prospective teachers need, more than ever, to understand how the larger societal context affects students, particularly those most marginalized in schools, and in society in general. Why do some students succeed academically, while others fail? What do race/ethnicity, social class, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and other differences have to do with learning? What is the real significance of the “achievement gap”? How does the societal context influence what happens in your school? Do your school's and your school system's policies and practices exacerbate and perpetuate inequality? Can teachers and other educators turn this situation around? What is your role and how can you face these challenges with hope and joy? *Affirming Diversity* is an attempt to answer these questions—and more—that both new and veteran teachers face every day in increasingly diverse classrooms and in schools that are becoming more bureaucratic and standardized.

## ■ About This Book

*Affirming Diversity* explores the meaning, necessity, and benefits of multicultural education for students from all backgrounds through an extensive review of research that explores:

- Influences on schooling and learning, such as:
  - The sociopolitical context of schools and society
  - Racism and other biases and expectations of students' achievement
  - School organization and educational policies and practices
  - Cultural and other differences, including ethnicity, race, gender, language, sexual orientation, religion, and social class
- A conceptual framework for multicultural education based on that investigation
- Case studies and snapshots—in the words of a selected group of students from a variety of backgrounds—about home, school, and community experiences and how these have influenced their school experiences
- Teaching stories that highlight specific teachers and the inspiring work they do in their classrooms to address issues of equity and diversity in a variety of settings, course content, and grade levels

The book presents data on the multicultural nature of schools and society, including information about different sociocultural groups, their experiences in schools, and the issues and challenges they face.

*Affirming Diversity* consists of 10 chapters organized in three parts. Part I sets the stage for understanding the sociopolitical context of multicultural education. Part II develops the conceptual framework for multicultural education, emphasizing institutional and cultural factors in schooling and individual and group responses to diversity. This section explores the multiple forces that may affect the school achievement of students from a variety of backgrounds.

To provide insights into the interrelated roles that discrimination, school policies and practices, and culture play in the education of students in the classroom,

we present 16 case studies and 7 snapshots. Incorporated throughout Parts II and III, the case studies and snapshots highlight salient issues discussed in particular chapters, and they provide a concrete means for addressing issues of diversity and success or failure in schools. We hope that the case studies and snapshots will help you more fully understand the lives and school experiences of a variety of young people who reflect our nation's growing diversity. Parts II and III also contain a number of multicultural teaching stories that epitomize what teachers can do, individually and in collaboration with one another, to put into practice some of the theories developed throughout the text.

Part III focuses on the implications of the case studies, snapshots, and teaching stories for teaching and learning in a multicultural society such as ours. We use themes that emerged from interviews with students and teachers to emphasize conditions that may affect learning for different students. In Chapter 9, three specific curriculum ideas for elementary, middle, and high schools are comprehensively described. These examples embody what the previous chapters have defined as multicultural education, that is, education that affirms diversity, encourages critical thinking, and leads to social justice and action. Chapter 10 offers suggestions for developing environments that foster high-quality education, concentrating on multicultural education as a process. In addition, in Chapter 10, we propose a model of multicultural education that affirms all students.

Each chapter concludes with (1) a series of problems or situations for you to contemplate and (2) suggestions for classroom activities and community actions. By including these, we are not implying that there are immediate or easy answers to the dilemmas you face in schools every day. The purpose of posing particular problems and proposing activities to address them is to suggest that careful attention needs to be paid to the many manifestations of inequality in our schools and that productive resolutions can be achieved when teachers, students, families, and communities reflect critically on these problems and work together to solve them.

## New to This Edition

Previous readers may notice a broad range of changes in this new edition.

### About Terminology

In the sixth edition, we took each section of the chapter that in previous editions was titled “About Terminology” and incorporated those sections throughout the book. In this seventh edition, we continue to include the same feature, one that clarifies what terms to use when referring to specific kinds of people, and how to identify respectful language that describes group affiliations. You will see these terms highlighted in boxes nearby case studies and snapshots when relevant to the identities of the students discussed in those features. One About Terminology box is new to this edition; titled “White Privilege,” it appears in Chapter 3.

### Multicultural Teaching Stories

In the sixth edition, we introduced a new feature, multicultural teaching stories, to highlight the important role of teachers in changing classrooms and schools. In this edition, we include two new stories and update two familiar stories. The first new story, “Immigration Rights and Family Stories” in Chapter 3, focuses on the actions of a teacher, principal, and superintendent in one school district to address the needs of immigrant families within the atmosphere of anti-immigrant vitriol that has become more prevalent since the 2016 presidential campaign and election. The second new story in Chapter 8 highlights the teaching of Renee Spanos Klein, who embodies the ethic of care through what she calls “culturally relevant writing pedagogy.” In Chapter 4, we revisit the Boston Teachers Union School, a teacher-run school, five years later. In Chapter 9, we hear updates from Bill

Blatner and learn about the transformation of the math curriculum at his school that was built upon his introduction of more inclusive math classes with a “belief in every kid” to succeed.

