

James A. Banks. *Diversity, Transformative Knowledge, and Civic Education: Selected Essays*. New York: Routledge, 2020. 235 pp. \$124.00 (cloth); \$47.95 (paper).

In this enlightening book, James A. Banks begins by reflecting upon his early schooling to highlight the factors that played a central role in shaping his life course as the seminal intellectual figure of modern multicultural education. Foremost among these was the lack of attention, with only a few exceptions, to the contributions of African Americans to the building of the United States. Although this was problematic enough, perhaps the most vexing element of his social studies curriculum was the “happy slave” narrative. As Banks notes, the “Blacks in my community were not happy about the racism and discrimination that we experienced, which made me wonder how the slaves could have been happy” (4). More positively, Banks credits his African American teachers with conveying “ethnic pride, patriotism, and democratic ideals in our tightly segregated Black school in Lee County, Arkansas in the 1950s” (6). Both aspects of his early schooling shaped his work as a fifth-grade teacher in Chicago, Illinois, before he moved on to earning a doctorate, becoming a leading intellectual figure, and transforming the way education professionals think about citizenship education.

The cognitive dissonance provoked by the “happy slaves” claim stimulated a set of questions that shaped Banks’s career. That this narrative was perpetrated under the guise of public education made it even more outrageous. Banks’s extensive corpus of work can be interpreted as an opposing argument to what counted as official knowledge before the epistemological revolutions of the twentieth century demanded answers to questions such as: How do we know what we know? Why do we believe what we believe? Who counts as an authority on these matters?

The answers to these questions, admittedly often still contested, shape understanding of “truths” about the past and present as well as judgments about what forms of knowledge are so worthwhile that they belong in school and college curriculum. Given the central purpose of social studies as citizenship education, these questions are by no means merely academic ones.

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Instead, they gesture to questions of inclusion and exclusion, voice and standing, agency and authority, mutual regard and respect of other citizens in ways that extend beyond the walls of schools toward social standing and civic polity writ large. In short, what we learn as children informs how we think about and what we owe other citizens as members of a democracy. False narratives learned at school have tangible, often damaging, consequences.

Along with other scholars in the humanities and social sciences, especially persons of color and feminists, Banks challenged the normative and epistemological frameworks undergirding curriculum. Beginning with his doctoral dissertation on the image of African Americans in social studies textbooks in 1969, Banks has developed an unparalleled body of work devoted to critiquing and reshaping the narratives, questions, and issues that comprise educational research and practice, in and well beyond the domain of social studies.

The essays contained in this volume provide a window into the evolution of Banks's thinking across decades, with ever-widening circles of application of his theoretical and conceptual frameworks to arenas beyond curriculum toward transformative school reform. These platforms for change are in thoroughgoing assessments of school culture, leadership, and all aspects of teaching and learning and encourage transformation, not tinkering. Several decades ago, his ideas moved well beyond the boundaries of the United States into different national contexts in East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East where scholars have taken up his writing as tools to critique their own educational systems.

During Banks's long tenure at the University of Washington, he forged an extensive network of collaborators that provides testimony to both his academic stature and his generosity of spirit that one often does not find in prominent intellectuals. This network is especially apparent in his *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, coedited with his spouse and frequent collaborator, Cherry McGee Banks (2004), and the four volumes of his *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education* (2012), as well as his other edited books, for example, on the history of multicultural education (1996), the issues and perspectives of multicultural education (in its tenth edition as of 2020), and citizenship education and global migration (2017).

These masterworks reflect Banks's international standing as the preeminent scholar on issues of diversity and citizenship in education. In addition, since the 1970s, abundant evidence exists of his broad circle of colleagues and friends, from William Joyce and Jean Dresden Grambs to Carlos Cortes and Geneva Gay, to name just a few. Although the explicit goal of this book is to provide an overview of Banks's thinking on diversity and citizenship education, implicitly it also offers a portrait of the humanity and generosity

of this man. As author and editor, he has applied his own prescriptions for inclusion by providing space for other scholars, male and female, of color or not, to participate in the creative act of writing for publication, with the goal of transforming schooling and society.

In his introductory essay, Banks is mindful of the fact that new generations of readers will not necessarily be familiar with the debates rocking the worlds of higher education and K–12 schooling at the time each essay was written. He provides helpful commentary about what he was trying to accomplish in crafting each piece in response to the debates of the day. He credits formative intellectual influences, citing several times, for example, the work of feminist philosophers such as Lorraine Code and Iris Marion Young and historians such as Carter G. Woodson and John Hope. He notes the impact on his thinking of classical works by Gordon Allport and Gunnar Myrdal on prejudice and the “American dilemma” of racism, respectively. These examples offer only a small glimpse into the breadth of academic domains and wide-ranging intellectual influences that Banks cites in these essays.

