

Schools for a New Majority:

The Role of Teacher Education in Hard times

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These are hard times for education, and for those of us who help prepare teachers for our nation's classrooms, they are especially grim. For one, public education is increasingly characterized by a mean-spirited and hostile discourse, one with little respect for teachers and the young people they teach. These are times where the most common buzzwords in education are borrowed shamelessly from the business world: the school is defined as a "market," while students and families are viewed as "consumers" and teachers as "producers." In this discourse, "accountability" is proposed as the arbiter of excellence, teacher tests are the answer to "quality control," and high-stakes tests are the final judge of student learning. Paradoxically, the very word "public" (whether referring to schools, housing, libraries, or other spaces) is suspect, while "privatization" is proposed as the solution to the many problems of public institutions. As a result, public schools are challenged by countless privatization schemes, including vouchers, tuition tax credits, "choice," and charter schools, even though such alternatives invariably benefit students who already enjoy economic and other privileges while they further disadvantage those who have the least.

Related to the marketization of education, less attention than ever is being paid to education as a way to expand the human spirit and create a better world, at the same time that there is an increased focus on schooling as job training and education primarily as a

vehicle to serve limited self-interests and consumerism. And finally, these are times in which learning is described as little more than rubrics, benchmarks, “best practices,” and test scores. Hence, public schools are no longer the one place where children of all races and social classes can expect to be educated (however imperfectly schools ever did this, but at least there was a shared vision that they had the *responsibility* to educate all children).

Paradoxically, at the same time that these are challenging times for education, they are also hopeful times. In fact, I would identify two current – and competing – discourses concerning teaching and public education in general. One is the “official” discourse, embodied in *NCLB* language, with a focus on accountability, standards, credentials, and testing, accompanied by punitive measures for failing to live up to these. The other is what one might call the “discourse of possibility,” a way of thinking about teaching and learning that is embraced largely by teachers and others who view public education as, on the whole, an unfulfilled but nonetheless significant project in the quest for equality and social justice. This “unofficial” discourse is visible in books and articles that focus on the positive and uplifting work that teachers do and that champion teachers and defy the current damaging climate in education (Freedman *et al*, 1999; Intrator, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2003a; Palmer, 1998; Rose, 1995).

As a result of these competing discourses, these are difficult but also promising times for those who view public education as the last and, in many cases, the *only* hope for fulfilling our society’s stated ideals of democracy. Schools can only serve this purpose, however, when at the very least, all children have access to teachers who are both competent and caring. It is little wonder, then, that a great deal of attention has lately

been focused on the quality of the teaching force. But what does it mean (to use the language currently in vogue) to be a “highly qualified teacher”? In this article, I expand on recent work (Nieto, 2003a) that challenges current notions of “highly qualified teacher.” Specifically, I focus on what it means to be a qualified teacher for the “new majority,” that is, for students of racial and ethnic minorities, migrants and immigrants, and marginalized students of all backgrounds, especially those who attend deteriorating public urban and rural schools. I will also briefly review some of the findings and implications of my work with excellent teachers of urban students (Nieto, 2003b), and suggest some qualities of truly “highly qualified” teachers, qualities that may not necessarily fit the definition proposed by *No Child Left Behind*.

The New Majority

Because of increasing diversity in our population, our country has become a far different place than it was just half a century ago. As of the year 2000, people of color made up 25% of our total population, a 5% increase from just a decade earlier. The growing racial and ethnic diversity have been accompanied by a growing linguistic diversity: currently, 18% of U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home, with Spanish the language spoken by half of these (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000a). Another remarkable indication of the growing diversity is found in the current number of foreign-born or first-generation U.S. residents, which in 2000 reached the highest level in U.S. history, 56 million, or triple the number in 1970. And unlike previous immigrants,

who were primarily from Europe, only 15 percent are now from Europe, with over half from Latin America and a quarter from Asia (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002).

