

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Race, Culture and Education: The Selected Works of James A. Banks by James A. Banks

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## BOOK/MEDIA REVIEWS

*Race, Culture and Education: The Selected Works of James A. Banks*, by James A. Banks. London & New York: Routledge, 2006. 234 pp. \$41.95, paperback; \$135.00, hardback.

**Reviewed by** Michael Vavrus, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington.

This collection is essential reading to comprehensively understand the critically important work of James Banks, the internationally recognized premier scholar of multicultural education. Chapters range from his late 1960s article on Black history to an invited 2005 lecture "Democracy, Diversity, and Social Justice: Educating Citizens in a Global Age." Within these pages readers will find key threads that have formed the evolution of Banks's thinking from that of a graduate student and aspiring social studies educator to president of the American Educational Research Association and editor of both a *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & Banks, 2004) and a multicultural education book series for Teachers College Press.

With a very accessible voice, Banks's introduction subtitled, "My Epistemological Journey," connects his life history with his scholarship. From Banks the scholar, readers get a glimpse into a social-political world that helped shape his orientation and academic steadfastness to designing conceptual frameworks that can help to analyze and appraise racial and cultural intersections within the schooling process. His introduction skillfully walks readers through the thinking behind his varied publications, insights that alone make this book a valuable addition to contemporary debates on "race, culture, and education," an appropriately chosen title for his book.

The scope of Banks's scholarly production is broad. To assist readers, the collection is organized thematically into seven parts: (a) "Black Studies, the Teaching of History, and Research," (b) "Teaching Ethnic Studies," (c) "Teaching Social Studies for Decision-Making and Citizen Action," (d) "Multiethnic Education and School Reform," (e) "Multicultural Education and Knowledge Construction," (f) "The Global Dimensions of Multicultural Education," and (g) "Democracy, Diversity, and Citizenship." This organizational structure does well by linking works that are separated by time that form a coherent whole cultivated across Banks's career.

Evident with each essay is Banks's ability to take complex schooling topics that are imbued with political tensions and analyze those issues through clear writing and constructive examples. He successfully presents qualitative information in a manner that can be analyzed through his incorporation of tables, typologies, and diagrams, which makes abstract concepts useful and meaningful for educators. For example, Banks's five "dimensions of multicultural education": (a) content integration, (b) knowledge construction, (c) equity pedagogy, (d) prejudice reduction, and (e) empowering school culture (pp. 132-137, 203-207) are explained in details for comprehension. K-12 pre-service and in-service teachers who hold narrow or resistant conceptions to multiculturalism, can significantly expand their outlooks when they understand how multicultural education is a broadly conceived systemic approach that is intended, in Banks's words, "to reform schools" (p. 202). For the dimension of content integration, one of the more common ways of defining multicultural education, Banks provides a typology that leads from the somewhat simplistic "additive" approach to ones that can transform the way knowledge is constructed and can lead to social action (pp. 140-144). His multicultural dimensions and various typologies that are collected in this volume bring together relevant classifications to grasp current complexities of this field in addition to holding constructive potential for both teacher education students and researchers (Vavrus, 2002).

Underlying Banks's work are questions about White Eurocentric constructions of what constitutes valid knowledge. Characteristic of Banks's style, he does not resort to rant but meticulously examines competing viewpoints and then offers a range and explanation of "types of knowledge" and their interrelationship. This is particularly the case in the section discussing, "The Canon Debate, Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education" (pp. 145-164) that

originally appeared in 1993 and remains, for this reviewer, one of Banks's most important theoretical contributions.

Multicultural education, as Banks acknowledged in 1984, is a contested field that is sometimes criticized by both the political right and left (pp. 181-190). In this part, Banks presents arguments that are against a multicultural focus in our schools, which are positions that are still held. Methodically, Banks is able to offer thoughtful critiques and strategies to those who envision an Anglo-American monoculture, as well as those who dismiss multicultural education as too limited of a reform. To that latter group, Banks responded thusly,

Multicultural education alone cannot make structural changes within society. It can, however, facilitate and reinforce reform movements that take place outside schools. The schools can promote social criticism and help students to develop a commitment to humane social change. (p. 183)

If there is a missing element from this outstanding collection, it may be how "the tangled knot of race *and class*" (emphasis added) can be analytically unraveled and addressed within Banks's conception of humane social change (Lustig, 2004). This is a difficult challenge for Banks and for any contemporary educator committed to social justice.