The book is divided into three sections. In part one, “Race, Knowledge Construction, and Transformative Curriculum Reform,” Banks takes up the idea of positionality and explains the ways he put this concept to use in developing his theories of curricular transformation. One of the articles included in this section is his 1998 presidential address for the American Educational Research Association (AERA). In this talk, he examines the legacy of social scientists such as Kenneth B. Clark, Franz Boas, and John Hope Franklin, who might be considered his intellectual forebears in shaping views on race and racism, cultural relativism, and African American history. Part two, “Cultural Democracy and Civic Education in Diverse Nations,” provides a response to advocates of assimilation who demand giving up one’s ethnic or religious heritage as the price for becoming American. Here, Banks defines cultural democracy as “cultural and political freedom” for groups and individuals living in a democratic society to retain their heritage, language, and culture (131). Drawing upon the early twentieth-century ideas of writers such as Horace Kallen and Julius Drascher, cultural democracy posits the image of new Americans being incorporated into the society as less melting pot and more mosaic. These ideas build upon the first article featured in this section—Banks’s 1982 presidential address for the annual conference of the National Council for the Social Studies. His thinking on the connections between multicultural education and citizenship education gain new purchase in his keynote address delivered at the establishment of the Korean Association for Multicultural Education in 2009. In a later chapter, he notes the

importance of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogical theories to the work of civic education (167).

The third and final section of the book, “Diversity, Global Migration, and Civic Education,” signals most explicitly the broad international dissemination of Banks’s writings. Worldwide, migration has accelerated dramatically over the last 40 years, bringing new residents, languages, and cultures into traditional societies in Europe and Asia that were previously characterized by social homogeneity and restrictive approaches to citizenship status. Viewed cross-culturally, the challenges to political, social, and economic arrangements in these societies brought on by these new residents have manifested themselves in terms of tensions within their educational systems. As Banks notes in the chapter on failed citizenship in this section, some migrants never become fully incorporated into the body politic of these societies due to structural exclusion and discrimination (160ff.). Failed citizens are those individuals who are either born or live in a nation but who have failed to “internalize the values and ethos of the nation-state, feel structurally excluded within it, and have highly ambivalent feeling towards it” (155). He also addresses the role schools can play in alleviating the problem of failed citizenship. In this section, too, Banks includes ideas about cosmopolitanism and global citizenship that pertain to individuals whose sense of belonging and attachment due to migration is to multiple nations and ethnic identities.

By way of wrapping up, I highlight several key features that characterize all eight chapters of the book. I consider these elements as touchstones of Banks’s signature approach to multicultural education, diversity, and citizenship education.

The first is a concern for practical applications of his theories and conceptualizations. This concern can be seen most prominently not only in his earlier publications such as textbooks and curriculum guidelines (found in an appendix that includes most of his works) but also in his more contemporary writing aimed at scholarly audiences in outlets such as *Educational Researcher*. He clearly has multiple audiences in mind—scholars, practitioners, policy makers, teacher educators, and teachers—and aims at influencing change systemically and comprehensively.

Given the shifting demographics of the public schools and nation as a whole, this comprehensive approach is critical. As in the past, most US teachers are European American in background. In his chapter on the canon debates from 1991, Banks cites the figure of 13 percent as the percentage of teachers who are ethnic minorities. The number of White teachers remains around 80 percent in 2020, but students of color have now become the

majority of students in the nation's public schools. In this chapter, Banks acknowledges that even within this overwhelmingly White profession, significant diversity of ethnicity, religion, and region among practitioners can be drawn upon as a resource for talking about difference and encouraging multiple perspectives in students. He calls upon teachers and administrators to create democratic classrooms where students become "critical consumers of knowledge as well as knowledge producers" (34)—advice that remains perhaps even more important now than then to the enterprise of schooling, given the problems that social media have created in circulating what has been called "fake news."

Second, at the heart of Banks's scholarship remains a concern with citizenship education. Depending on how readers first encounter his massive body of work, they may not see the connections between multicultural education and civic education as clearly as one who has had the benefit of reading it over time. To be sure, multicultural education is a theory about transforming curriculum and teaching. As Banks makes clear in several textbooks on this topic, as well as here (33), multicultural education also demands a thorough reconsideration of how schools are organized, how parents are engaged, and who is doing the teaching, among other issues, alongside reexamination of the content of the curriculum. The aim is to make schools more democratic and inclusive in their approach to democracy, and Banks cites John Dewey as a formative intellectual influence in this regard.

Throughout this book, Banks includes several chapters that drive home the connections between multicultural education and civic education. Implicated more prominently in recent years as Banks's orientation has become more global is explicit attention to human rights and how these shape schooling, citizenship, and citizenship education. As he reminds us repeatedly, the future of democracy rests upon the internalization of democratic ideals and values. In the United States, the enactment of democratic and multicultural education means inclusion of African American, Native American, and Latinx content, for example, in the classroom. In Latin America and Africa, the approach points toward shifting curriculum away from the histories of colonizers and conquest to investigations of the original cultures, especially their efforts at emancipation.