As a consequence of these changes, the nation's public schools are also very different from what they were a few decades ago. In 2001, there were 47.2 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States, a 14.6 percent increase since 1991, with much of this increase due directly to the growing immigration (Young, 2002). Although not yet a majority, the number of children in our public schools representing backgrounds other than European American is growing rapidly: White students still make up the majority of students, but it is a dwindling majority, now at just 61.2 percent. Blacks make up 17.2 percent, Hispanics 16.3 percent, Asian/Pacific Islander 4.1 percent, and American Indian/Alaska Native students 1.2 percent of all students in public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

In spite of the growing diversity in schools around the country, racial and ethnic segregation in schools is on the rise. That is, students in U.S. schools are now more likely to be segregated from students of other races and backgrounds than at any time in the recent past. In fact, according to Gary Orfield (2001), for Blacks, the 1990s witnessed the largest backward movement toward segregation since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and the trend is continuing. Moreover, Latinos now have the dubious distinction of being the most segregated of all ethnic groups in terms of race, ethnicity, and poverty.

Poverty continues to be a serious problem in our nation. The percentage of persons living below the poverty level climbed steadily from the 1970s to the 1990s, from 12.6 percent in 1970, to 14.5 percent in 1994 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). It improved somewhat in the late 1990s due to the booming U.S. economy, but poverty is

again on the increase, and it is especially bleak among people of color: while Whites represent just over 9 percent of the poor, Blacks are over 22 percent and Hispanics over 21 percent of those living in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000b).

At the same time that the number of students of color, those who speak languages other than English, and those who live in poverty has increased, the nation's teachers have become more monolithic, monocultural, and monolingual. The percentage of White teachers actually *grew* from 88 percent in 1971 to 90.7 percent in 1996, while the number of Black teachers decreased from 8.1 percent to 7.3 percent and the number classified as "other" has decreased from 3.6 percent to 2.0 percent during the same time (National Education Association, 1997). By 2001, the number of teachers of color was still less than 11%, with Black teachers at 6 percent and those classified as "others" at 5 percent (National Education Association, 2003). Moreover, recent research has confirmed that there is a connection between teacher retention and "deficit thinking," that is, the idea that students different from the mainstream in terms of language, race, ethnicity, social class, and other differences are deficient rather than simply different. In one study, teachers from high-poverty urban schools were more likely than other teachers to cite both discipline problems and their students' lack of motivation as reasons for their dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 2001). It is not surprising, then, that a major gap in the research on teacher preparation concerns how best to prepare teachers to teach students of diverse backgrounds (Wilson *et al*, 2001).

Given these realities, we need to think about what it means to prepare teachers to work with students who in most cases are vastly different from them in background and experience. I focus on teachers *not* because I think they alone are responsible for either

all the good or all the bad that happens in public schools. On the contrary, without structural changes in schools and in society in general, teachers can have only a limited impact (see Nieto, 2003a for a broader discussion of this question). But we cannot afford to sit around and wait for revolutionary changes to take place. These changes do not appear to be happening any time soon and, in the meantime, we cannot just fold our arms and wait for the structural changes that we know are needed. The times call for us to work on what we *can* do to work with practicing and prospective teachers to become competent teachers of the new majority. The implication for teacher educators is to help prepare teachers who can take the long view on education reform at the same time that they commit themselves to work in their classrooms and beyond for social justice.

A “Highly Qualified Teacher” For Every Child

In the past decade, there has been a growing interest on preparing, recruiting, and retaining “highly qualified” teachers for every child. It is now an established fact that the quality of teaching matters, and it matters especially to the most vulnerable young people (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996; for a cogent review of related research, see Cochran-Smith, 2003). Black and Latino students, for instance, receive a disproportionate amount of poor teaching and are much less likely to have certified teachers than are White students, among many other disadvantages (Haycock *et al*, 2001). One widely-cited study (Sanders & Rivers, 1996) 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. Consequently, in a review of dozens of studies on retention in the late 1990s, Linda Darling-Hammond and Beverly Falk (1997) suggested that until schools address the enormous inequalities in students' access to qualified teachers, other changes will have little effect on student achievement.

