



James Banks: Preeminent Scholar of Multicultural Civic Education

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Contents

Introduction	2
Influences and Motivations	3
Professional Transitions	4
Key Contributions	5
Advancing E Pluribus Unum Through Educational Reform	6
Approaches to Multicultural Education Curriculum Reform	8
The Canon Debate and Knowledge Construction	9
Multicultural Education Dimensions	10
Backed by Extensive Research	11
International Perspectives	12
Encyclopedic Research Collection	13
New Insights	13
Legacies and Unfinished Business	14
Conclusion	15
Cross-References	15
References	15

Abstract

For over a half century, James Banks has been central to the creation of accessible theories and practices that have accrued him international recognition as the preeminent scholar of multicultural civic education, often referred to as “the father of multicultural education.” Banks grew up in the racially segregated South of the United States on a cotton farm in the Arkansas Delta and learned as Black child to navigate the racism of Jim Crow practices. Banks’s entire career must be contextualized within historical struggles for full citizenship rights under ever-present threats of vigilantism and sanctioned police violence.

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During the 1960s, James Banks moved to Chicago, completed an undergraduate degree, and went on to teach elementary school in Illinois. After completing his Ph.D. at Michigan State University in 1969, Banks became the first African American hired in the College of Education at the University of Washington in Seattle where he worked for 50 years until his retirement in 2019.

James Banks is past-president of both the National Council of Social Studies and the American Educational Research Association. Among his hundreds of publications, Banks's major scholarship includes the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*; *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*; *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*; the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*; and initiating and editing 80 books for the Multicultural Education Series for Columbia University's Teachers College Press. For those who worked in any capacity with James Banks, he is also known for his generosity and inclusiveness.

Keywords

Multicultural education · Citizenship education · Ethnic studies · Social studies · Diversity · Race · White supremacy · Canon debate

Introduction

James Albert Banks is the foremost internationally recognized multicultural scholar on the intersections of civic education with ethnic and racial diversity. Although often referred to as “the father of multicultural education,” Banks humbly responds, “I am ambivalent about this designation because many other scholars made essential contributions to establishing multicultural education as a field of study” (as cited in Bembenuity, 2022, p. 51). Banks's acknowledgment of the works of other contemporary scholars reflects his generosity and inclusiveness toward both established and emerging scholars (see Banks, 1998).

The scope of James Banks's body of work is enormous. It includes 11 authored books; 14 coedited books; 85 book chapters; 6 monographs as lead author; 112 journal articles; two newspaper editorials; 14 book reviews; and 5 guest editorships of thematic journals (see Banks, 2020, pp. 194–208). Additionally, Banks (2012a) created and edited the broad-based four-volume *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*. As if Banks's myriad academic awards and extensive publications were not enough to cement Banks's scholarly standing (see University of Washington, 2023b), he also initiated the Multicultural Education Series for Columbia University's Teachers College Press. Longtime multicultural scholar Carl Grant (n.d.) commended Banks on the series for “a work of first-class scholarship presented by a distinguished list of authors [and] for bringing significant and influential works to the field” (para. 5). The series now includes 80 books that Banks provided the forewords. Clearly, such a review of all his work would require a full-length book.

To concentrate, however, just on the academic accomplishments of James Banks is to overlook the volatile political and social context of the decades in which his contributions to Black studies, ethnic studies, multicultural education, and citizenship education developed. Therefore, this biographical essay first steps back to situate Banks's origins in becoming the most prolific and preeminent scholar of multicultural civic education. To this end, the next section presents an overview of key personal and professional influences in Banks's life. After that is an extensive section devoted to his key contributions, followed by his new insights in the twenty-first century and a discussion of his legacies and unfinished business.

