

[Panda Lecture] Sonia Nieto Urges Educators to Center Love in Pursuit of Educational Equity

Campus focus

The Department of English hosted a Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair Lecture on November 11 at 1:00 p.m. at the Chang Yeo Lan Hall of the Hsu Shou-Chlien International Conference Center, inviting Professor Sonia Nieto, Professor Emerita of Language, Literacy, and Culture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst's College of Education. She delivered a keynote speech titled "Multicultural Education in a Globalized World: Implications for Educational Equity," sharing her extensive international experience in promoting multicultural education and linguistic diversity. The lecture drew an audience of over 200 faculty and students from the College of Foreign Languages. Due to the speaker's influential contributions in the field of education, Chairperson Flora Chia-I Chang and College of Education Dean Kuo-Hua Chen also attended the event.

In her opening introduction, Prof. Yi-Ti Lin, Dean of the College of Foreign Languages, highlighted Prof. Nieto's internationally recognized contributions to multicultural education and social justice. She noted that her seminal work, "Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education," is regarded as a foundational text in 20th-century educational research. Prof. Nieto's philosophy not only emphasizes respect for diversity but also advocates for realizing educational equity and justice through understanding and action—values that are critically important in contemporary education. Prof. Lin also introduced the mission of the Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair series: to invite distinguished scholars from around the world to share their achievements and, more importantly, to inspire students to view the world with an open mind. She expressed hope that the lecture would motivate educators to move from mere "tolerance" toward affirmation, solidarity, and justice, making education a genuine force for social inclusion and mutual understanding.

Prof. Nieto began by expressing her admiration for Tamkang University's

mission of “cultivating talents with excellent soul” as well as its Triple Objectives of Globalization, Information-oriented Education, and Future-oriented Education. She also demonstrated her familiarity with Taiwan by referring to the ongoing challenges in implementing bilingual education policies.

She then shared her personal background as a daughter of Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States. Throughout her early education, she had no exposure to Puerto Rican history or culture, and it was not until graduate school that she encountered courses related to her heritage, an experience that made her feel that something essential had been missing. Later, as a middle school teacher, she connected her curriculum with her students’ lived experiences and cultures: “I saw the light in their eyes!” Her book, “The Light in Their Eyes,” documents these moments when students feel excited and empowered by learning.

These profound experiences led her to dedicate her career to multicultural and bilingual education. She emphasized that multicultural education serves two core purposes: ensuring all students have access to high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full potential, and respecting and affirming students’ cultures and languages. She underscored that multicultural education plays a vital role not only in specific countries but in a globalized world.

Prof. Nieto went on to address the origins of multicultural education, which are rooted in struggles against historical inequalities and racial segregation. She highlighted the distinction between equality and equity: Equality provides everyone with the same resources, while Equity ensures that everyone can benefit from those resources. For example, giving every child the same book might seem fair, but if some children cannot read the language, the opportunity is not truly equal. Likewise, if physical education is offered but students using wheelchairs cannot participate, equity has not been achieved.

She shared several cases demonstrating how individual educators, collective organizations, and institutions can create culturally and linguistically inclusive environments grounded in equity. She emphasized that love and

dedicated support from teachers are essential to achieving educational fairness.

Toward the end of her talk, Prof. Nieto stated: “Love must be at the center of anything related to education.” Teachers cannot effectively educate students if they do not care deeply about them. In a time filled with challenges and uncertainties, speaking about love and educational equity may feel like a luxury, she said. For educators, however, “This is precisely the moment to learn about, discuss, study, and most importantly, practice the ongoing pursuit of educational equity in a globalized world.” The lecture was organized by the Department of English. Department Chair Jui-Min Tsai, who studied Prof. Nieto’s works during her PhD studies, expressed her excitement at finally inviting the esteemed scholar to TKU. Chair Tsai noted that in the rapidly changing era of globalization and AI, Taiwan’s education system is facing challenges related to multicultural coexistence and cultural understanding. According to Nieto’s educational philosophy, true education goes beyond the transmission of knowledge — it lies in cultivating civic awareness that embraces listening to, understanding, and coexisting with diverse cultures. She emphasized that Prof. Nieto’s research reinforces the belief that: “Language education is not merely instrumental learning, but an essential bridge for social connection and cultural respect.”

Earlier that day, Prof. Nieto was accompanied by Dean Lin and Chair Tsai to visit TKU President Huan-Chao Keh and Chairperson Flora Chia-I Chang. The hosts provided a warm welcome and introduced the origins of the Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair. Prof. Nieto received the Panda trophy and a commemorative TKU vase decorated with calligraphy by renowned masters Chi-Mao Lee and Ben-Hang Chang, featuring the campus scenery and the school anthem.

Prof. Nieto expressed her gratitude and honor for being invited as a Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair lecturer. Having long advocated for multicultural and equitable education, she mentioned that this lecture marked her first public speaking engagement in four years, symbolizing a renewed commitment to her mission. In addition to sharing her own

educational journey, she praised Tamkang University for having nearly 1,500 international students, making it an ideal environment for practicing multicultural education. She expressed hope that her lecture would deepen the understanding of faculty and students in this important field. She also exchanged ideas with President Keh and Chairperson Chang on the United States' EDI policies, as well as the history and strategies of bilingual education. As a former editor at Teachers College Press, she revealed that she continues to write to further contribute to the development of equitable and inclusive education.