A unifying premise within Banks's scholarship is a recognition of the tensions and challenges in "balancing unity and diversity" within nation-states (p. 208). From the early 1970s to the present, Banks has strove to articulate what it means to be a citizen and the subsequent responsibilities of decision-making that ought to go along with citizenship. In opposition to calls for assimilation, Banks articulates a conception of "*multicultural citizenship* . . . [which] recognizes and legitimizes the right and need of citizens to maintain commitments both to their cultural communities and to the national civic culture" (p. 209). In his 1978 article, "Multiethnic Education Across Cultures," that is reproduced in this volume, Banks was insightful in anticipating the racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts and street demonstrations that have come to mark the urban areas of contemporary France. Nearly 30 years later, the French government would have been wise to have taken note of Banks's earlier analysis:

The problem of ethnicity and schooling in France is regarded primarily as a linguistic problem—which reflects an assimilationist ideology. . . Ethnic problems are usually seen as temporary. . . [which] overlooks the fact that there is strong evidence of racism. . . and that racism and discrimination will not necessarily disappear when immigrant groups become acculturated. (p. 176)

At the end of his introduction to this volume, Banks indicates that issues surrounding multicultural citizenship will continue to be a focus of his scholarship in the coming years, a goal of utmost importance in a world that too easily can slip into wars characterized by ethnic conflict (Ferguson, 2006)

This book should definitely be in college libraries as well as professional libraries of multicultural practitioners and scholars. With thorough reference lists, recommendations for further reading and an extensive bibliography of Banks's work, this collection can serve as a required text for graduate students studying multicultural education, ethnic studies, or social studies education. Selected chapters can be used in undergraduate courses in social studies curriculum and instruction, foundations of education, and multicultural education. Banks's thoughtfully analytic perspective remains a much needed one in a climate where too often K-12 schools and their teacher education counterparts continue to seek quick fixes to institutional problems of racial inequities.

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*Social Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*, by Richard Rothstein. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University; Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2004, 210 pp. \$17.95, paperback.

**Reviewed by** Mariajosé Romero, *Columbia University*.

In *Social Class and Schools*, Rothstein sets out to explain the persistence of the Black-White achievement gap despite 50 years of school desegregation and reform since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In his view, the achievement gap results not from failed policies, poor school quality, or ineffective schools, but from social class disparities between Black and White students, which impact every aspect of their lives. A research associate at the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) and former education columnist for the *New York Times*, Rothstein has written extensively on student achievement and school reform. The book stems from lectures he gave in 2003-2004 at Teachers College, Columbia University, although some of the chapters expand on work previously done at EPI or published elsewhere.

Chapter 1 examines the mechanisms through which social class influences academic performance. For Rothstein, the Black-White achievement gap arises from class-based differences in socialization, health status, housing, wealth, and learning outside schools. In his view, middle-class students outperform their lower-class counterparts because middle-class parents often read to and use complex language with their children; enforce behavioral norms consistent with those of schools; provide effective homework assistance; promote future orientations; and as role models, attest to the payoff that investments in education have for the middle class. Rothstein argues that, in comparison to their middle-class peers, lower-class children are more likely to suffer nutrition, vision, hearing, and other health problems that undermine their ability to learn. Likewise, they may lack access to stable, high-quality housing and experience considerable geographic mobility, which fragments their school experience. Due to lack of wealth, lower-class children may be exposed to parental unemployment, economic, and food insecurity, and poverty spells that seriously hamper their learning, especially during the early years. Lastly, unlike some lower-class families, some middle-class ones may provide meaningful learning experiences prior to kindergarten and during after-school and summer hours, which strengthen school readiness and performance, and prevent the summer learning loss typically observed in lower-class children.

Rothstein recognizes that improving the quality of schools may help diminish the Black-White achievement gap. But, in his view, school reform alone is insufficient since it leaves class-based disparities untouched. Chapter 2 reviews initiatives purporting to have eliminated racial disparities in achievement. For Rothstein, these claims are unfounded: in some instances, proposals owe their success to the selective students served, who typically perform better than lower-class students; in other instances, improved achievement scores are due to health interventions rather than to educational changes; and in still others, claims are based on a selective reading on test scores or lead to unrealistic policy goals.

Two chapters in *Social Class and Schools* are devoted to the important question of what we actually know about the achievement gap. In Chapter 3, Rothstein contends that school reform efforts cannot be evaluated because of limitations of existing standardized tests, and their misuse in response to political pressures of the current accountability environment. Chapter 4 examines the gap in non-cognitive skills, that is, "character traits like perseverance, self-confidence, self-discipline, punctuality, communication skills, social responsibility, and the ability to work with others and resolve conflicts." For Rothstein, these skills ought to represent key goals of public