Influences and Motivations

Born in 1941, James Banks grew up in the racially segregated South of the United States on a cotton farm in the Arkansas Delta. This was an era where the law of the land codified Jim Crow segregation after the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court declared in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that "separate" was somehow equal for people of African descent in a White supremacist dominated nation, a reality throughout Banks's childhood. When Banks (2020) looks back on his life as a marginalized youth experiencing racism as a Black child without full citizenship rights, remembrances for him remain "enduring," "bitter," and "painful" (4). His schooling experiences represented a cognitive dissonance between textbook portrayals of happily enslaved people and the psychological and material realities of Blacks who were far from content with the racism that they were forced to navigate daily. As Banks explains, "Blacks wore a mask as they feigned contentment around Whites" while Black "anger seethed below the surface, ready to explode" (as cited in Bembenuity, 2022, p. 38).

Carter G. Woodson (1933/1970) – one of the groundbreaking scholars who Banks regularly honors – in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* emphasized the oppressive social condition that Banks and other young Blacks experienced during the mid-twentieth-century decades. In 1954, Banks was in seventh grade when the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board* with a unanimous decision that the dictum separate-but-equal was no longer the legal standard of the United States. Yet, the adults around young James were apparently silent about the decision: "I have no memory of it being rendered or mentioned by my parents, teachers, or preachers" (as cited in Bembenuity, 2022, p. 38). Woodson highlighted how living under White supremacist "terrorism" functioned so effectively that many African Americans "ceased to think of political matters as their sphere" (88).

Such was the political environment in Banks's community, like so many others across the South and the rest of the United States. An uneasy racial hierarchy remained intact despite the Court's *Brown* decision as evidenced with White supremacists taunting Black children and fire-bombing homes of Blacks who attempted to desegregate their public schools in the 1950s and 1960s. Banks's entire career necessitates historical contextualization as part of this long haul struggle to actualize conditions for equal citizenship rights under ever-present threats of vigilantism and

sanctioned police violence intended to keep Blacks compliant to White supremacist governing regimes.

Fortunate to grow up surrounded by supportive Black adults, Banks believed that he could excel as well as anyone else. Rather than athletics, he was drawn to the world of ideas and history through books and stories he heard growing up about Black resilience. An example of his early public writing career was as the founding editor of both his junior and senior high school newspapers. In 1960, after Banks graduated from his segregated high school, he moved to Chicago to join his brother. Banks graduated from a community college – Chicago City College – for his first experience in a desegregated educational institution. Banks chose to complete a bachelor's degree in elementary education and social studies from Chicago Teachers College, which today is Chicago State University. He then went on to teach elementary school in Illinois.

About his academic experience in Chicago, Banks (1998) noted, “Throughout my schooling. . .I tried to reconcile the representations of African Americans in textbooks with the people I knew in my family and community. I wanted to know why these images were highly divergent” (4). Furthermore, he added, “My undergraduate curriculum did not help answer my questions” (4). Nevertheless, Banks took with him a drive toward academic excellence as evidenced by him graduating with honors.

Professional Transitions

Banks's academic potential had already been recognized during his community college days when Dr. Ernest B. Kelley, his English teacher and only Black professor that he had as an undergraduate, encouraged him to enroll for his B.A. at the University of Chicago (which he chose not to do). As Banks recalls, “She thought I had a lot of promise” (March 6, 2023, personal communication). After leaving elementary teaching, Banks attended Michigan State University (MSU) where in 1969 he received a Ph.D., affirming Banks's potential that Dr. Kelley had recognized early on. Banks credits mentors during his graduate school studies for encouraging him to pursue writing for professional publications and making a career in higher education seem like a possibility, a reality far removed from his childhood experiences of second-class citizenship. Mentors at MSU were instrumental helping him secure an interview for a position at the University of Washington in Seattle where he was hired in 1969 and worked for 50 years until his retirement in 2019.

In 1969, during the fraught but hopeful era of the Civil Rights Movement, Banks became the first Black faculty member in the University of Washington's College of Education. African American studies professor Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2023) helps to locate the era of Banks's emergence as a recognized scholar by pointing out that “Black studies as an academic field, as a discipline, emerges out of the rebellions of the 1960s” (“Transcript” para. 23). The cauldron of this modern civil rights history of the twentieth century significantly marks the academic orientation of Banks. Reflecting on his initial scholarly motivation and focus, Banks explained

that “legitimizing the study of race was a major part of my own identity” (as cited in Brown, 2018: “What opportunities do you believe” para. 4). Investigating intersections among racial and ethnic discrimination and citizenship rights remained a driving force throughout his career.

