



Speaking the Unpleasant: The Politics of (Non) Engagement in the Multicultural Education Terrain. Rudolfo Chávez Chávez and James O'Donnell, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. 338 pp.

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This collection of essays on multicultural education for teachers is part of the State University of New York Series on the Social Context of Education and is dedicated to the memory of Paulo Freire. As a book about curriculum by and for teachers and teacher educators, it fills a niche in the proliferation of books on multicultural education. Many of these books tell us that it is important to engage in dialogue about and within our cultural experiences and differences, but few give examples of curriculum or pedagogy.

From a preface by series editor Christine Sleeter and a foreword by Donaldo Macedo (aptly called "Tongue-Tying Multiculturalism"), we begin to get the sense that talking about "culture" in the multicultural curriculum for teacher education is both important and difficult. What we talk about when we talk about culture is not only ethnic foods and festivals but history, power, social class, gender, race, language, and more. Culture is not a precondition for social experience. Rather, what we know as culture is forged in the heat of contact, much of it fraught in the history of the United States with struggle, fear, need, greed, hope, and desire.

This book consists of 17 chapters, each by a different educator working the perspective of Freireian critical pedagogy. The collection views talk about culture as a problem of practice in teaching and teacher education. The editors frame that problem as follows: "How will we construct a liberatory practice in the multicultural terrain that is proactive, participatory, and coupled with a practice of everyday courage that embraces the necessity and importance of multicultural education within the teacher education enterprise?" (p. 4).

That multicultural education would involve courage is noteworthy. Rarely in the pre-service education of teachers does learning about culture seem risky. In fact, culture often seems marginal to teachers' concerns, a required detour into the field's foundations quickly discarded in the press of practice. U.S. teacher education is stuck in the flypaper of its history. Rudolpho Chávez cites statistics describing the profession at the end of the century as remaining primarily a Caucasian, monolingual



English-speaking, and middle-class one. The pupil population, however, is growing in diversity. Teacher education is marked, in Chávez's words by an unreflective curriculum of "entrenched perspectives about race, ethnicity and culture, gender, and class" (p. 10). Thus, the profession remains hermetically sealed from the diverse values and funds of knowledge of the pupil population and unaccustomed to dialogue about and across difference.

Chávez cites Rosaldo's idea of "decentering the dominant anthropological discourse" of cultural description and its somewhat inert texts. Chávez advances Rosaldo's view that culture is better studied "from a number of perspectives [that] cannot necessarily be added together into a unified summation" (p. 13, citing Rosaldo 1993:93). The organization and content of this volume tries to do just that. What the chapters hold in common is description of authentic contact among learners with the experience of culture. Chávez calls them "an array of pedagogical perspectives that are idiosyncratic to the contextual and processual experiences the teacher and the learner bring *at that moment of engagement*" (p. 13).

Learning about culture by means of engagement may be well known and practiced by anthropologists, but within teacher education it is a new and highly evocative idea. We do not learn about others by talking about them but, rather, by what Haroutunian-Gordon calls "turning the soul" both outward and inward (*Turning the Soul*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Creating authentic engagement with "culture-as-lived" is difficult for our isolated and homogeneous profession, and the book's chapters offer a variety of approaches to tackling this problem of practice.

Examples of praxis in the collection deal with five issues: (1) critical pedagogy (chapters by Nieto and Cross); (2) race and racism (chapters by O'Donnell and Diaz-Rico); (3) reform of teacher education (chapters by Cannella, Dressman, Bahruth, and Steiner; De Leon, Medina, and Ortiz; and Tellez and O'Malley); (4) "whiteness" (chapters by Rumann, Smith, and O'Grady); and (5) identity development and resistance (chapters by Cahill and Adams; Goodman; and Lesko). A closing chapter on power and pedagogy by Anderson, Bentley, Gallegos, Herr, and Saavedra takes the form of a dialogue. It will ring true to readers who have worked to try to reform education within their colleges and universities. The most appealing feature of these chapters is their examples of the "point of contact" among students, teachers, and texts. They give the book the quality of "showing" rather than "telling."

This book leaves us wanting to know more. How can we help teacher candidates learn that authentic conversation about difference is worth its risks? What impact does participation in such conversation have on their thought and work with their pupils?



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How might we assess teachers' learning about culture? How might work have an impact on the teaching profession? With so many questions remaining, I hope and expect the authors to continue fostering and researching teacher education's most difficult conversations.

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