However, notions of “highly qualified teacher” differ dramatically depending on one’s position, goals for public education, and view of the future of public schools. In the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, and as articulated in the Secretary of Education’s annual report (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), a “highly qualified teacher” is one who has full state certification or a passing score on a state exam; superior verbal ability and content matter knowledge; the ability to use instructional strategies that draw on “scientifically based research;” and competence in so-called “best practices.” Most people would agree that superior verbal ability, excellent content matter knowledge, and skill in using effective pedagogy are important in teaching, but the definition of “highly qualified teacher” put forth by the Bush administration is both incomplete and inadequate. It has been severely criticized for numerous reasons, including the assertion that it masks a political agenda that includes dismantling both public schools and colleges of education (Cochran-Smith, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002).

The passage of *No Child Left Behind* has been accompanied by an appropriation of the discourse of the left by the right, the media, and mainstream politicians. For instance, even the language of the law (“no child left behind”) echoes that of reformers who have long insisted that “all children can learn.” But sentiments such as these now fall trippingly off the tongues of politicians from the left to the right who support NCLB and the use of high-stakes tests as arbiters of learning. In addition, the new discourse has

supported the “dumbing down” of teachers, that is, the attempt to strip teachers of their creativity and judgment, by having them follow pre-packaged curricula and prescribed pedagogical strategies. This was a trend predicted by Michael Apple (1993) over a decade ago. Given these conditions, revisiting the issue of “highly qualified teachers” is necessary if teacher educators are to focus our efforts on creating a new model of teacher education that confronts head-on conventional deficit thinking about teachers and about the students they teach.

Preparing Teachers for the New Majority

What does it mean to be an effective teacher of students of diverse cultural backgrounds in urban schools? Put another way, what are the characteristics of excellent teachers of students of the new majority, that is, poor students of color and economically disadvantaged students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who attend our nation’s most troubled and least supported schools? Tackling this puzzle may help our nation prepare new and continuing teachers more successfully to meet the challenges of teaching students of diverse backgrounds in urban schools. At the same time, exploring what it takes to be an effective teacher of these students may in the end shed light on what it takes to help all students reach their potential.

In spite of the prevailing notion that teachers are simply technicians who know how to write lesson plans, prescribe prepackaged programs, discipline students, and evaluate them through rubrics, benchmarks, and tests, I view teachers as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988) who also happen to know techniques and strategies, and who

can manage their classrooms efficiently. Thus, no checklist of desirable qualities for teachers is sufficient to describe a highly qualified teacher. Instead, qualities of excellent teachers need to emerge through investigation and study.

Numerous researchers over the years have tackled the question of what it means to be a successful teacher of students of diverse backgrounds (García, 1999; Haberman, 1988); Gordon, 1999; Irvine, 2003; Knapp, Shields, & Turnbull, B. J., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Rose, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). A synthesis of this literature demonstrates a number of common characteristics that seem to describe highly qualified teachers. In general such teachers:

- place a high value on students' identities (culture, race, language, gender, and experiences, among others)
- connect learning to students' lives
- have high expectations for all students, even for those others may have given up on
- stay committed to students in spite of obstacles that get in the way
- view parents and other community members as partners in education
- create a safe haven for learning
- dare to challenge the bureaucracy of the school and district
- are resilient in the face of difficult situations
- use active learning strategies
- are willing and eager to experiment
- view themselves as life-long learners
- care about, respect, and love their students

Taken together these qualities define teachers as enthusiastic lifelong learners who are deeply involved in their work and who defend both their students' right to an excellent education and their own rights as intellectuals and professionals. Unfortunately, however, far too few of the professional development activities in teacher preparation or inservice education – university courses, inservice workshops, field placements, and so forth – focus on these skills or qualities in a direct way. Not many courses, for instance, help teachers learn to challenge school bureaucracies, or teach them strategies for learning about the identities of the students they teach. And although issues of difference and discrimination are now more prevalent in teacher education programs than they were a decade ago, they are still left largely unexamined in many of these programs (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Also, practicing and prospective teachers rarely have the opportunity to read the work of scholars that analyze the work of teachers and schools in a broader sociopolitical context (Anyon; 1997; Lipman, 1998; Spring, 2001), or that present educational reform in a critical and comprehensive way (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998).