A third feature found across these chapters is his use of categorizing strategies for wrestling complex conceptualizations into digestible frameworks. As an accomplished social scientist steeped in the importance of generating theory, Banks regularly accomplishes this goal by producing typologies that serve as schema for considering how multicultural and diversity education can be considered and enacted. For example, he provides a table on page 22 representing the "types of knowledge" students bring to the process of education

(i.e., personal/cultural, popular, mainstream academic, transformative academic, and school), and on page 23 he includes a diagram of the interrelationships across these types of knowledge.

In so doing, Banks advocates for recognition that students bring multiple forms of understanding into classrooms; that students are not empty vessels who come to school without “culture.” Likewise, school knowledge (i.e., “the facts, concepts, generalizations and interpretations that are presented in textbooks, teachers’ guides, other media forms, and lectures by teachers” [22]) ought to be considered only a subset of academic knowledge, and, indeed, is often a fossilized one. For example, the “happy slaves’ narrative,” which owed more to early twentieth-century historians (e.g., Ulrich Phillips, 65) than to leading-edge mid-twentieth-century historians such as John Hope Franklin (81), reflects this problem of educational lag time between academic research and textbook formulation. As Banks notes, the task of teachers is to “free students from their cultural and ethnic boundaries and enable them to cross cultural borders freely” (25), or what has sometimes been called the “windows-and-mirrors” approach to teaching and learning, whereas the task of scholars is to expand human knowledge, including correcting mistakes of the past.

Another example of typology can be found in the chapter on insiders and outsiders as researchers (73): the indigenous insider, the indigenous outsider, the external insider, and the external outsider. Delivered as his AERA presidential address, Banks speaks to a lively debate of the time period about this matter, but, as always, he is fair and thoughtful in considering the advantages and disadvantages of each category of researcher. Although he quotes James Baldwin at the end of this chapter (86), his overall theme would seem to be more sanguine than the judgment Baldwin made on the ability of White scholars and teachers to understand and empathize, if not fully, then partially, with students and communities of color.

In expanding his focus in later writing toward issues of global diversity, Banks provides other categorical schemes to illuminate his topics. On page 118, he offers “principles and concepts for educating citizens in a global age.” On page 123, he presents a “Stages of Cultural Development Typology” that includes six categories, from a developmental starting point in cultural psychological captivity and ethnocentrism, to multiculturalism and reflective nationalism, to globalism and global competency, or cosmopolitanism. As with all typologies or conceptualizations, Banks acknowledges that these typologies include “ideal types” whose boundaries have fluid borders and are imperfect conceptualizations of complex phenomena. He sees their contribution lying not in pigeonholing people into boxes with rigid borders so much as assisting them in thinking about complex processes more fluidly,

such as those associated with the dynamics of personhood and sociocultural identity, social change, and educational transformation.

The last two chapters provide perspectives forged—at least in part, one assumes—from contemporary realities as seen in the rise of autocratic regimes and repression of human rights worldwide. Here, too, Banks employs typology as a heuristic device. Besides failed citizenship, his citizenship typology includes recognized, participatory, and transformative forms. He notes the connection and distinction between his framework and the widely circulated formulation of Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne in a piece, “What Kind of Citizen?” published in the *American Educational Research Journal* in 2004.

Given recent events in and beyond this nation, the prominence of cosmopolitanism in Banks’s later chapters provokes a certain nostalgia in this reader for a more hopeful time when social trust seemed greater and optimism about the future higher. Here, too, Banks provides a typology, “civic education programs for noncitizen and citizen” (179), that includes distinct approaches to human rights/citizenship education and multicultural citizenship education. Banks considers the former as the major focus of civic education for noncitizen students and the latter as the major focus for “citizen students who experience failed citizenship and structural exclusion” (178–9). Although heuristically distinct, Banks indicates that the two forms of education are interrelated.

As I read this book, I could not help but think about the faith Banks exhibits throughout these chapters in the power of knowledge to produce transformative educational and social change. If there is anything missing from these inspiring pages it is, perhaps, greater recognition of the nonrational and emotional elements that political scientists tell us shape tribalism in American society and the stubborn ways of individuals in clinging to psychologically protective modes of thinking about their own status and that of the “other.” Sadly, we have come to understand better today the degree to which rational argumentation and the accumulation of evidence (i.e., facts) are often weak interventions in altering people’s minds or motivating positive change. Banks’s faith in rational processes, cogent arguments, and clear conceptualizations is grounded in faith that others will be moved along a path toward social justice transformation on the basis of platforms such as his. Although this may be true of some people, one wishes that greater numbers would find such strategies of persuasion effective in shedding racist and White supremacist orientations in schooling and society.

Moreover, Banks believes that White people are capable of building knowledge, developing empathy, and exhibiting compassion for people of color,

even if they may never completely overcome the legacy of being born and reared in a racist country. Banks has devoted his life's work to using education as a means to understand, respect, and value others whose experiences have been different from their own. In so doing, he believes that we can engage with others empathetically and compassionately, perhaps even becoming citizens dedicated to creating a more just and inclusive democracy. Whether that is possible for schools or society remains an open question. Nevertheless, the future of this democracy depends on the will to change and the ability to carry out such a vision. These chapters provide powerful prescriptions toward those ends.

*By Margaret Smith Crocco*

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