Key Contributions

By 1973, Banks had published a text on teaching social studies along with articles and chapters devoted to incorporating Black history into the school curriculum. For example, from 1971 and into 1973, with chapter and article titles such as “The Causes of Prejudice,” “Black Power: Strategies of Teaching,” “Liberating the Black ghetto: Decision Making and Social Action,” and “Poverty”; Banks offered to mainstream social studies teachers and researchers conceptualized perspectives germinated from the Civil Rights Movement. Banks was resolute in his belief that social studies as an initial curricular access point could provide students a multicultural foundation for civic engagement and social action.

By the mid-1970s, he widened his academic net to focus on a variety of marginalized and misrepresented ethnic groups. First published in 1975, *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* is now in its eighth edition (Banks, 2008). In 1983, Banks published *Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice*, a title that was changed for a fifth edition in 2006 to *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*. By 2016, the book was in its sixth edition (Banks, 2016b). Over the years, countless educators, including this chapter’s author, have leaned on these texts to deconstruct for students the stereotyping and essentializing of the Other in mainstream academic and public discourse.

In the early 1980s, Banks served as president of the National Council of Social Studies. When he delivered his presidential address, Banks highlights that roots of his life-long focus on the ideals of liberal democracies: “liberty, equality, justice, and human dignity” (Banks, 1982/2020, p. 93). By that time, Banks was already critiquing “the liberal assimilationist conception” of citizenship as “incomplete, flawed, and oversimplified” (p. 104) – all of which stemmed from his research and life story.

Drawing on his childhood lived experiences, Banks (2020) makes explicit what influenced his teaching and scholarship throughout his career:

My experience growing up in the segregated South and learning about the ways in which White historians outside the African American community had constructed images of Blacks that were institutionalized within the schools and the society writ large *initiated an epistemological journey* that resulted in my focusing much of my life’s work on uncovering and describing the ways in which the autobiographical journeys of historians and social scientists *influence the knowledge they create and how the construction of knowledge is influenced by factors such as race, class, and gender.* (4 emphasis added)

He then explained, “Feminists call this phenomenon *positionality*” (4 emphasis in original). Throughout his career Banks’s positionality informs his acknowledgment

of “the relationship between the subjective and objective components of knowledge” (69).

Banks “epistemological journey” led him to a critique of the construction and application of knowledge and to the transformative potential of multiethnic and multicultural education.

Advancing E Pluribus Unum Through Educational Reform

Banks possesses an unusually astute ability among academic researchers to take complex schooling topics imbued with political tensions and to analyze them through clear writing and constructive examples. Consider his strategic use of “reform.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines reform as the “action or process of making changes in an institution, organization, or aspect of social or political life, so as to remove errors, abuses, or other hindrances to proper performance.” Banks (1993c) defines multicultural education as “a total school reform effort designed to increase educational equity for a range of cultural, ethnic, and economic groups” (6 emphasis in original). In this usage, Banks employs a definitional frame of *reform* in the OED manner of seeking “to remove errors, abuses, or other hindrances to proper performance” from public schools for the eventual benefit and inclusion of historically marginalized children and youth. When considering the contemporary backlash against ethnic and racially diverse populations, Banks’s definition of reform is crucial today to offer educators and policymakers ways to resist and counter far-right anti-multicultural U.S. legislative actions. Clearly, for example, Banks’s multicultural education advocacy to “increase educational equity” remains heresy to White supremacist imaginaries (cf. Contorno & Maher, 2023). Stepping back, however, from this straightforward definition of multicultural education as “a total school reform” provides a glimpse as to what is a *radical* proposal that pertains to uprooting curricular racism and disinformation.

Banks’s far-reaching objective has been the realization of the unifying motto of the 13 original North American British colonies, the Latin phrase *E pluribus unum*, translated as *out of many, one*. A unifying premise within Banks’s (2006) scholarship is a recognition of tensions and challenges in “balancing unity and diversity” within nation-states (208). Banks endeavors 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” (209).

