

Christine I. Bennett

When one thinks about the possibilities for educational equity and social justice in the twenty-first century, one must honor and recognize the scholarship of teaching, research, and service of Christine I. Bennett. Her legacy is a work in progress, a deep footprint on the path toward a multicultural, compassionate democracy that admittedly has not yet been reached. Christine's dedication and accomplishments stand as exemplars of goals we can make our own.

Christine was born and raised in Michigan. The fact that three of her grandparents were immigrants from three different countries—one in fact was born in what is now Iraq—piqued her interest at a very young age in people from different nations, and laid the foundation for an awareness and acceptance of the differences in how humans perceive the world. She credits her paternal grandparents and her father, all active in the medical profession, for providing her with strong models of humanitarianism, self-discipline and intellectual development, integrity, and a desire to contribute to society.

In 1964 Christine received her B.A. in sociology from Northwestern University. From there she moved to Stanford University, completing an M.A. (1965), then to the University of Texas at Austin to earn the Ph.D. (1972). During her studies at Northwestern she served as tutor in an inner-city neighborhood youth center in Chicago, an experience that deepened her interest in the effects of cultural conditions on diverse ethnic groups. Although the young men she tutored may have been high school dropouts, Christine recognized that their brightness and knowledge of the world were impressive. This experience made her more aware of the oppressive conditions of poverty and injustice, and it also made her feel connected to the larger human community. While teaching high school in California, she became aware of the lack of information about African American students. Later, as a doctoral student, she developed a multifaceted model for multicultural education that included understanding multiple historical perspectives, developing cultural consciousness and competence, combating racism, and taking social action.

In 1976 she began her academic career at Indiana University, where she has made significant contributions as citizen-teacher-scholar. Although she retires as a professor of social studies and multicultural education, she also served as director of a variety of education research and development initiatives. Her funded research and scholarly publications have focused on the impact of multicultural social studies curricula on African American, Anglo, and Latino youth; classroom climates in desegregated middle schools; causes of racial inequities in school suspensions and expulsions in desegregated high schools; explanations of minority student attrition in predominantly white universities; the impact of multicultural teacher education; and analytical perspective as a tool for reflection and professional growth. Christine's interests in multicultural and global education were further enhanced by teaching experiences in China and the United Arab Emirates.

In 1987 she developed—and directed until 1996—the Teacher as Decision Maker Program, a graduate-level certification program for middle and secondary school teacher preparation for diverse student populations. In 1994 Christine led the development of the School of Education's Research Institute on Teacher Education (RITE), an initiative she directed until 1998. From 1996 to 2005 she directed Project TEAM, a program to encourage students of color to become teachers.

An enduring testament to Christine's scholarship is her work in the field of multicultural education. One of her most influential contributions is her book *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice* (Allyn and Bacon, 1986). In this seminal textbook she merges well her commitment to teaching, research, and service to form a perfect union of head, heart, and hand. In 2007 a sixth edition of the book appeared,

in the preface to which Christine writes: “My goal in the early 1980s was to create a framework that would help students make sense out of a complex, ambiguous, multidisciplinary field that asks teachers to take risks and deal with controversial topics such as prejudice, racism, social justice, and cultural pluralism.” As one reviewer observed, the various editions were filled with “superb bibliographic content” and a “masterful balance of content” focusing on cultural and individual differences. *Comprehensive Multicultural Education* provides a curriculum model with six goals and numerous lesson plans to illustrate how each goal can be implemented in the classroom. It emphasizes both theory and practice.

Christine made spaces within which students could think about, talk about, struggle about, shout about, sing about where we might as citizens take our country—how we might help each other awaken from the great moral and political sleep that has deepened among us over the years, and recognize again the continuing democratic urgency of Langston Hughes’s call: “We the people must redeem our land and make America again.” And as she goes forward to retirement, she has left colleagues, students, and teachers with the clear understanding that we do not have the luxury of relaxed curiosity about persistent educational failures in the twenty-first century. The research that will help make the new century more human and humane is a deeply engaged inquiry through which we offer ourselves as participants in and exemplars of the goals of equality and social justice.

While Christine can take pride in her academic accomplishments, her friends know too that she is most proud to have the love and support of her life partner, David, her sons, Adam and Matthew, daughters-in-law, Kathleen and Jennifer, and her grandsons, Max and Ty. She has always managed to keep the worlds of scholarship and family connected. She dedicated the fifth edition of her book thus:

To our grandson Max, who was born October 31, 2001. The long anticipated arrival of Max sustained us through a difficult spring and summer prior to September 11. His powerful presence in the midst of global tragedy and human suffering strengthens our hope that worldwide justice and peace will become a reality in the 21st Century.

In years to come avid readers of her work will find affirmation that this is Christine talking from the heart, down to earth, authentic, and inspiring. Her life’s work has been in all ways about living well with others and about the power of teaching and learning, driven by the belief that courage and hope can move and shape lives.

Paulette Patterson Dilworth