Because of my interest in learning about what helps to sustain teachers in the profession, from 1999-2000 I collaborated in an inquiry group with a small group of mostly veteran high school teachers in the Boston Public Schools. Focusing on the question “What keeps teachers going?”, we met throughout the year to think and talk about what conditions, in and out of school, help teachers remain in the profession. Based on the data we accumulated (transcripts of meetings, writings, and field notes), I identified seven interrelated themes that seem to best describe the major reasons that this

group of excellent urban teachers stays in teaching. The themes were *autobiography*; *love; hope and possibility*; *anger and desperation*; *intellectual work*; *democratic practice*; and *the ability to shape the future* (Nieto, 2003b). In most cases, however, these themes are missing in the current official discourse concerning teacher education (Nieto, 2003a), and I have become interested in why this might be so.

Qualities of Highly Qualified Teachers of New Majority Students

The themes we discovered in our inquiry group in many ways contradict the current official discourse about “highly qualified teachers.” Not one of the teachers, for instance, mentioned passing a certification test, knowing a set of “best practice,” or implementing a prescribed curriculum as being of primary importance. But for these teachers, issues of social justice and their own continuing professional development were paramount. While it is true that what sustains this small group of high school teachers in Boston, Massachusetts may not be the case for others in different circumstances, in our work around the country we’ve found that teachers in many different situations share similar experiences. Whether they teach in small schools or large, elementary or secondary, urban or rural, they often bring up the same issues.

Building on these findings, and in order to think about how teacher education programs might better prepare teachers for the new majority students they will inevitably face in their classroom, I have become interested in delving specifically into the *qualities* that teachers bring to, and develop through, their teaching. Thus, in my newest project, I have asked a group of teachers to reflect on why they teach (Nieto, forthcoming).

The intention of this research is to examine teachers' reflections in order to explore quintessential values that undergird the profession of teaching and to suggest some of the qualities that define excellent and "highly qualified teachers." I expect to tease out some of these qualities through an analysis of the teachers' essays. Using narrative inquiry, I want to begin, in the words of Jean Clanindin and Michael Connelly (1999) with "the researcher's autobiographically-oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle" (p. 42). The research puzzle I am trying to solve is why teachers come into the profession, and what qualities help to define them.

The teachers with whom I am working on this project, unlike the Boston group, are more diverse in experience and context: they teach at all grade levels from elementary through secondary school; they have from zero to 35 years of experience (one is 22 years old and a beginning teacher; another, at age 54, is a new student teacher); they teach in large systems and small, mostly urban but some suburban and rural as well; and they teach content from science to English to social studies to art. Like the Boston teachers, they come from diverse cultural backgrounds, they love their students and the subject matter they teach, and they are devoted to the profession.

Currently, I have about a dozen essays from teachers, and I am beginning to see some patterns emerge. While it is too early to develop a full-blown analysis of their essays at this time, I have been able to uncover three qualities that several of the teachers share: *the courage to question mainstream knowledge*; a combination of *solidarity with and love for students*; and *a passion for social justice*.

In the remainder of this article, I introduce three teachers who embody these qualities through a brief excerpt of their reflections.

The Courage to Question Mainstream Knowledge

Unless they have access to texts that challenge conventional knowledge, and unless they engage in deep reflection and serious dialogue (Freire, 1970) about their own knowledge and the curriculum they will teach (Apple, 1993), most teachers do not develop the practice of questioning mainstream knowledge. The challenge for those of us who prepare teachers is to encourage them to develop the courage to confront what Michel Foucault (1980) has called “regimes of truth,” that is, the types of discourses promoted by each society as truth, a truth produced, transmitted, and kept in place by systems of power such as universities, the military, and the media. The result of these “regimes of truth” is that perspectives and realities different from those that are officially sanctioned tend to remain invisible. For teacher educators, it is a matter of including such perspectives in courses and other teacher preparation experiences. These diverse perspectives include different ways of looking at mainstream knowledge (Loewen, 1995, 2000), as well as the presentation of new, often upsetting, knowledge (Nieto, 1999; Spring, 2001; Zinn, 2001).