Mainstream liberals, conservatives, and the far right rightfully understood that critical assertions of U.S. multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism were an affront to historical hegemonic Whiteness as a radical departure from an assimilationist melting pot narrative. For example, liberal presidential historian and speech writer and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, Arthur Schlesinger (1990) claimed in a White supremacist anti-immigration journal an Anglo-Saxon essentialism of U.S. history,

stating “To deny the essentially European origins of American culture is to falsify history” (para. 17; Kieffer, 2020). Understating that he and Schlesinger “don’t agree on a lot” (as cited in Brown, 2018: para. 9), Banks (1982/2020) had previously critiqued such positions as Schlesinger’s as faulty, deficient, and simplistic arguments at the National Council of Social Studies. Schlesinger’s (1992) pleas for a unified nation employed a mythic history of “intrepid Europeans” who migrated to the Americas during colonization (cf. Isenberg, 2016) to set the stage for his attack on a supposed “cult of ethnicity” without apparently investigating the research of multicultural historians such as Banks (13, 74). Prominent liberal multiculturalists such as Schlesinger only zeroed in on just single ethnic group studies, ignoring the scope and range of multicultural educational research. Banks (1993b) named this persistent blind spot of liberal multicultural assimilationists, for example, in how they “are ambivalent about Afrocentrism. . . . This is in part because the Western traditionalists rarely distinguish the Afrocentrists from the multiculturalists and describe them as one group” (4).

Both Schlesinger (1992) and Banks (1993a) drew on the motto *E pluribus unum* in their respective but quite different approaches to what would make a unified United States. In contrast to “Western traditionalists,” Banks argued, “the *unum* must be negotiated, discussed, and restructured to reflect the nation’s ethnic and cultural diversity” (24). Banks looked beyond mere recognition and celebration of cultural diversity and pointed to the redistributive concept of power sharing: “to be united must be a process that involves the participation of diverse groups within the nation, such as people of color, women, straights, gays, the powerful, the powerless, the young, and the old” (24). In other words, unity would not happen, according to Banks, without radical changes that would no longer minimize and denigrate the struggles of marginalized groups. Yet, in 1993, Banks warned that any “curriculum changes that are linked with issues related to race evoke primordial feelings and reflect the racial crisis in American society” (24).

The crisis of White anxiety that Banks named was ideologically justified through an inflated sense of American exceptionalism. That attitude was visible, for example, in the mid-1990s when the U.S. Senate passed by a 99-1 vote “A resolution to prevent the adoption of certain national history standards” (1995) that was *against* any federal support for multicultural national history standards unless “such funds should have a decent respect for the contributions of western civilization, and United States history, ideas, and institutions, to the increase of freedom and prosperity around the world” (para. 3). Long after Banks’s retirement, what he had depicted as racialized “primordial” emotions continues to play out in the third decade of the twenty-first century and likely beyond (Banks, 1993a, p. 24; Blow, 2023).

James Banks’s ascendancy to the 1997–1998 presidency of American Educational Research Association (AERA) marked a multicultural coming of age for the most prominent interdisciplinary educational research associations in the world. By 1997, AERA was organizationally in the throes of reckoning with its historical “role as guardian of the traditional canon and methodologies of knowledge production related to education [that] have sometimes resulted in maintenance of conditions and processes that often operate in ways that are exclusionary” (Gordon, as cited in

Banks, 2016c, p. 151). As AERA grappled with its exclusionary history, the election of Banks as AERA president elicited grave concerns from conservatives.

Among monoculturalist adversaries of multicultural education such as Sandra Stotsky (1999), a former Massachusetts deputy commissioner of education and past journal editor for the National Council of Teachers of English, no bias supposedly existed in school textbooks from the 1920s into the 1960s *until* the rise of multicultural education (cf. Loewen, 2007). Banks's AERA presidency, along with his multicultural and ethnic studies curricular influence, became a further cause of alarm by such educators and policymakers like Stotsky. In today's historical moment, Banks's thesis of multicultural education as a "total school reform" remains a radical position that stands in opposition to condemnations of "curricular content and pedagogy that enhance group identity and 'redistribute power'" (Stotsky, 1999, p. xv). Banks (1993a) clearly anticipated and recognized, however, "the well-orchestrated attack on multicultural education" as an aspect of what it means to be an American, continually "reshaped, as groups on the margins of society begin to participate in the mainstream and to demand that their visions be reflected in a transformed America" in the quest for *E pluribus unum* (28).

