

Book Review

Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education (2nd ed.), by J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee Banks. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004, pp. 1120, \$95.00 (hardcover).

In the United States “only an estimated 68% of those who enter 9th grade graduat[e] with a regular diploma in 12th grade” (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Seanson, 2004, p. 2). Furthermore, for African American, Native American, and Hispanic students, the graduation rate hovers at or slightly above 50%. Clearly, this is a crisis, not only for urban public schools where the highest concentration of students of color attend (and drop out) but also for a society already characterized by skewed class and racial differentials that undermine its democratic ideals.

The second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* arrives in a political climate where dominant reforms for reducing achievement differences, including drop-out rates, generally emphasize measurable outcomes that prioritize individual reading and mathematics test scores over other curricular considerations or corollary reform initiatives (Hirsch, Koppich, & Knapp, 1998). The use of testing gains as the accountability measure gained national prominence based in part on Rod Paige’s claims as the former Houston superintendent that this approach actually closed the academic achievement gap, although data now suggests otherwise (see, e.g., Schemo & Fessenden, 2003; Winerip, 2003). Nevertheless, as the former U.S. Secretary of Education, Paige was able to disseminate this questionable assumption through the federal No Child Left Behind legislation and its heavy testing expectations. Hence, many educators who work under the weight of high-stakes testing and/or who hold narrow or antagonistic conceptions of the role of multicultural education reform in public education may perceive it as a luxury additive to what is deemed as “im-

portant” in the schooling process (Vavrus, 2002). A close reading of nearly any of the *Handbook*'s chapters, however, defies this parochialism and makes clear the relevancy of multicultural education in addressing the problems of practice and accountability that underlie schooling inequities.

The second edition of the *Handbook* is an invaluable resource for educational practitioners and scholars. This 49-chapter volume of comprehensive research reviews and extremely knowledgeable discussions includes 20 new chapters and 29 chapters revised from the first edition that was published in 1995 (and reissued in 2001 by Jossey-Bass). The chapters are organized into 12 sections that make this volume of more than 1,000 pages quite accessible to a wide array of interests, offering an encyclopedic study of the field of multicultural education. Although each chapter provides valuable multicultural analytic insights and recommendations for future research, there are also four chapters that constitute a section devoted exclusively to multicultural research issues.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS

James Banks's opening chapter, "Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice," captures not only critical components of his work throughout the past 35 years but also succinctly summarizes key foundational variables that inform the field of multicultural education. Banks's dimensions of multicultural education—content integration for an inclusive elementary and secondary school curriculum, multicultural knowledge construction processes, prejudice and discrimination reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure for all children and youth—continue to provide a research-based conceptual map for educational reform from a multicultural perspective.

As Geneva Gay further explains in her contribution to the *Handbook*,

A high degree of consensus exists among multicultural educators on the major principles, concepts, concerns, and directions for

changing curriculum and instruction to make them more reflective of and responsive to the racial, ethnic, cultural, social, and linguistic diversity that exists in the United States. . . . This observation defies claims of many critics that multicultural education is chaotic, confused, lacking in conceptual clarity, and devoid of a consensual voice. (p. 45)

Although neoconservative political pundits strive to reduce multiculturalism to a divisive force within the nation-state, the content of the *Handbook* represents this broad consensus on the constructive value of multicultural education to help solve existing undemocratic social, political, and economic inequities that public schools regularly reproduce. In his chapter on knowledge construction and power, Banks identifies how oppositional transformative knowledge operates as a countervailing force against the institutional production of inequities by providing “unique ways to conceptualize the world and an epistemology that differs in significant ways from mainstream assumptions, conceptions, values, and epistemology” (p. 230).

Most authors in the *Handbook* are keenly aware of the need to merge transformative knowledge into contemporary educational discourse. In their respective chapters, Gloria Ladson-Billings (“New Directions in Multicultural Education”) and Christine Sleeter and Dolores Delgado Bernal (“Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Antiracist Education”) incorporate critical race theory (CRT) into 21st-century perspectives on multicultural education. The inclusion of CRT contributes to an understanding of how White political supremacy has been able to subordinate people of color while maintaining a legal system that purports to provide equal protection under the law. CRT begins with the premise that “racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). CRT differs from White privileged notions of racial equality that contend institutional racism does not exist or only appears as a deviation from the norms of a presumed fair society. Ladson-Billings concludes that using CRT to critique curriculum, instruction, and assessment provides “a theoretical tool for uncovering many types of inequity and social injustice—not just race inequity and injustice” (p. 61).

In addition to CRT, Sleeter and Bernal also review scholarship on critical pedagogy and antiracist education as related to multicultural education. By sorting out the implications of antiracism for multicultural education, Sleeter and Bernal contrast status quo forms of token multiculturalism in schools with a pedagogy that encourages antiracist agency. Nevertheless, the development of antiracist teacher identities is continually challenged by an ideology of White privilege that acts “to delegitimize antiracist activity and to make accommodation to racism seem commonsensical and sane” (Roediger, 1999, p. 242). In their discussion of critical theoretical approaches to multicultural education, Sleeter and Bernal echo this concern and further wonder, “Is it likely that critical theories, as they interact with practice, will be altered or diluted to meet the everyday practical needs of educators” (p. 254)?