### **A New Case Study**

Delilah Rogers is the focus of a new case study in Chapter 3; she reflects on how schools either silence or support student voices and talks about race in school against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement.

### **A New Snapshot**

Chapter 3 also features a new snapshot of two brothers: one a seventh grader and the other a high school senior who identify as straight White males, and they both discuss White privilege.

### **Thoroughly Updated References**

We have gone to great lengths to thoroughly update the vast majority of the references and studies cited throughout the text.

### **Student Art**

The updated artwork appearing on the cover as well as in all the chapter openers and part openers are portraits and self-portraits created by school students from middle and high school.

### **Chapter by Chapter**

Chapter 1, “Understanding the Sociopolitical Context of Schooling,” has expanded its emphasis on the foundational concepts of the text. Updates include the most recent research illustrating the six significant tasks of understanding the sociopolitical context of multicultural education: (1) clarifying the goals and key terms of multicultural education; (2) dissolving myths about immigration and difference; (3) naming the social, economic, political, and ideological underpinnings that influence educational structures; (4) studying the current demographic “mosaic” of our nation; (5) using qualitative research to understand students; and (6) examining the political struggles of legislation and policy in public education.

Chapter 2, “Defining Multicultural Education for School Reform,” remains the anchor of the text, describing in detail Sonia Nieto’s definition of multicultural education, which she offered in the first edition of this book in 1992. The definition remains rooted in the seven characteristics originally named while continuing to evolve to address current conditions. Since Sonia developed this conceptual framework in the first edition, she is listed as the sole author of this chapter.

Chapter 3, “Racism, Discrimination, and Expectations of Students’ Achievement,” has been thoroughly updated with new research and insights on these topics:

- Implicit bias, discussed under the section on critical race theory
- The history of housing segregation that influences school in a contemporary context, discussed under the section on the systemic nature of discrimination
- The manifestation of racism and discrimination in statistics
- Statistics and research on teacher expectations

In addition, a new multicultural teaching story on immigration rights, a new case study, a new snapshot, and a new About Terminology box have been added to the chapter, along with a new What You Can Do: “Promoting Racial Literacy in Your Classroom and School.”

In Chapter 4, “Structural and Organizational Issues in Classrooms and Schools,” many of the topics covered have remained the same as in the sixth edition, although a great deal of new research on those issues has been included.

- The section on discipline policies has been updated with resources about restorative justice practices in schools.
- There is a new section on school climate with four subsections to reflect the multifaceted issues that schools must address with a multicultural perspective:
  - social and emotional learning;
  - anti-bullying initiatives;
  - physical violence and safety; and
  - school buildings, physical environment, school and class size.
- The chapter also includes an updated report about the Boston Teachers Union School in its multicultural teaching story.
- There are many updated resources listed in several of the What You Can Do boxes providing the most recent research to inform practice:
  - being proactive about tests;
  - using the curriculum critically;
  - creating inclusive disciplinary practices; and
  - vigorously promoting family outreach.

Chapter 5, “Culture, Identity, and Learning,” includes further explanation of theories about culture and learning than in the previous edition. Recent research is presented on culturally sustaining practices, as well as the relationship between power, poverty, and learning.

Chapter 6, “Linguistic Diversity in U.S. Classrooms,” has been updated with new definitions and cutting-edge research in the field.

Chapter 7, “Understanding Student Learning and School Achievement,” has been completely revised in this edition, reflecting new research on:

- caring relationships, hope and healing;
- teacher expectations and asset-based pedagogy;
- out-of-school factors;
- discipline disparities and restorative justice; and
- youth identities within school structures.

Chapter 8, “Learning from Students,” includes a new multicultural teaching story about a first-grade teacher’s efforts to affirm students funds of knowledge through culturally responsive writing.

Chapter 9, “Adapting Curriculum for Multicultural Classrooms,” includes an updated multicultural teaching story about Bill Blatner’s Interactive Mathematics Program (IMP). We revisit the teaching story of the sixth edition and see how Bill’s Math Department transformed the entire school math curriculum.

- Its language has been updated to include transgender identities more explicitly, especially in the discussion of LGBTQ curriculum.
- The coverage of Sara Barber-Just’s LGBTQ literature course has been updated, reflecting the new literature she has added and the change in the course’s actual title so it is more inclusive of transgender identities.
- A section has been added at the end of the unit on Cambodia, suggesting how the same approach and activities might be applied to other refugee or immigrant groups, depending on school population and location.
- The What You Can Do boxes feature the updated recommendations of recently published resources under themes such as:
  - Using technology to expand multicultural curriculum
  - Making your school a “welcoming school”

This chapter was single-authored by Patty Bode, so it bears Patty's name.