Approaches to Multicultural Education Curriculum Reform

Rather than a one-dimensional construction of multicultural education implementation, Banks highlighted interrelated frameworks that constitute multicultural education. As Banks acknowledges, other scholars in the late 1980s and early 1990s were also offering more dynamic conceptualizations of multicultural education (e.g., Sleeter & Grant, 1988; for summary of other scholarly examples, see Vavrus, 2002, pp. 2–6). "Approaches to Multicultural Education Reform" was Banks's (2012b) initial reform typology that evolved primarily during 1988–1993. The typology included four ideal characteristics of curricular approaches: *contributions*, *additive*, *transformational*, *social action*. Neither the contributions nor additive approaches fundamentally restructure the curriculum. Combined, those pedagogical methods might add to a lesson plan Black and Brown heroes and holidays along with some multicultural perspectives but within the confines of the status quo.

In contrast to the multicultural tokenism of the contributions and additive approaches, transformational and social action methodologies both require pedagogical restructuring. Banks's transformational approach draws from critical theory that problematizes and deconstructs mainstream narratives about which groups reflect a nation's identity. For Banks (2012b), problematizing the curriculum historically requires a transformational process where the "structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups" (1531). His highest level in a transformed curriculum is social action where students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to solve them (1531). With a transformed curriculum, students can begin to see themselves as active citizens, a theme that carries throughout Banks's work. For twenty-first-century critical teacher educators, however, the realization of

Banks's transformed multicultural curriculum can pedagogically, nevertheless, face institutional barriers (Gorski & Parekh, 2020).

The Canon Debate and Knowledge Construction

One of Banks's (1993b) most influential theoretical contributions grapples with a persistent canon debate between Western traditionalists and multiculturalists, acknowledging that each perspective reflects "values, ideologies, political positions, and human interests" (5). To tease apart the complexities of whose knowledge counts as legitimate and worthy of study, Banks provides a typology of interrelated knowledge: (a) personal/cultural knowledge; (b) popular knowledge; (c) mainstream academic knowledge; and (d) transformative academic knowledge, all which filter to varying degrees into (e) school knowledge that students receive.

The ideal type of personal/cultural knowledge falls under what is more commonly referred to as a child's lived experiences, which are independent of the formal school curriculum. Students also learn outside the classroom and home through popular culture sources such as media. With two types of knowledge outside the scope of normative schooling, students also encounter in their classrooms mainstream academic knowledge that consists of "the concepts, paradigms, theories, and explanations that constitute traditional Westerncentric knowledge in history and the behavioral and social sciences" (Banks, 1993b, p. 7). As observed from Banks's racially segregated childhood to our present historical moment, defenders of an exclusionary *mainstream academic knowledge* are in tension with what Banks identifies as *transformative academic knowledge*. The latter represents a type of knowledge intended to "expand and substantially revise established canons, paradigms, theories, explanations, and research methods" (7).

Banks (1993b) explains that mainstream academic knowledge is paraded as neutral and apolitical, whereas transformative educators and researchers "assume that knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by human interests, that all knowledge reflects the power and social relationships within society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society" (9). In his research on transformative academic knowledge, Banks reaches back historically to scholarly efforts from the 1880s to the mid-twentieth century to transform a Eurocentric school curriculum. Among those, he includes are George Washington Williams, Carter G. Woodson, and W. E. B. DuBois while highlighting as well transformative scholars since the 1970s.

Banks (1993b) understands multicultural teaching as a means to help students learn how knowledge is constructed. He emphasizes that teachers and administrators need to provide students "opportunities to investigate and determine how cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and the biases within a discipline influence the ways the knowledge is constructed" (11). Furthermore, students should have opportunities to create knowledge to "identify ways in which the knowledge they construct is influenced and limited by their personal assumptions, positions, and experiences" (11).

