

FELICIA MOORE

Teachers College, Columbia University

Mapping The Diversity and Social Justice Landscape

My Vexation

My research interests for the past few years have not changed much, though my passion for teaching about issues of diversity has become stronger. I see how an understanding of diversity/multicultural education has become a major focus in many more areas of my teaching and research. I continue to think about ways to open lines of communication around diversity and how to incorporate it more in my teaching and research. With this passion, I have reframed or reconsidered “language” to help me to communicate my views and to inform others. Thus, this year at Crossroads, I want to present and discuss a diversity and social justice framework for teacher education. The framework is a work in progress. As I think more about my purpose for teaching and what I want to accomplish as an educator, the framework expands. As I think about student learning in science, the framework expands, and as I think about the role of teacher education, the framework expands. However, the expansions contribute more to the details, goals, and purposes of a framework that provides possibility and hope for new directions and new possibilities in science education that strongly considers issues of diversity.

From the first Crossroads, I presented my ideas on “Diversity: is this TOO diverse to handle?” Since that time, I spoke at a symposium at Teachers College about what this means for teacher education and science education specifically. My reception was good, but I was still disappointed that people did not or could not speak to the multiplicity of perspectives that must be dealt with when talking about diversity. I was even more convinced that indeed diversity is too much for most to handle. As a result, diversity remains at the margins where it has taken a permanent seat—a position that vexes me sorely. I have stated in past conversations that the margin is not so bad, especially when you are left to work diligently, creatively, and strategically—waiting for an invitation to take a visitors seat in the center, or gaining a strong voice to enter and to demand a rightful seat in the center. This metaphor has been beneficial for me personally and professionally. As I, along with diversity and multicultural issues, sit on the margins, I (we) work, create, and develop approaches to make issues of diversity “front and center” (Nieto, 2000). Below is my framework—the “venture” to make diversity and social justice education a permanent, comfortable front and center seat in science education.

My Venture

From thinking about diversity and social justice education in science education, I mapped out a framework that I believe to be the purpose of science teacher education. The framework may continue to grow as I develop and think more critically about what I do and what I hope to instill in the preservice teachers whom I predominantly teach. I hope that this framework will provide some guidance for them and for those who want to teach for diversity and multicultural education. It may also provide guidance for inservice professional development as the framework offers a theoretical foundation and practical application to teach for diversity. The following framework, with an emphasis on the teacher, is my “venture”—

Diversity and Social Justice within Science Teacher Education: A Proposed Framework

My approach to diversity and social justice for science teacher education is grounded in several theoretical perspectives: (a) critical theory, (b) reflective practice, (c) multicultural education, (d) feminist poststructuralist theory, and (e) social reconstructionism-socioconstructivism. Collectively, these five perspectives are used to construct key elements as goals and purposes of preservice teacher education in teaching for diversity and social justice in science.

1. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice elevates teaching science to a civil right, a moral obligation, a social responsibility, an ethical choice.* The science teacher embraces the belief that each child has a right to learn science, is given free access to science, is empowered by knowing science, and is provided opportunities to advance themselves educationally within science.

2. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice is transformative for teachers and in turn transformative for students, schools, communities, and the world.* Science teaching and science learning begins with teachers seeing the necessity and benefit of science, first within their lives and then in the lives of their students. The economic, political, and social power of science education has the potential to transform the lives and work of teachers which can simultaneously transform the present conditions and future opportunities of those people and settings in which they work.

Mapping The Diversity and Social Justice Landscape

3. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice is practice-oriented and recognizes the value in using an array of approaches to learning science.* The science teacher knows how and when to use particular methods of instruction and assessment that promote science understanding, individually and collectively, which is consistent with the goal of scientific literacy for all students.

4. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice is the beneficiary of reflective and collaborative efforts.* Becoming knowledgeable about personal experiences in science encourages science teachers to see opportunities to advance personal growth along with sustaining the educational and professional experiences of their students and colleagues.

5. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice relies upon critical perspective taking.* Teachers should question the ways and examine the assumptions that influence how they were taught science and desire more inclusive means for supporting the science learning of their students.

6. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice is multicultural.* The science teacher realizes that knowledge is socially constructed and is a by-product of dominant positionality and cultural perspectives, even as they accept that the manner in which their views have been, and are continuously shaped by personal experiences and cultural factors about which they may not be fully aware.

7. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice is community building.* Teachers develop mutually supportive relationships that foster opportunities for their learning along with that of their students by creating learning communities among students and with other teachers.

8. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice endorses the view that science is interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary.* The science teacher recognizes that mathematical and literacy skills are necessary for building knowledge that extends beyond the classroom and are vital for individual success within society, and incorporates skill development within their classroom practices.

9. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice means that teachers view culture, language, and communities as resources to advance science learning.* Science teachers consider how their assumptions, biases, and views of culture, language, and communities may be detrimental to their teaching and make a concerted effort to incorporate other perspectives and alternative ways of knowing and being into their classroom.

10. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice means that teachers develop an identity within science and an agency for teaching science in ways that engage students, connect to students, and makes science meaningful and relevant.* Teachers and students empower themselves to become actively engaged in science and see the significance and importance of applying scientific knowledge in their lives.

11. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice means that any topic is open for question and discussion.* Topics not typically included in science and teacher education such as issues of race, politics, poverty, privilege, power and oppression are discussed within the context of science teaching and learning as well as being viewed as mechanisms for opening and broadening individual and collective awareness about the role of science within daily living.

12. *Science teacher education for diversity and social justice means that teachers consider themselves to be lifelong learners and advocates for social justice in science education.* The historical, social, and institutional barriers that have created inequities in science learning are seen as contextual issues that allow for opportunities to transform, to re-envision, and to reform schools.

Therefore, the purpose in my attending the Crossroads Conference II is to receive feedback on my framework, the implications of such, and its usefulness in science education. I think it has broad application for education in general, but I also want to discuss what specific examples can be presented to make the points more valuable. I can present examples from my practice and student examples, but I would appreciate varied examples from Crossroad participants. My view of diversity comes an intermingling of multiple perspectives, making issues of diversity, multicultural education, and social justice are spoken in very broad and very specific terms. I do not necessarily want to “define diversity” but I want to consider the possibilities of how a diversity and social justice framework may help others to situate their work to make issues of diversity a part of their thinking and work. Thus, I envision the diversity and social justice framework to be a tool for helping teachers to consider diversity in their teaching and educators in their research.