Chapter 10, "Affirming Diversity: Implications for Teachers, Schools, Families, and Communities," continues to focus on communities. It highlights the importance of working with families to promote student learning.

## ■ Supplements and Learning Aids

### Instructor's Manual

The Instructor's Manual includes a wealth of thoughtful ideas and activities designed to help instructors teach the course. The IM contains a sample syllabus and course suggestions. Each chapter includes the following elements: overview, problem posing, response journal prompts, whole class/group work assignments, student as teacher assignments, a critical pedagogy in action assignment, instructions for projects to be included in student portfolios and used as assessments, handouts to accompany all assignments, and essay questions. (Available for download from the Instructor's Resource Center at <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc>.)

### PowerPoint™ Presentation

Created by Patty Bode, these PowerPoint slides outline the key points of each chapter, and are customizable so that professors may add or delete material as they see fit. Instructors may also download book-specific PowerPoint slides from the Instructor Resource Center at <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc>. Your local representative can provide a password and instructions for using the IRC.

We end this preface with a personal reflection from each of us.

### Sonia

The first edition of *Affirming Diversity*, published over 25 years ago, helped define my professional career. It also had an enormous impact on my personal and professional life because it put into words the ideas and values about education, diversity, and social justice I had been thinking about since I was a child, and especially since I stepped into my first classroom at Junior High School 278 in Brooklyn, New York, many years ago. Just a few years ago, the Museum of Education recognized the first edition of *Affirming Diversity* as one of the 100 books in the twentieth century to help define the field of education, something for which I am both humbled and incredibly proud. I have been equally gratified by the enormous and generous response of readers to the text through its first four editions when I was the sole author, and since the fifth edition when Patty Bode accepted my invitation to become my co-author. She has helped to make subsequent editions of *Affirming Diversity* fresh, timely, and relevant to our times. Given the challenging times in which we are living—particularly with relationship to public education—it is my hope that the book will challenge you to think boldly and creatively about your role in making schools inspiring and joyful for all students. In the process, I hope that education becomes not only your profession but also a rewarding odyssey.

### Patty

The first four editions of *Affirming Diversity* played a transformative role in my research, teaching, and worldview. I was honored to become co-author on the fifth, sixth, and now seventh edition and am eternally grateful to Sonia for inviting me to participate in the continual metamorphosis of this important book. The work on the text reflects the urgent calls I have heard through 18 years as a public school teacher, a decade in higher education as a teacher educator, and now in my work as a school principal to make our schools thrive as socially just places of joy and rigor. I strive to bring those voices together with educational research that combines the most

current scholarship with foundational and landmark studies in the field to point teachers toward creating meaningful, high-achieving, transformative learning communities. As a teacher, I recognize the struggle that arises from competing messages from academic, political, and popular culture about what counts as knowledge and what defines teaching. The vision we assert in this book hopes to activate antiracist critical pedagogy in classrooms. For all students and their families and teachers, I hope that this new edition of *Affirming Diversity* contributes to creating change.

## **Acknowledgments**

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Professional colleagues who have read and commented on the various iterations of this text have helped to strengthen it, and we are thankful to all of them. For this seventh edition, we thank the following reviewers: Jennifer L. Brown, Columbus State University; Michael Lee McDonald, NE Wesleyan University; Dr. Christopher Weiler, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania; Celeste Williams, Tennessee State University. Their detailed comments and suggestions for improving the book were enormously helpful. At Pearson Education, we are grateful for the tremendous support and encouragement we received from our editor, Julie Peters.

Once again, we owe a heartfelt thank you to Jim Cummins, a scholar of rare genius and a wonderful friend, for writing the inspiring foreword to this seventh edition. Jim has been a steadfast and enthusiastic supporter of this book since the very first edition. His continuing willingness to write the foreword means a great deal to us. And, of course, we would not be where we are without our families. Sonia particularly wants to acknowledge Angel, her partner of 50 years, for his unconditional love and support; Celso, her son-in-law; her daughters Alicia and Marisa; and her granddaughter Jazmyne, who we raised, for teaching her how to be a mother. Her other grandchildren—Corissa, Terrance, Monique, Tatiana, Celsito, Aliya, Clarita, Lucia, Mariya, Kalil, and Angela—are another source of joy and inspiration. Patty wants to thank Mark, her life partner, for his love, humor, and encouragement, and her sons, Bob, Ryan, and Keo, for revealing the adventures of life’s ongoing journey with special appreciation to her daughter-in-law Maya and granddaughter, Anju for adding joyful meaning to it all.

Sonia Nieto

Patty Bode