In many regards, student learning in a classroom instructional environment operating within Banks's category of transformative academic knowledge reflects assumptions and dialectical applications of critical pedagogy (cf. McLaren, 1989). Approaches to transformative knowledge destabilize the absolutism and purported neutrality of mainstream academic knowledge. The destabilization of mainstream academic knowledge, in tandem with the reconstructive process of transformative academic knowledge, remains a contentious politicized educational topic among competing ideological orientations (Vavrus, 2015, 2022).

Multicultural Education Dimensions

Banks's theoretical and pragmatic multicultural praxis is radical but without necessarily a publicly raised fist. Fundamentally, Banks's conception of multicultural education, nevertheless, serves as a disruptive force to status quo desires of a White supremacist-dominated education. Reinforcing the radical nature of one of Banks's conceptual models that first appeared in the early 1990s, merits a closer look at his typology of five "Dimensions of Multicultural Education" for implementing and increasing the effectiveness of multicultural education: (a) content integration of multicultural perspectives, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) an equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and structure (Banks, 2012c).

In his multidimensional typology, Banks (2012c) notes how too many people assume that multicultural education only pertains to the social studies curriculum and ignore *content integration* opportunities in such disciplines as science, math, and language arts. Hence, his inclusion of *knowledge construction* to help teachers and their students understand "the procedures by which social, behavioral, and natural scientists create knowledge, and how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways that knowledge is constructed within it" (1540). Banks's conceptualization of knowledge construction provides educators a means to teach multicultural education across the school curriculum rather than just being siloed in history and social studies departments.

Synthesizing nearly a century of research, Banks (2012c) forwards the dimension *prejudice reduction* with the aim "to help students develop *democratic* attitudes, values, and behaviors" (1541 emphasis added). In a liberal democracy such as the United States, normative advocacy would encourage democratic values. Yet, Banks's call throughout his career for the development of democratic practices is a radical antithesis to status quo offerings of a limited concept of democracy, which in effect reduces or eliminates any hint of multicultural education from the school curriculum (cf. Gabriel, 2023). Banks further explains that the multicultural dimension *equity pedagogy* "exists when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and social-class groups" (1543). Advocating for an equity pedagogy,

Banks critically summons educators to reevaluate liberal multicultural assertions that all students have an equal chance to learn and participate actively in civil society.

For equity pedagogy and the other interrelated multicultural dimensions to transpire, however, an all-encompassing dimension of an *empowering school culture* is necessary. In other words, Banks recognizes the school as a social system that needs radical restructuring. For example, he names as problematic and in need of reexamination on behalf of historically marginalized students “grouping practices, labeling practices, the social climate of the school, and staff expectations for achievement” (1544). Accordingly, Banks et al. (2001) wrote “Diversity Within Unity: Essential Principles for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society,” an accessible monograph for school administrators and teachers to materially evaluate in detail the daily operations of their schools to realize an educational mission to provide an empowering school culture for *all* children.

Backed by Extensive Research

Critics of multiculturalism resist acknowledging that pedagogical approaches to each multicultural dimension are based on thorough research (cf. Banks, 2012b, pp. 1539–1547). A conservative U.S. Supreme Court majority, for example, chose to ignore the extensive research Banks provides. In *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1* (2007), Chief Justice Roberts infamously used colorblind circular reasoning to rule against Seattle’s plan to racially diversify secondary schools by stating, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race” (748). The majority in that case paid no heed to Justice Breyer’s dissent that documented the benefits of diversity and racial integration and included stellar research from the ground-breaking *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* coedited by James and Cherry A. McGee Banks (1995).

James and Cherry Banks (2004) released a second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*. This edition is a 1100-page collection of 49 chapters by a wide variety of multicultural and ethnic studies luminaries. It contains not only 29 revised chapters from the first edition but also 20 new chapters. The *Handbook* is divided into 12 sections with five key emphases: multicultural education foundations, academic achievement, ethnic groups and language issues, teacher education, and class and international perspectives.

