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Book Review: Redefining Multicultural Education: Inclusion and the Right to be Different

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Book Review

Redefining Multicultural Education: Inclusion and the Right to be Different. (2014). By Ratna Ghosh & Mariusz Galczynski (3rd edition). Toronto, Canadian Scholars' Press. 232 pages. ISBN: 9781551306285

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Multiculturalism is a term which means different things to different people depending on where they stand on the political spectrum and their position on race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Multicultural education is as vague, and differently-understood as multiculturalism itself. It is “a labyrinth of assertions and assumptions” (p. 26) which makes little sense to teachers and students (Carlson, 1976). Adam-Moodley (1986) concludes that multicultural education in Canada is essentially a superimposition on Anglo-Saxon curriculum. She acknowledges the difference in educational policies and practices at provincial and board levels due to the lack of a national policy on multicultural education. Furthermore, she suggests that while some see the current praxis of multicultural education as a boost for self-concept of minority students, others view it “as a superficial palliative, which does little to combat the problems of language education, inequality of access and the covert racism that differentiates between physically assimilable minorities and visible ones” (p. 12). Ratna Ghosh and Mariusz Galczynski do not have a flattering picture of multicultural education either and hence, have attempted to redefine culture, *and more importantly in my view, education, in their book.*

For Ghosh and Galczynski, education is much more than schooling and the primary goal of education is not training students for work and giving them required “skills” for jobs. They argue that “education is not a matter of accumulating knowledge and skills; it involves acquiring “conceptual schemes”-forming links and understanding ideas. [...] To be educated is to have a voice, which implies knowledge as power. To be educated is to have the ability to influence one’s personal and social environment.” (p. 61). This view of education guides all their discussions in the book. In fact, as authors argue, if preparing students for democratic citizenship and international communication is not among the goals of education, there is no rationale for multicultural education (p. 125). Multicultural education only makes sense if we extend our “vision beyond purely utilitarian interpretations educational goals” (p. 134). In this redefined version, “the basic aim of education is empowerment” (p. 84) and “an education that neglects the ethical questions of democracy is irresponsible and can be described as miseducation.” (p. 85)

Now we can ask: “how about culture? What is it?” Defining culture without engaging in theoretical debates is not an easy task; however, Ghosh and Galczynski, are quite certain that viewing culture as “exotic elements of ethnic cultures” (p. 33) is problematic. The authors start with a working definition of culture as “a way of seeing the world in terms of cognition, emotion, and behaviour” (p. 6) and then give a detailed explanation of different components of culture. Since there are different ways of seeing the world, they elaborate on elaborate on the construction of differences in terms of identity, privilege, and empowerment. This deconstruction brings them to the basis of difference i.e., race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical dis/ability, and social class. These components, therefore, are at the heart of multicultural education which, as such is *political and all about power.* While at one point the

authors mention the “interlocking” effect of these components, absent from the discussion an elaboration of the issue of intersectionality (when these components intersect).

Redefining Multicultural Education begins with an introductory chapter which lays out its basic concepts. Moreover, this chapter discusses all students’ right to be different and argues that rather than focusing on minority students, multicultural education should be about all students. Chapter two gives a brief history of multicultural education for English Canada, Quebec, and aboriginal peoples. The section devoted to English Canada is almost one third of the next two sections. While this history documents the policies introduced in different provinces, it does not explain the extent and quality of the implementation of those policies. For example, while we read about the introduction of anti-racist education policy in Ontario in 1993, we don’t read how it was almost shelved later (Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2012). In this chapter, I expected to see a parallel history of the ideology of multiculturalism in Canada and its ups and downs with changing political atmosphere of the country and the world. If as many argue, we have witnessed a retreat of multiculturalism in Canada from the mid-1980’s (e.g., Elliston, 1996), then the new directions of multicultural education in Canada would make better sense. Also, we would have a more realistic picture of the future of the field. In order to move forward, we need to know what research says about the *current* situation of multicultural education in Canada. How well/badly are we doing now?

Chapter 3 discusses the educational framework in which multicultural education is possible. Chapter 4 is on the school environment and how it shapes students’ experiences. The hidden curriculum, bullying and cyberbullying, culture clash, and discipline are among topics discussed in this chapter which usually do not appear in “traditional” books on multiculturalism. Instead of avoiding “controversial” topics, the authors have gathered a good collection of most of the educational issues which made the news headlines. Many of these issues are *very recent* and among the additions to the third edition of the book.

Chapter 5 on teacher education and classroom interaction, in my view, is the most important part of the book because of teachers’ crucial role. For Ghosh and Galczynski, there are two problems with teacher education programs: change is slow in faculties of education and their programs are often defined by governments. They call for urgent change in these programs and discuss areas that need change, as well as the resistance to change. I wish they had reported the research which has documented the situation of teacher education programs as well as existing teachers’ attitude toward multicultural education. Such a report would clearly demonstrate the changes that they have called for. The final chapter discusses teaching strategies and evaluation. In every single topic discussed in the book, the authors go head-on into political and power aspects which are often neglected.

The book ends with a very useful annotated list of websites on multicultural education and I wish they had added a list of useful books which discuss more specific strategies for and challenges of multicultural education in science and mathematics, two areas which are traditionally perceived “neutral” or “acultural”. I conclude this review with one final suggestion. There are *many* statements in the book that reflect results from research, but have not been backed up by the relevant research. While for the people in the field, these may seem as “common sense” (I personally cannot disagree with or challenge any of them), they need to be referenced. For example, “studies indicate when people feel part of the policy and process of change...” (p. 24), “ethnographic research in many Canadian schools reveals...” (p. 98), and “studies show that motivators, learning styles, behaviour patterns...” (p. 134). Despite the points

discussed here, I think this is an excellent book because of its holistic view of culture and education and also because of its integrative approach to multicultural education.

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