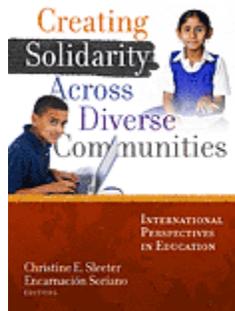


Professional Book Review

Sleeter, C. E., & Soriano, E. (2012). *Creating Solidarity across Diverse Communities: International Perspectives in Education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. 240pp., ISBN: 9780807753378 (pbk). \$52.95

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Christine E. Sleeter and Encarnación Soriano begin *Creating Solidarity across Diverse Communities* with eight news headlines from around the world that portray the misunderstanding of “diversity” as a problem of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and social class differences. They refer to the works of Childs (2003) who wrote, “Diversity itself is not the problem; being affiliated with a community normally gives a sense of strength and wholeness. The problem, rather, is how diversity is dealt with.” Sleeter and Soriano commend Childs for challenging us to address diversity by developing relationships of solidarity that will enable us to confront issues of difference.

Sleeter and Soriano succeed in making readers aware of educational inequality from a multicultural and international perspective. Their book, a compilation of international diversity issues, examines the results of research, interviews, case studies, and surveys from around the world.¹ The book is divided into two parts: Part 1—“Solidarity as Social Unity” and Part 2—“Solidarity as Building Allies in Contexts of Struggle.” This book discusses differences in religion, culture, language, and identity as well as obstacles inherent in building relationships among parents, students, schools, and communities across ethnic and racial barriers. The principle of solidarity, the authors argue, can change our view of education across multicultural lines, regardless of race, class, and social differences.

Part 1, “Solidarity as Social Unity,” consists of four chapters that address how solidarity can be used to promote social unity. Part I explores how Chile, Mexico, France, and Spain have struggled with a lack of unity, which negatively affected their educational systems and communities. Specifically, Chapter 1 is based on a study of parents and students who experienced negative effects from being educationally excluded from the Chilean school system. This study revealed that the lack of solidarity in municipal schools caused peer-to-peer aggression while private schools experienced little-to-no such aggression due to management practices grounded in solidarity. Activating solidarity in the Chilean education system, the authors argue, can unify the delivery in education and break the walls of difference.

Chapter 2 explores cultural differences and social inequalities between indigenous and nonindigenous teachers in Mexico. Both groups experienced cultural and social differences that prevented them from working together and learning from each other. Chapter 3 confronts linguistic barriers constructed by France’s refusal to take different languages and cultures into account, arguing that encouraging the use of other languages in schools provides students with a broad understanding of other

cultures. Co-existence issues within schools in Spain also resulted in multicultural conflict among students; chapter 4 discusses favoritism Spain displayed towards students who studied abroad, in hopes they would return to strengthen the economy, while neglecting those who chose to stay in Spain. Taken together, these four chapters capture the essence of how the concept of solidarity, which is as much about action as it is about unity, can be used to promote social cohesion and equality. The chapters also show how solidarity can be used as a core value for school leadership as well as for understanding cultural diversity.

The seven chapters of Part 2, "Solidarity as Building Allies in Contexts of Struggle," address using solidarity to build bridges across areas of struggle among different people. Chapter 5 returns readers to Spain, clarifying multicultural co-existence and teacher resistance and difficulty with immigration. Chapter 6 explores a research study from a predominantly Mexican middle school in Utah. The use of oral history projects inside the classroom empowered students and teachers to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge outside the classroom. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on two case studies from California. In Chapter 7, a struggle of power between a historically marginalized middle and high school resulted in a lack of engagement between the school and the community, putting the future of the school at risk. Chapter 8 explores the study of a home visit initiative made by a Mexican American principal in Hayward, California. The study revealed a lack of participation from White teachers and attributed race, social class, and gender as the cause. Chapter 9, based in New Zealand, discusses problems of power and privilege among teachers in colonized societies, specifically between Maori and New Zealand European teachers in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Chapter 10, set in India, discusses the distance between tribal leaders who emphasized formal education and those who sought to retain traditional knowledge. In this section, the authors examine the challenges and areas of struggle inherent in building bridges across ethnic and racial barriers. Chapter 11 explores an important view of diversity, one in which diversity does not threaten the stability of our society. Differences in culture, religion, and life experiences, the author argues, should be embraced as a learning experience. She closes by discussing what solidarity means for equity and diversity in education.

Enactments of solidarity can be used to confront issues throughout the education system and across multicultural lines of misunderstanding. When embraced, solidarity can build social cohesion among different races, social classes, and economic statuses. Sleeter and Soriano argue for a concept of solidarity as the basis for ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities while sharing symbolic meanings that pertain to one's own culture and community. Solidarity can also be used to ensure equal access to resources and opportunities through sharing symbolic meanings that pertain to one's own culture and community. "This book advances the concept of 'solidarity' as a tool for considering how to forge alliances that work toward equity and justice, in the process of respecting the diversity of families and communities that increasingly bump shoulders in complex societies" (pp. 206-207). It is an essential read for parents, teachers, community members, and school administrators.

Notes

1. Contributors include Isabelle Aliaga, Gilberto Arriaza, Andrés Calderón, Maria Antonia Casanova, Juan Francisco Contreras, Dolores Delgado Bernalis, Gina E. DeShera, Martine Dreyfus, Judith Flores Carmona, Anne Hynds, Verónica López, Mahendra Kumar Mishra, Carmen Montecinos, José Luis Ramos, José Ignacio Rodríguez, and Alice Wagner.