The second edition arrived at the height of efforts to use standardized testing to *quantify* student learning outcomes. The trope of standardized testing in the first two decades of the twenty-first century as *the* educational corrective diverted curricular attention away from multicultural and civic education in U.S. public schools (Au, 2009). In comparison to an exclusive reliance on standardized testing, Banks’s work demands *qualitative* interventions first – an empowering school culture for all children – *before* valid and reliable measurable standardized testing is possible.

The content of the *Handbook* represents a broad consensus on the constructive value of multicultural education to help improve society by reducing existing

undemocratic social, political, and economic barriers that public schools can reproduce. At the core of the *Handbook*, as well as entirety of Banks's corpus, is an effort to interrupt and dislodge the reproduction of schooling inequities that disproportionately affect Brown and Black students. The interrelatedness of both his typologies of multicultural dimensions and approaches to multicultural curriculum reform endures as an invaluable resource for both educational researchers and practitioners in the United States and internationally.

International Perspectives

At the beginning of this century, Banks (2001) acknowledged the formable task to incorporate international perspectives of multicultural education into a globally representative framework. 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" (14). His vast contribution to the field of multicultural education had already accrued for him the honor as the "father of multicultural education." Yet, Banks recognized that multicultural education needed to be extended globally, and he set himself to that self-imposed assignment.

Using papers presented by participants at the 2002 Bellagio (Italy) Citizenship Education and Diversity Conference, Banks (2004) produced the edited *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*. In his introduction to *Race, Culture and Education*, Banks (2006) further 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. He followed up his stated goal with the 550-page edited *Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education* (Banks, 2009c).

At a conference unveiling the publication of the *International Companion*, Banks (2009b) acknowledged the challenge to adequately summarize the wealth of information that was made available in that text. With the *International Companion* Banks emphatically brings forth what he acknowledged was an important missing perspective on global multicultural issues. Banks not only advances his own work on this topic but shares with an international audiences a treasure-trove of 40 peer-reviewed, accessible chapters under the authorship of 48 well-chosen scholars. The *International Companion* both documents the deleterious effects of policies and practices that support a monocultural conception of nation-state citizenship to the detriment of culturally diverse and marginalized populations, as well as proposing transformative alternatives for a more inclusive and equitable world.

Banks is perceptively aware of the consequences of praxis in one of his own authored chapters in the *International Companion*. Under the section on "Citizenship, Immigration, and Education," Banks (2009a) frames multiple ways that citizenship in the nation-state is conceived theoretically and in practice:

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. (316–317)

In his adept use of accessible language, he draws readers in without using the phrase civil disobedience. Yet, civil disobedience – violation of “existing conventions and laws” – is implied as a potential requirement for an equitable social justice outcome to attain a transformative form of citizenship.

Encyclopedic Research Collection

The most daunting and massive undertaking by Banks (2012a) was the creation of his four-volume *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*. Within its 2230 pages, the *Encyclopedia* contains over 600 signed entries with cross-references and recommended readings. Banks devoted 3 years to this project and made “over 500 phone calls...to educators globally” (Baptiste et al., 2014: para. 2). When asked why he undertook such a prodigious endeavor, Banks explained that the *Encyclopedia* “has as a major purpose to legitimize the discipline of multicultural education” (as cited in Baptiste et al., 2014: para. 1).

At the conclusion of the alphabetically organized entries, Banks organized an appended additional 50-page “Diversity in the United States and Other Nations: A Chronology of Key Events and Publications” (2331–2381). This section ambitiously begins with the “estimated age of first fossil records of Indigenous occupation of Australia” (2331) in 50,000 BCE and concludes appropriately with the publication of the *Encyclopedia*. Beyond the main body of the *Encyclopedia*, volume four contains more than 90 pages of a detailed subject and author index for reader accessibility in this far-reaching collection. This unique *Encyclopedia* covers a spectrum of diversity issues that “extend the basic parameters of diversity in multicultural education” (Baptiste et al., 2014: “Commentary” para. 1). Among the broad array of research-focused entries are topics pertaining to race, class, gender, religion, language, exceptionality, classroom practices, immigration, equity, citizenship, global dimensions of diversity, influential organizations, significant contemporary and historical individuals and groups, and key historical events and legal decisions.

