

Book Review

Kellie Rolstad
Arizona State University

Ovando, C. J., & McLaren, P. (2000). *The politics of multiculturalism and bilingual education: Students and teachers caught in the cross fire*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

This anthology provides a powerful blend of theoretical and practical discussion, representing a wide range of ideological convictions from some of the foremost intellectuals in the fields of multiculturalism and bilingual education. Professors and graduate students co-authored several pieces, adding voices which will resonate strongly with the book's intended audience of undergraduate and graduate students.

Part 1, the Moral and Political Cross Fires of Multiculturalism, focuses on the theoretical conflicts and ideologies affecting the field of multiculturalism. Part 2, Teachers and Students Caught in the Cross Fire, highlights the more immediate effects of politics on teaching and learning in schools. Both parts reflect issues that deeply concern multicultural and bilingual educators today, with reference to some of the latest developments in these fields, such as Crawford's analysis of California's 1998 initiative outlawing bilingual education. The relevance of this book for both scholars and students interested in multicultural and bilingual education is clear, particularly given the thought-provoking nature of each of the articles and the range of ideas presented.

In the first chapter, the Political Life of Language Metaphors in Writings About Diversity in Education, Pugh, Ovando, and Schonemann explore the power of language to shape and reinforce our awareness of difference and similarity and to guide our perceptions of self and others, focusing on the metaphorical nature of language and how metaphors can highlight or hide selected aspects of reality. They discuss how metaphors can be manipulated by powerful groups to influence policy and maintain the subordination of oppressed groups. The authors urge that students learn to analyze metaphors so that they can critique their inherent values and messages. A sample of metaphors of the senses, of conflict and pathology, and of geography, drawn from writings on multicultural issues, provides a basis for exploring how a dialectical approach to metaphor analysis can fire students' moral imaginations, leading them to "develop a concept of shared humanity that renders social injustice and other forms of violence unacceptable" (p. 18). In order to effectively teach metaphor analysis, teachers themselves must become much more sensitive to the pervasiveness of metaphors in thought and expression. This chapter provides teachers with an excellent introduction to the double-edged nature of metaphorical thinking in its ability to help or harm both comprehension and communication, to expand or to limit understanding.

In Chapter 2, *Contesting Whiteness: Critical Perspectives on the Struggle for Social Justice*, McLaren and Muñoz criticize mainstream multicultural education as insufficiently radical to solve the problems it is intended to address—those of systematic racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of institutionalized oppression. Multiculturalism tends to treat these elements as artifacts of psychological disposition—a state of mind that is constrained primarily by the desire of a given individual to change—rather than an institutionalized foundation of capitalism. The authors suggest that this approach to multicultural education is not only ineffective in its scope but actually damages the cause of achieving social justice, because it distracts from and even undermines the struggle against capitalism and white supremacy. They argue persuasively that white supremacy can hardly be fought as long as multicultural education entails such,

a limited amount of critical discussion of the history, construction, and representation of whiteness, particularly with respect to its ability to remain the presumed default setting for so much of mainstream American culture, social relations and intellectual activity (p. 35).

Instead, the authors propose a revolutionary multiculturalism that attacks global capitalism as the foundation of oppression. Meanwhile, the authors acknowledge that less thorough reforms may constitute necessary first steps in the struggle for peace and justice. This acknowledgment may encourage current and prospective teachers to take those first steps toward building a less racist and more progressive society, working within the sphere of their immediate influence, namely, the classroom.

In Chapter 3, *the War Against Cultural Politics: Beyond Conservative and Neo-Enlightenment Left “Oppositions”: A Critique*, Giroux decries the inaccurate portrayal of cultural politics by critics—conservative, liberal, and neo-leftist—who variously link multiculturalism with such horrors as anti-Americanism, a decline in standards, and a weak substitution for more traditional class-based political struggle. Giroux depicts these strange bedfellows as “display[ing] a similar contempt for cultural politics, popular culture, cultural pedagogy, and differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation” (p. 54). He addresses the powerful role that popular culture plays in the lives of students and urges the incorporation of a variety of media not only for students to view, analyze, and critique, but to be created by students themselves. He challenges educators to rethink how traditional modes of education might benefit from such new forms of cultural pedagogy. In order to strengthen the relationship between democracy and schooling, Giroux urges educators to “expand and apply the principles of diversity, dialogue, compassion, and tolerance in their classrooms,” since “bigotry, not difference, is the enemy of democracy” (p. 60). Further, students must be taught to recognize the value of multiple literacies and the dangers of racist culture so that they can participate in the transformation of “those racial, social, and economic inequities that impede democratic social relations” (p. 60).

Chapter 4, *Multiculturalism and Religion*, addresses the lack of inclusion of religious teachings in multicultural education. Due in part to the prevalence of religion in American life, religion is typically studied within multicultural education in two of its primary roles: as an important, valued component of specific cultures, and as an oppressive force against tolerance and multiculturalism. In this article, Nord argues for the inclusion of religion in multicultural education, contending that the absence of a religious approach to the curriculum constitutes an oppression of the very sort that multiculturalism is meant to fight. However, much of the difficulty in maintaining Nord's position lies in the inherent intolerance of many religions, which stands at cross-purposes with multicultural education's primary message regarding unity and celebration of differences.

