

## The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education

reviewed by Michael Vavrus – November 09, 2009

**Title:** The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education

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At the beginning of this century James Banks (2001) confronted the multifaceted challenge to incorporate international perspectives of multicultural education into a globally representative conception. At that time Banks wrote, “My work on global identification and issues is incomplete and episodic...Global issues remain mostly an unrealized and hoped-for goal” (p. 14). In regards to the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & Banks, 2004), I had observed that international topics overall were generally limited (Vavrus, 2006). In the same year as the publication of the *Handbook*, however, Banks (2004) published edited papers from the 2002 Bellagio (Italy) Citizenship Education and Diversity Conference, a few chapters from which appear in revised form in the text under review. In his introduction to *Race, Culture and Education*, Banks (2006) also signaled that issues of citizenship and multicultural education in a global context would continue to be a focus of his scholarship in the coming years. With *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education*, Banks emphatically brings forth this important missing perspective by not only advancing his own work on this topic, but by surfacing for an international audience a treasure-trove of 40 peer-reviewed, accessible chapters under the authorship of 48 well-chosen scholars.

Guided by an international editorial board, the *International Companion* is effectively organized “around key concepts and...case studies from various nations to exemplify and illustrate the concepts” (p. 2). A striking aspect of this collection is its pragmatic approach. Efforts throughout are made to connect theory and the discourse of public policies to actual practices. Whereas chapters are grounded in comprehensive reviews of research, authors consistently make a point to consider possibilities for conceptualizing further actions around what often appear as intractable multicultural dilemmas. Collectively the chapters present an invaluable foundation to monitor multicultural policy situations and practices globally.

Banks’ own opening chapter on dimensions and paradigms of multicultural education is recommended to orient the reader entering this collection. Stephen May’s following chapter expands this discussion with a presentation of the components of a critical multicultural paradigm. Contemporary population migratory patterns and the effects on global notions of “diversity” and the challenges to education are provided by Stephen Castles’ focused chapter. Part 1 of this volume concludes with Marcelo and Carola Suárez-Orozco’s excellent “Globalization, Immigration, and Schooling” chapter. Thus, the first of ten conceptually organized sections provides a helpful overview of topics and issues and sets an appropriate tone and context for the chapters that follow.

One set of chapters presents a review of multicultural education across Europe and in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., South Africa, and Japan. Although Reva Joshee’s chapter focuses on Canada, her analysis of governmental discourses in comparison to actual practices offers a methodology for examining nation-state multiculturalism at the national and provincial levels as well as the situational enactment in particular locales. Sonia Nieto’s chapter with the subtitle “Historical Realities, Ongoing Challenges, and Transformative Possibilities” captures well major contemporary multicultural issues within the U.S.

David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell’s lead chapter in the section “Race, Intergroup Relations, and Schooling” is exceptional in its coverage in a short amount of space to bring coherence to the often diffused conversations around critical theory, race theory, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and subjectivities. Looking at the implications of the “critical character” of these approaches, Gillborn and Youdell note that understandings as to “what it means to be a teacher, a student, White, or of color might be opening up to radical rethinking” (p. 182) in our current historical moment.

Three additional chapters in that same section examine how children develop racialized beliefs. Authors generally included specific “[i]nterventions to modify children’s attitudes...to overcome their currently held bias and to add more positive attitudes” (p. 200). Of critical significance to the lives of children in the Middle East and in particular to the continuing existence of Palestinian children and their families is “Education Programs for Improving Relations between Jews and

Palestinians in Israel” by Zvi Beckerman, a professor at Hebrew University in Israel. In recognizing the strengths as well as limitations of peace education, Beckerman concludes that efforts premised on

coexistence and reconciliation processes should pay special attention to the strong connections between the concepts of identity and culture and the coming into being of political organization of the nation-state. It is to this political organization that we owe the powerful machinery in the shape of massive educational efforts aimed at homogenizing populations through the invention of primordial identities and cultures. (p. 219)

As a follow-up to Beckerman’s chapter, the reader can choose four important chapters under the section “Religion, Culture, Identity, and Education” where each contribution addresses Islam to grasp the dynamics of educational situations in various regions of the world.