How do teachers learn to question mainstream knowledge? If not through teacher education, it can happen in their general education or through life experiences. Jennifer Welborn, an eighth-grade science teacher in a college town with a fairly diverse student population, provides a vivid example of how one book, along with her upbringing and the values she learned at home, were transformative in influencing her world-view.

Ever since I was young, I have felt strongly about issues of social justice. My parents were active in the Civil Rights movement. They took my brother and sisters and me to countless marches on Washington. I remember seeing Detroit burning from the race riots. I grew up recognizing (as best I can as a “white” person) some of the inequities in America and believing that it’s important to work to create social justice in one’s life.

I feel it’s important for kids to know that science is one way of knowing—a way of gaining knowledge about the material world. The scientific method has strengths, but it also has weaknesses. There are limitations to what science can explain. It is actually those weaknesses that I want my students to fully understand. I want them to learn to be skeptics. I want them to be able to determine the validity of scientific data. I want them to differentiate between good science, bad science, and pseudoscience.

In graduate school, I read for the first time The Mismeasure of Man, by Stephen Jay Gould. I stayed up all night reading it. I could not put it down. The book primarily deals with scientific racism and the concept that race is a social construct... [In the book, Gould explains how data which did not fit a pre-conceived notion of white superiority were discounted, erased, or thrown out... I was thoroughly shocked by what I read. Up to that point, I had not considered the role of science in establishing, perpetuating, even legitimizing racism.

That weekend I began to develop a unit on scientific racism that I have taught every year for the last 10 years. Each year, I spend quite a bit of time on it when my students learn about the scientific method and experimental design. I explicitly teach them about the characteristics of a good experiment. Then I contrast this with examples of scientific racism, which is bad science. I do this because I want my students to learn

that while human variation is real, racial groups are not based on genetic differences between groups of people.

I also want my students to realize that science is not the objective pursuit of knowledge that it is professed to be. I want them to understand the limitations of gaining knowledge through experiments. I want them to understand that data may support a hypothesis that is not valid to begin with. I want them to know that correlation does not imply causality. I want them to know that there are hidden variables that may affect an experiment. I want them to know about researcher bias. I want them to know all this so that when they read in the newspaper that “minority SAT scores are down,” they know that these data must be due to social, economic, and political inequities in our society. They are not due to genetic inferiority.

Eighth graders are fully capable of understanding these concepts. In fact, middle school kids are passionate about issues of justice. I believe it’s important for kids to understand how and why race groups were formed and how racial grouping affects individual people both positively and negatively. I want them to know the concept of white privilege. I want them to think about the automatic advantages and disadvantages that racial grouping brings to individuals in our country. It is through this knowledge and dialogue that students can understand the complexity of racism in our country.

Solidarity and Love

Another quality that several of the teachers demonstrate through their essays is a combination of solidarity and love, echoing one of the major findings in my previous work with teachers (Nieto, 2003b). “Love” is not a word that one hears very often these

days when teaching is the topic at hand. In fact, it seems almost maudlin to speak about it, as if it were inconsistent with professionalism and academic rigor. Yet it is well established that teachers who love their students and feel solidarity with them also develop strong and meaningful relationships with them, an essential ingredient for students' affiliation with school (Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). That is, when students experience school as a place where they belong and are welcome, they are more likely to take on identities as "school kids" than as "street kids" (Flores-González, 2002).

For the teachers who have reflected on their practice, love meant having genuine respect, high expectations, and great admiration for their students. Following is an example from Stephen Gordon, an English teacher and 33-year veteran of the Boston Public Schools who loves his students and also loves language. When they come together, it's magic.

As I end I am reminded of an experience that seems to answer the question [of why I teach] one more time. [My colleague] June Robinson and I co-taught a "transition" English class for ninth-grade students who needed more work on reading and writing. June and I had asked students working in groups to read and comment on poems we had given them. We circulated among groups, and then we talked about poetry: who likes it, who writes it, and lyrics of music. June asked if anyone had memorized poetry. Tashia raised her hand just high enough to be noticed.

I asked her, "When did you have to memorize a poem?"

"Last year, in eighth grade," she answered.

"What poem?" June asked.

“Phenomenal Woman’ by Maya Angelou.”