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Linda Darling-Hammond’s comprehensive contribution skillfully frames the elusiveness of equal educational opportunity. By making complex data and scholarship accessible to her readers, Darling-Hammond cuts straight to the structures of inequality in U.S. education. She reminds us that “Institutionally sanctioned discrimination in access to educational resources is older than the American nation itself” (p. 607). She examines inequities in relation to the distribution of funding, qualified teachers, courses, and materials. Next, she moves to accountability policies that can better equalize resources to improve student achievement.

Jeannie Oakes and her colleagues specifically investigate how inequities are fostered within and between schools. Their research review, which examines how access to course taking in mathematics and science influences student achievement, concludes the following:

1. Advanced course taking enhances achievement.
2. Advanced course taking determines eligibility for competitive colleges.

3. Completion of a rigorous high school program is the strongest predictor of college success, and it has a particularly strong impact on underrepresented students of color.
4. Taking courses from qualified teachers increases achievement.
5. A school's tracking policies play an important role in all of these outcomes. (p. 80)

The authors offer an important caveat with regard to these conclusions. Although the Los Angeles Unified School District added more advanced placement courses, “comprehensive high schools in low-income L.A. neighborhoods have proven to be far less able than schools in more advantaged neighborhoods to offer students opportunities that lead to AP success” (pp. 83-84). Purposeful earlier interventions in middle and junior high schools, however, can increase access and achievement at the high school level for many marginalized youth.

Because “education is essentially a social process,” John Dewey (1938/1974) understood that educational quality should be judged by “the degree in which individuals form a community group” (p. 58). Elizabeth Cohen and Rachel Lotan also understand quite well how “academic status order” can undermine community among students and, when perpetuated by teachers, create classroom communities marked by hierarchies of predictable successes and failures. In their chapter titled “Equity in Heterogeneous Classrooms,” Cohen and Lotan provide a review of research that teachers can use when approaching their classrooms as social systems that empower the learning of all students. Although most teachers contend that they treat all students fairly, Cohen and Lotan’s research suggests that teachers need to reassess how in practice they actually assign competence to students, especially low-status students.

The State of Washington has incorporated Cohen’s (1994) earlier research on groupwork and pedagogy as a central component to its redesign of internship expectations for all preservice teachers. Examples in Washington’s *Performance-Based Pedagogy Assessment of Teacher Candidates* (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2004) include expectations that teachers know how to “plan instruction . . . based on principles of effective practice that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, gender sensitive, and inclusive of all students, including low-status/

historically marginalized students” (p. 33). In addition, during instruction student teachers must use “heterogeneous cooperative learning that build and recognize academic competence of students” (p. 36). Cohen and Lotan’s chapter brings this research up-to-date, places it center stage in multicultural education, and makes it immediately applicable for urban educators.

ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

Multicultural aspects of ethnic groups and English language acquisition are amply addressed in four sections that alternate chapters on social science and historical research on ethnic groups with those that focus on the education of specific ethnic groups. Individual chapters on immigrant children and language are also included. When surveying these sections, readers are encouraged to take a close look at an earlier chapter by Maria Root on “Multi-racial Families and Children” for her thoughtful problematizing of the topic of racial identity formation. Although no single volume can offer definitive solutions to the shifting demographics of urban schools, these particular chapters taken together are immensely helpful in analyzing and evaluating multidimensional elements that hinder or enable schooling and life opportunities of those populations historically subordinated to Eurocentric systems that perpetuate White economic and social privilege.

Within these sections, the chapter by Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozo and Fabienne Doucet is particularly instructive about academic engagement for increased achievement of youth who are historically subordinated. The focus is on Latino immigrant youth; however, the findings in this chapter are generalizable to other groups who live under similar conditions. For example, in debunking the research on motivation as a central factor affecting achievement, the authors explain, “This model of understanding [i.e., achievement motivation] tends to ignore the harsh implications of structural barriers and blames the victim” (p. 425). Instead, the authors turn their attention to academic engagement to understand achievement and offer a conceptual map of five categories (demographics, individual risk factors, contextual risk, social sup-

port, academic engagement—all of which include a total of 17 elements) as they affect academic outcomes. A primary message taken from this chapter is the necessity to pay closer attention to adolescent identity formation “as contextual and contingent upon a variety of circumstances . . . where dominant majorities and ethnic and racial minorities cohabit a national space” (p. 428).