Carol Lee’s chapter cautions against essentializing “culture” and calls for recognition of “patterns of both continuity and difference within communities” (p. 246). Using applied examples from the content areas of mathematics, science, and literacy, she explains, “One way to address this continuity and difference is to examine the everyday practices of cultural communities with the understanding that there will be variation in such patterns of activities” (p. 246). These cognitive-cultural approaches that Lee describes are representative of “new conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy” (p. 241).

Throughout the *International Companion* authors repeatedly reference the deleterious effects of the policies and practices that support a monocultural conception of the nation-state. Nowhere is this more evident than in the three chapters about studies of indigenous education experiences in Peru, New Zealand, and the U.S. Long-time scholars of American Indian education Donna Deyhle and Karen Comeau (formerly known to us by the last name Swisher) bring their expertise and hope to the schooling process by positing that the education of indigenous youth “has come nearly full circle from its historic, pre-colonial beginnings with Indian parent, family, and community in control of the education and socialization of their children to the contemporary times of self-determination and local control in Indian education” (p. 273). The authors have valid reasons to be optimistic based on the very real inroads to recapture a culturally relevant education for American Indians. Nevertheless, for a state like Washington where I live with its 29 federally-recognized tribes and a graduation rate for American Indians at an estimated 47% (Greene, 2002) - in a nation where 64% of indigenous Americans “reside outside locations officially designated as tribal areas” (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2008, p. 5) - an acknowledgment of what constitutes “American Indian communities” (p. 272) would have been helpful. This is especially critical in regards to the plight of the significant numbers of urban Indian young people disconnected from indigenous community cultural support and advocacy that is a major source of the authors’ optimism.

In the section on “Citizenship, Immigration, and Education” Banks appropriately frames the multiple ways that citizenship in the nation-state is conceived both theoretically and in practice. Here he advances a social justice perspective on citizenship that can require civil disobedience:

The important difference between active and transformative citizens is that the actions taken by active citizens fall within existing laws, customs, and conventions, whereas the actions taken by transformative citizens are designed to promote values and moral principles - such as social justice and equality - and may violate existing conventions and laws. (pp. 316-317)

The subsequent chapters on citizenship rights in other parts of the world segue into the section on “Language, Culture, Identity, and Education” and opens with an outstanding chapter by Suzanne Romaine. While noting the indisputable links among language, culture, and identity, Romaine observes that “fewer than 4% of the world’s languages have any kind of official status in the nations where they are spoken” (p. 380). The practice of both leading colonial powers and relatively newly independent nations reveals a general pattern at best of “pragmatic accommodation” (p. 382) of indigenous and immigrant languages that are not privileged by dominant classes. For this reason Romaine speaks against mainstream tolerance of minority languages and instead frames the issue in the context of UNESCO reports as an issue of “linguistic human rights” (p. 382).

Seven chapters devoted to the “Education of Ethnic and Cultural Minority Groups” outside of the U.S. and Canada conclude the *International Companion*. The scope of the totality of chapters is significant with authors covering large geographic regions. These include separate chapters focused on China, Russia, Latin America, Brazil, Mexico, Spain, and Germany.

The concept of *globalization* in this volume is presented in relation to “large-scale worldwide migrations” (p. 88) and the effects of “intersecting identities” (p. 378) in the few instances where the term is mentioned. Absent is a discussion of the contested aspect of globalization as an organizing concept that was exemplified by world-wide massive public rallies against international capital and “free” trade agreements during the past decade. In this context the concept is understood as capitalist or *corporate globalization* whereas actions favoring the emancipation of oppressed people under corporate globalization is framed as *global solidarity* (see, for example, Vavrus, 2002, chapter 6). A chapter acknowledging the political economy of this perspective and its effects on multicultural education would have added another dimension to this ambitious collection.

At a recent conference unveiling the publication of this text, Banks (2009) acknowledged the challenge to adequately summarize the wealth of information that is made available in the *International Companion* in a relatively short period of time.

This is also the case for this reviewer with space limitations. Be assured, however, that K-12 practitioners as well as scholars of multicultural education can benefit by dipping into various chapters of interest located in the *International Companion*. This is an important publication that furthers social justice by informing our learning on multicultural education in international settings. U.S. educators and policy analysts have an opportunity here to relate global issues of equity to U.S. situations both inside and outside of schools. If the hefty list price of \$170 is too much for the individual buyer, college libraries need to make this ground-breaking text part of their permanent collections.

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