

# JUSTEC 2010

## Forum Q & A

September, 2010

Answered by Professor Marilyn Cochran-Smith (Boston College)

1. What are President Obama's ideas for improving U.S. education and what do you think of them?

The administration of President Obama, including centrally the US Secretary of Education, Arnie Duncan, has an ambitious agenda for improving education in the US, including ensuring that all students have opportunities for a rigorous education and closing the current "achievement gap" that exists. As is clear in the priorities of the "Race to the Top" program, which distributes federal funds for education to the states, the Obama administration has several priorities, which are summarized in the Executive Summary (this can be located at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race\\_to\\_the\\_Top](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_to_the_Top)). \*

2. What is missing in Japanese education today from the point of view of diversity?

Based on the responses of many of the people who heard my keynote address or who spoke with me during the JUSTEC conference, my impression was that what might be missing in Japanese education is a broad and shared valuing of diversity as an asset, as opposed to a deficit that has to be overcome. Particularly in the preparation of teachers, I believe it is important to help teachers understand how to build on the cultural, linguistic, and experiential resources that students bring to school with them. See also my response to Question 7 below for further reading. \*

3. In Japan and in my school we have an academic divide issue△high income students are high achievers and low income students are low achievers. How does the U.S. deal with this kind of issue?

In many nations around the world, income level of students' families and achievement are correlated with one another. Of course this partly has to do with the many opportunities that high income students have and with the assumptions that schools make about what is of most value. Some of the ways this is being addressed

in the US include providing better health care for all families, providing early childhood education for all. A group that has directly geared its efforts to addressing this issue has developed the "Broader Bolder Approach" to education reform, which outlines many of the strategies for breaking the link between income and achievement. Interested readers could consult: Economic Policy Institute (2008). *A broader, bolder approach to education*. <http://www.boldapproach.org> \*

4. I am a student majoring in education and wish to be a teacher in the near future. What can I do to meet the challenges of diversity?

One of the most important things individual teachers can do is to join with others who are also working to meet these challenges. There are various kinds of inquiry communities and other teacher learning groups in the US in which individual teachers join with others to construct local knowledge about these issues. I have discussed this at length and provided many examples in my recent book, which you might like to consult: *Inquiry as Stance: Teacher Research for the Next Generation* (M.Cochran-Smith and S. L. Lytle, Teachers College Press, New York, 2009). \*

5. I heard that the U.S. Education system differs state by state. How widely shared is the idea that "diversity is an asset?" Is it shared by most states?

It is true that education is the purview and responsibility of the states in the U.S., so of course there is a great deal of variation from state to state. Currently there is a major effort, supported by the federal funding of Race to the Top, to establish national common core standards for the elementary and secondary school curriculum. There are also efforts to have common assessments and standards for teachers. The National Council of accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE), which is the major national accreditor of teacher education programs in the US, for example, has a strong focus on diversity. Readers might like to consult the standards, especially standard #4, which focuses on diversity:

<http://www.ncate.org/public/unitStandardsRubrics.asp?ch=4> \*

6. Regarding social justice, is it shared by all ethnic groups? How can we share the same "social justice" with people who have different value systems?

What social justice means to different groups varies, and the question of justice crossing cultural and values lines is complicated. I have worked on these issues specifically with regard to teacher education in a major paper about a theory of teacher education for social justice. Readers may wish to consult this chapter, which is about to be released: Cochran-Smith, M. (In press). *Toward a theory of teacher education for social justice*. In M. Fullan, A. Hargreaves, D. Hopkins, & A. Lieberman (Eds.), *The International Handbook of Educational Change (2nd ed.,)*. New York: Springer Publishing. \*

7. Is there any affirmative action program to recruit or hire minority teachers? What do you think of such a special recruitment and hiring system for minority teachers?

There are a number of teacher programs and projects that specifically aim to recruit and retain a diversified teacher work force. I believe that these programs are essential for many reasons, including the idea that diverse teachers provide role models for students, that they bring cultural and experiential knowledge that is essential for working with diverse populations, that they may tend to have higher expectations for diverse students, and that there is some evidence that they have more positive impacts on the achievement of diverse students than other teachers. Readers may wish to consult: Villegas, A., & Lucas, T. (2004). Diversifying the Teacher Workforce: A Retrospective and Prospective Account. In M. Smylie & D. Miretzky (Eds.), *Developing the Teacher Workforce: The 103rd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 70-104). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. \*

8. I would like to know what you meant by "high expectations for students" in your keynote address. Please specify the expectations.

There is evidence that suggests that many teachers, especially those who are majority teachers in terms of race, class, language, and experiential background, tend to have lower expectations for students who are not like them in these terms. A major effort in teacher education that attempts to address diversity issues is to help teachers interrogate their own assumptions about students and work to be certain that they do indeed assume that all students are capable learners who ought to be provided with rich curriculum and instruction opportunities. There are many references on my keynote list that address this question, including Irvine, J. (1990). *Black students and school failure: Policies, practice and prescriptions*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press. and Goodwin, A. (2001). Seeing with different eyes: Reexamining teachers' expectations through racial lenses. In S. King & L. Castenell (Eds.), *Racism and racial inequality: Implications for teacher education*. Washington, DC: AACTE. \*

\* This is certainly a complex question, which could easily involve many pages of response. Here I will offer only a very brief response. I would suggest that interested readers consult the reference section of the published version of my keynote address for the Forum for further reading in this area.