

Is this Just TOO Diverse to Handle?

A Success

My research interests for the past couple of years have been *diverse*. I have focused on diversity related to preservice/in-service teacher education and the design of curriculum materials that focus on issues of diversity in teaching and assessing science. Understanding issues of power and using a feminist poststructuralist analytical framework were areas of interest that began with my dissertation work a couple of years ago. This past year, I returned to my dissertation work focusing on difference (race, class, gender, age, religion) in science teacher professional development and identity in preservice education. I continue to think about all of these areas in the context of preservice and in-service education in terms of understanding teachers, teaching and learning science, and professional development. So, when I say that my interests are diverse, I really mean it. Nevertheless, there is a common thread that runs through and connects all of my interests: a focus on diversity in science education.

Science education research is extensive regarding teacher professional development, and the general teacher education literature adds substantially to the field, making professional development a huge area. But when it is looked at from a multicultural perspective, the literature on professional development in science education becomes small. Science education has yet to fully embrace multicultural education in teacher education and professional development. There are some key scholars in science education whose research deals with various aspects of multiculturalism in teacher education and professional development. Their work is very encouraging but I wonder why many more researchers are not incorporating diversity issues into their research and teaching. Do they not even see diversity as an area worth attention? Do researchers become overwhelmed with how big diversity really is? Do they see diversity as being too complicated and diverse to handle? A common adage becomes, "There's diversity in diversity", but making an attempt to understand all the diversities that could be covered by this becomes a huge undertaking for research, professional development, and teacher education. I imagine it is similar to researchers' attempts to define "urban." Do we really know what we mean when we say "urban?" Similarly, what do we mean when we say "diversity?"

Vexation

In elementary preservice education, I encounter students saying, "We had one diversity course, so why should we talk about diversity in science education?" Because I am such a patient person, I wait for the students to catch up, and by the end of the semester, they see how vitally important thinking about issues of diversity is to science teaching. For my efforts, I am pleased, but I still think I can and should do more. Just what it is, I am not certain. In-service education is a little more receptive to thinking about diversity, at least in my experiences, because they are there in the middle of diverse classrooms, teaching diverse students, and having to think about teaching that considers diversity. But I also encounter many elementary in-service teachers who do not teach science at all. Last semester in an in-service course, I had only one of the seven teachers who taught science. Thus, talking about diversity issues in science instruction with these teachers created a different set of concerns where diversity was taught much differently for them than the preservice teachers. I think about various approaches to teaching diversity in science education to accommodate the diverse body of teachers I have.

I have one thing that I have been working on in my mind, thus a completely mental project at this point. I have been thinking about constructing a Diversity Map that includes different philosophical perspectives or approaches to diversity, such as sociocultural, culturally responsive, culturally congruent, constructivist, post-positivist, critical, feminist, postmodern, transformative, emancipatory,

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etc. I suppose a very elaborate literature search will be a first and necessary step to begin developing more ideas about what a Diversity Map would look like. I wonder how the varying perspectives mentioned above define diversity, or use diversity/equity/social justice understandings pertaining to teacher professional development and teacher education. The Diversity Map can show the different perspectives and how they are (or could be) connected, and how a particular perspective highlights something important in understanding diversity in professional development and teacher education. This information could be helpful as it provides a tool to begin looking at how to approach diversity, making diversity a workable concept for research and teaching.

Some additional questions to be addressed in developing a Diversity Map are: how does one perspective of diversity influence professional development and teaching? What are the underlying assumptions for thinking about diversity within different perspectives? What unique contributions can a Diversity Map of multiple perspectives bring for understanding professional development and teacher education and diversity?

Therefore, the purpose in my attending the Crossroads conference is to think very seriously about constructing a Diversity Map that can be used for understanding diversity in very broad and very specific terms. I do not necessarily want to “define diversity” but I want to consider the possibilities of constructing a conceptual map for people to situate their work within a framework for thinking about issues of diversity. I envision this map as a tool for helping teachers to consider diversity in their teaching and educators in their research.