New Insights

During the 2010s and 2020s, Banks refined and expanded international perspectives on citizenship. Banks continued with a collaborative approach in an edited text *Global Migration, Diversity, and Civic Education: Improving Policy and Practice* (Banks et al., 2016). Developed out of a National Academy of Education workshop, Banks (2016a) describes the purpose of the text as “ways in which educators can work toward a sustainable version of social cohesion by providing diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups with an education that advances

civic equality, recognition, and structural inclusion” (31). By centering around an institutional goal to advance social cohesion, *Global Migration, Diversity, and Civic Education* extends Banks’s project toward the promise of *E pluribus unum* internationally.

In a contribution to the *Global Migration* text, Banks (2016a) draws primarily from social-psychological research with a critical purpose to develop “a transformative conception of citizenship education” (30). His aim for readers is to consider how culturally responsive teaching can be more inclusive by incorporating a clearer orientation toward civic education in an era of an unprecedented influx internationally of migrant students into public school classrooms. For example, he points to research studies in which immigrant youth “distinguished *national* identity” from “*citizenship*” (42 emphasis in original). Regardless of citizenship status of young people, Banks cautions that “blind nationalism may prevent students from developing reflective and positive global identifications” (45).

For Banks (2020), the subjectivity of his coming-of-age experiences with the alienating characteristics of what he comes to mark as “failed citizenship” serves to inform and frame his analyses of the inequitable access to fundamental rights of citizenship. Banks offers a citizenship typology that moves from “failed citizenship” to that which is “recognized” and “participatory” in the political process, leading ideally to “transformative citizenship” (153–170). It is the critical liminal space of *transformation* that grounds all of Banks’s work here and throughout his career, suggesting that what exists now provides the conditions of possibility for a transition toward a more critically informed civic education and inclusive citizenry.

Legacies and Unfinished Business

The legacy of James Banks rests not only on his prodigious publications but also in the doors he opened for aspiring and established scholars forwarding a diversity of distinctive multicultural standpoints. The author of this biography is just one example of someone who benefited significantly from late-career encouragement to publish on a range of topics – from ideological perspectives on diversity and transforming the multicultural education of teachers to validating the importance to teaching antifascism for civic engagement of young people.

A point noted earlier in this chapter must be reemphasized: Banks’s use of clear and effective language that invites readers into his work. Banks precision and attention to detail is evidenced in his application of Strunk and White’s (1959/1999) *The Elements of Style* which this author directly experienced in a writing critique received once from Banks. The intelligibility of Banks’s prose is also evident in his variety of multicultural and citizenship typologies that remain timely and useful for teacher education programs and for a range of researchers, policymakers, and classroom teachers.

Banks’s legacy is also materially represented in the establishment of the endowed James A. and Cherry A. Banks Professor of Multicultural Education (see University of Washington, 2023a). If Banks left unfinished business, it remains with other

scholars, policymakers, and educators to work toward Banks's objective of an inclusive and empowering *E pluribus unum*. In a current era of political, economic, racialized divisiveness and efforts toward exclusivity, Banks has more than laid out comprehensive educational counter-strategies toward the realization *E pluribus unum*, an ideal that remains unfulfilled.

Conclusion

With national and international academic awards and recognition, myriad analyses and conceptual frameworks, and collaborative involvement of other researchers and educators, James Banks is rightfully the preeminent scholar of multicultural civic education. Multicultural citizenship educators and researchers are asked to remain mindful of Banks's counsel to work toward a more just world:

As educators we must be hopeful, and we must have faith that our work will make a difference. Faith and hope enable us to wake up every morning and to keep going – believing that we can make a difference. Without faith and hope we are immobilized. (Banks, as cited in Kelly, 2020: “Do you remain hopeful” para. 2)

In effect, the “father of multicultural education” leaves educators and policymakers with the counsel to collectively not abandon the struggle for equity and instead continue to work toward a more just and humane world for all.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Ladson-Billings, Gloria](#)
- ▶ [Lee, Carol](#)
- ▶ [Milner, Rich](#)
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