This review of research on interventions to assist Latino immigrant youth is an effective lead into chapters on educating Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Asian Pacific students. Confounding the education of many ethnic minorities are English language challenges. Masahiko Minami and Carlos Ovando first explore the assumptions and practices underlying programs that turn out to be ineffective. Next, the authors systematically sort through research to offer a more nuanced view of how students who are learning English can best be assisted. It is interesting to note, many of Minami and Ovando’s recommendations for students with a minority language generally mirror what constitutes effective teaching regardless of the setting. For example, “The nature of the teacher-student interaction is particularly relevant to the promotion of minority children’s academic success,” especially when evidence indicates that significant numbers of teachers “tend to view minority students as a group, simply ignoring their individual differences” (p. 584). Minami and Ovando’s chapter shifts the responsibility for low student achievement from blaming local communities for perceived deficits and places accountability for student learning where it belongs—on policy makers, school administrators, and teachers. For more detailed approaches to effective English language acquisition of students with a minority language, the chapter by Minami and Ovando and one on “Trends in Two-Way Immersion Research” form an excellent foundation in language issues for educators and researchers.

TEACHER EDUCATION

What may be of most interest to urban educators and researchers in the section on higher education is a chapter authored by Marilyn

Cochran-Smith and two of her colleagues on teacher education and multicultural education reform. Their "Synthesis of the Syntheses on Multicultural Education, 1980-2001" (pp. 936-946) is particularly useful. This chapter is outstanding in articulating the forces on teacher preparation and the subsequent response of programs. A comprehensive research review that compares actual practices by programs and recognizes the need to empirically document program effects on teachers, this chapter provides a seminal contribution to the further development of multicultural teacher education.

Based on my own research on multicultural education (see, e.g., Vavrus, 2002) and institutional efforts to incorporate a multicultural perspective into student-teaching internship requirements (e.g., Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2004), I have been concerned about how many teacher education programs avoid in-depth engagement with critical multicultural issues. The supervision and accountability of student teacher interns in full-time public school classrooms—the primary full-time teaching experience that preservice teachers receive before being recommended to their respective states for licensure—is often scandalous in how little attention and support is given to teacher candidates to engage all learners. This counterproductive practice generally ignores factors that provide research-based approaches to increase student achievement such as those raised in the *Handbook*. The move by some urban school districts to institute their own preservice teacher education programs generates even more concern. The assumption guiding most school district models of teacher preparation is simply that apprenticeships are sufficient for developing good teachers despite evidence that experienced teachers who may be mentors are often not knowledgeable or interested in the substance of multicultural research presented in the *Handbook* (see, e.g., Murrell, 1998; Rios, 1991; Rushton, 2001). Transformative teacher education, including multicultural mentoring of in-service teachers, is a key variable for meaningful policy initiatives that can create equitable learning opportunities for students from low-income families and for students of color. Again, readers interested in the role teacher education can play in multicultural education reform are strongly encouraged to study the research that Cochran-Smith and her colleagues present in their chapter.

CLASS AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The *Handbook* concludes with three reviews from international perspectives: the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa. Readers who desire more attention to the global dimensions of schooling are encouraged to consider Katarina Tomasevski's (2003) *Education Denied: Costs and Remedies* for a data-driven human rights critique of education and *Diversity and Citizenship: Global Perspectives*, another new edited volume by Banks (2004).

Although Michael Knapp and Sara Woolverton's chapter on "Social Class and Schooling" was not written to address global issues, it not only helps us understand how class interacts with race, ethnicity, and gender in U.S. schools but also provides a conceptual framework on how class can manifest itself in other countries. This consideration is particularly important because a mainstream U.S. model of schooling is regularly exported to other countries as an effective educational approach (see, e.g., Ladwig, 2000). Regardless of the setting, Knapp and Woolverton's chapter remains basic reading to check assumptions and furnish insights into how educators respond to student social class and the multiple ways in which class interacts with schooling experiences.

CONCLUSION

At some fundamental level, multicultural education is premised on an inclusiveness of all people regardless of race and class. This important premise is visited historically by Cherrie McGee Banks, coeditor of the *Handbook*, in her chapter on "Intercultural and Intergroup Education." The five chapters that follow hers are particularly useful for reminding us that when conditions present seemingly irreconcilable differences among different groups of peoples, thoughtful interventions can have positive effects within schools. As Janet Schofield articulates in her chapter, factors are available "in structuring racially and ethnically mixed environments in ways that will foster positive relations and minimize negative relations among different groups of students" (p. 808).

To give justifiable attention to all of the chapters in the *Handbook* is not possible within the scope of this book review. Nonetheless, in its totality the second edition of the *Handbook* is like finding a treasure chest on a library shelf: In one volume, educators and policy makers have at their fingertips an astonishing collection of informed research reviews and myriad thoughtful and realistic policy and research recommendations, all of which would be impossible for any one individual to thoroughly gather and synthesize on one's own. An indispensable resource for researchers, teacher educators, K-12 educators, and policy makers, this new edition of the *Handbook* stands out as the premier guiding light on research and policy that is intended to improve teaching and learning for all our children.

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