“Recite it for us,” June requested energetically.

“No,” she said in a low voice, not wanting to become the focus of all our eyes.

“You can do it,” June coaxed supportively.

“Please. I love poetry,” I added.

Tashia reluctantly got up and walked to the front of the room. She began:

“Pretty Women wonder where my

secret lies

I’m not cute or built to suit a

Model’s fashion size

But when I start to tell them

They think I’m telling lies.

I say

It’s the reach of my arms

The span of my hips

The stride of my steps

The curl of my lips.

I’m a woman

Phenomenally

Phenomenal woman

That’s me”

And she continued through the next three stanzas. And we all watched and listened. I felt tears well up in my eyes, for here were 24 students and two adults experiencing the reason to be in school: to hear poetry, to be moved by language, to be together in a place where young men and women express the words that they have taken to their souls – beautiful, powerful words of identity, hope and learning. I knew that the world was usually filled with unhappiness, brute power and injustice, but now I was in a sacred place: a classroom filled by Tashia’s strong voice and chosen words. I knew this was why I teach.

A Passion for Social Justice

All the teachers who have contributed essays to my project so far have written about their passion for social justice. That is, all are motivated in one way or another by ideals of democracy, fair play, and equality. This motivation is not surprising, as there are few tangible perks associated with the profession. Given the poor compensation, tremendous demands, and little power that characterize the profession, it is a wonder that so many people are eager to enter the profession in the first place. Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2003b), in a recent editorial, critiques the market view of education (“Sometimes it’s Not About the Money”), suggesting instead that teaching is primarily about caring, learning, and the desire to change the world. She concludes that “teaching and learning cannot be reduced simply to the bottom line of efficiency and profitability” (p. 374). A recent survey of U.S. teachers confirms this perspective: based on data from more than 1,400 classroom teachers throughout the country, the National Education Association (O’Neil, 2003) found that:

In spite of low pay and crazy mandates, 60 percent of teachers say that, if they had to go back to the time they were in college – armed with their present knowledge – they'd still choose teaching (p. 32).

The teachers who have written essays on why they teach demonstrate their motivation for social justice in different ways, depending on their own attitudes, autobiographies, and experiences with teaching. For some, social justice has to do primarily with racial and ethnic equality, for others it is closely tied to economic and resource issues, and for others still, it is a matter of access to a more truthful curriculum and to opportunities for higher education. For some, it is a combination of these things, and more. For instance, teachers who work in economically devastated schools daily confront – and perhaps question – the difficult and unfair conditions in which their students learn. This situation is poignantly described by Michelle Fine, Janice Bloom, and Lori Chajet (2003), who after conducting focus groups and surveys with many students who attend such schools concluded:

Children who attend structurally, fiscally, and educationally inadequate schools are not only miseducated, but they read conditions of resource-starved schools as evidence that the state and the nation view them as disposable and, simply, worthless (p. 15).

Bill Dunn, a veteran teacher of English and social studies in a struggling mill town in the Northeast, knows this reality all too well. Having spent most of his career in an urban vocational school, he has also spent much of his time fighting for fairness for his mostly Puerto Rican students. His essay, which he titled “Confessions of an Underperforming Teacher,” focuses on the MCAS, the high-stakes test in Massachusetts that he says is leading to *less* educational opportunity, not *more* for his students. A brief excerpt follows.

I work in an urban vocational high school. Eighty-five percent of my students are Hispanic. Eighty-three percent qualify for free or reduced lunch, and seventy percent are native Spanish speakers. I wish I could tell you that I don't encounter gangs, weapons, poverty, high pregnancy rates, and the other social ills which plague city schools; but these problems are the realities of where I work. These things trouble me, but I understand them because I live with them daily, as do my students. I know the cause of these problems, and I also know that the majority of my students are the victims and not the perpetrators. Violence in schools is as real as metal detectors and policemen. The stresses which students and teachers encounter in schools today should evoke compassion and admiration from the public; unfortunately, quite the opposite occurs, and this troubles me even more. Test results are released and inner-city students and their teachers are ridiculed in bold headlines. My favorite label is “underperforming.” I sincerely couldn't have come up with a word with nastier connotations to attach to schools and the human beings who inhabit them...

So why do I teach? I teach because someone has to tell my students that they are not the ones who are dumb. They need to know that only the blissfully ignorant and profoundly evil make up tests to prove that they and people like them are smart. I teach because my students need to know that poverty does not equal stupidity, and that surviving a bleak, dismal childhood makes you strong and tough and beautiful in ways that only survivors of similar environments can appreciate and understand. I teach because my students need to know that in their struggle to acquire a second language, they participate in one of the most difficult of human feats. My students also need to know that four days of reading in a second language under “high-stakes” testing conditions would shut down even Einstein’s brain. I teach because my students need to know that right and wrong are relative to one’s culture, and that even these definitions become laughable over time. I teach because the people who make up these tests don’t know these things, or worse, they do.

Conclusion

These, then, are some of the qualities that I am discovering need to be nurtured in teachers if they are to be successful in teaching the new majority. The three teachers whose words you have read *also* have excellent verbal ability, solid subject matter knowledge, and effective pedagogical skills, and they could no doubt pass any teacher test we would throw their way. But these things are simply not enough. The question of how to help those who work with students of diverse backgrounds in our public schools develop values such as a passion for social justice, love and solidarity, and a commitment

to challenge mainstream knowledge is a difficult one, but one that merits our full consideration.

What are the implications of this work for teacher education? One implication is that we need to rethink professional development. This means a major shift in the culture of teacher preparation to include issues other than just curriculum and pedagogy. It means encouraging teachers to view teaching as intellectual work, to learn about their students' identities and lives, and to be intellectually curious and questioning. In a word, it means having a curriculum and a program that places rigorous demands on prospective teachers. In fact, recent research has confirmed that the odds of leaving schools but remaining in education are eight times greater for graduates who describe their teacher preparation as "extremely intellectually challenging" (Quartz *et al*, 2001). Thus, in contrast to defining the problem of teacher education as a technical one, or as simply a shortage of "highly qualified teachers," we must think of it primarily as an intellectual and political question related to issues of equity and social justice.

The second implication is that schools themselves need to be restructured to provide the kind of environment where teachers find community and engage in intellectual work. If this is to happen, schools need to drastically alter the climate for teacher learning. Engaging in intellectual work is neither easy, nor even always welcome, by teachers. It is difficult, time-consuming, and even painful sometimes, but it is also a necessary and crucial part of teaching. It is, in fact, the opportunity to do intellectual work that helps sustain many teachers (Nieto, 2003b). Yet this reality is often overlooked in the many recruitment plans that have been proposed to offset the massive teacher shortage that is approaching. A recent study, for instance, found that teacher recruitment

programs will do little to solve the coming teacher shortage unless they also address the organizational structure of schools because the structures are part of the reason that teachers leave in the first place (Ingersoll, 2001).

Supporting sustained professional development also must challenge teachers' negative perceptions, biases, and racist attitudes about students and their families, while at the same time neither moralizing nor blaming them for these attitudes. It means encouraging prospective and practicing teachers to reflect deeply on these attitudes in order to understand and change them. Taking part in an isolated workshop, attending a yearly conference, or taking one university course a year are not enough. Teachers need to give sustained attention to these questions and this implies that schools need to provide them with the resources and support they need for doing this kind of work.

It is clear that the most significant implication of this work is that new national priorities need to be established for teaching. The current policy climate at both state and national levels is permeated by a profound disrespect for teachers, especially teachers who work with new majority students. Yet current reforms in education that focus on recruiting "highly qualified teachers" and on developing "best practices" will not adequately prepare teachers to be effective with these students. Subject matter knowledge is important, of course, but if teachers do not learn how to question it, they simply replicate conventional wisdom and encourage students to be docile learners. A grasp of pedagogy is also vital, but if teachers do not develop meaningful relationships with their students, they will not succeed. In my ongoing work with teachers, I am finding instead that, in addition to subject matter knowledge and a mastery of pedagogy, the *qualities*

that teachers develop before they enter the profession, as well as through their practice, are just as significant and, in some cases, even more so.

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