In this chapter, Nord wonders why religion is "ignored" by multiculturalists who are much more concerned with fighting racism, sexism, homophobia, and linguistic expression—systematic forms of oppression which are institutionalized in the United States. If religion were not itself already institutionalized in American life, the avoidance of overt religious instruction might conceivably constitute the sort of "passive hostility" that Nord claims it does; yet, religious instruction is well established. Parents who feel their children need additional religious instruction have the option of placing them in private religious schools. Nord's fear that religion is being relegated to a position of unconcern by multiculturalists is probably due to the fact that religion already has far more supporters than detractors, and the oppression of religious groups simply does not approach the level of crisis currently seen in conflicts related to racism, sexism, and other severe forms of oppression. Historically, religion—especially fundamentalism—has often been used to promote these very forms of oppression. This chapter does argue effectively that rather than being merely neutral, "public schooling takes sides; it encourages students to think (and feel) about the world in secular rather than religious ways" (p. 75), and may well be of interest to educators concerned with a stronger inclusion of issues of morality in education.

In Chapter 5, *the Politics of Multiculturalism: A Three-Country Comparison*, Laine and Sutton compare multiculturalist thought in the United States, Canada, and Australia, three countries with common historical and social threads as "Anglo-settler states with subjugated native populations" (p. 82). They argue that the United States' lack of federal leadership "around issues of culture, national identity, ethnicity, and economic opportunity has left educators—arguably the primary transmitters of American culture—without a common vision of what it means to be a multicultural American" (p. 82). The result is that "teachers and students are frequently caught in the cross fire," struggling to cope as best they can with the realities of pluralistic life. Canada and Australia are represented as having successfully shifted debate "away from an exclusive focus on assimilation of differences toward a discourse of effective respect for differences" (p. 84). These countries tend to view culture and multiculturalism as characteristics of the society as a whole;

the United States, by contrast, continues to view them as characteristics of individuals, a view with very different policy outcomes.

Laine and Sutton posit an interesting explanation of the nature of the governments in these countries, suggesting that perhaps the stronger identification with group authority in parliamentary systems lends itself better to the acceptance of group identities. They add, however, that “the legal rather than the political system of the United States constantly reinforces individual over group identities” (p. 99). The authors contend that this strong sense of individualism is antithetical to multiculturalism, and that only by shifting our focus to include “the centrality of cultures to human life” (p. 100) will the many cultural groups in the United States be able to find truly common ground.

The second part of the book, highlighting political effects on teachers and students, begins with Chapter 6, *Language Politics in the United States: The Paradox of Bilingual Education*. Crawford outlines the legal history of bilingual education in the United States and discusses the paradox of bilingual education, which is that while 30 years ago bilingual education enjoyed broad support, despite a virtual lack of research showing its pedagogical effectiveness, today, with 30 years of evidence showing that it is indeed effective, bilingual education is widely vilified by politicians and laymen alike, unjustly blamed for all sorts of social and academic ills. Crawford ascribes this in part to the intuitive link made by the public from bilingual education to “the legitimization of ‘bilingualism’ in public contexts” (p. 108) and to the perception of increased diversity that has accompanied a rise in immigration. More fundamentally, however, Crawford traces today’s public confusion regarding the effectiveness of bilingual education to confusion over its goals, whether it is meant to teach English, encourage bilingualism, provide equal opportunities, and so forth. He traces this confusion, in turn, to the original confusions over the goal of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. Crawford asserts that it was never clear whether the act was intended as an antipoverty initiative, an antidiscrimination measure, or an experiment in multicultural education to foster bilingualism. He relates these varied goals to Ruiz’s (1984) distinctions among language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource, respectively. These various approaches have resulted in the bilingual paradox we find today, and, as Crawford argues, only clarity of purpose can enable parents to unite in activism to support bilingual education. Without parental support and activism, there is little that bilingual educators and advocates can do to help rescue bilingual education for language minority children.

Chapter 7, *Beyond Adversarial Discourse: Searching for Common Ground in the Education of Bilingual Students*, also addresses bilingual education in the United States. Cummins relates much of the public controversy regarding bilingual education to the confounding of psychoeducational and sociopolitical issues. Given that Cummins’ research and theory have profoundly influenced debate among both researchers and the public, Cummins attempts to summarize and defend his views. He recapitulates his distinctions between conversational and academic language proficiency made in Cummins

(1981a), subtractive and additive bilingualism (Cummins, 1978, originally due to Lambert & Tucker, 1972), and common and separate underlying proficiency (Cummins, 1981b). He then reports some of the misconceptions and distortions of these principles, clarifies the misinterpretations, and provides a compelling critique of the arguments of several prominent opponents of bilingual education. Cummins concludes, through his critiques, that “when the adversarial screen of courtroom discourse is lifted, there is actually much that advocates and opponents of bilingual education can agree on” (p. 143), particularly with respect to dual immersion or two-way bilingual programs, and that the primary concern should be to promote instruction “that affirms the value of students’ cultural and linguistic identity and offers students opportunities to develop powerful intellectual and linguistic tools to act on the social realities that affect their lives” (p. 143).

Chapter 8, the Politics of Bilingual Immersion Programs, discusses the politics of bilingual education in Texas. Ovando and Pérez present three cases of partial English immersion programs for Spanish-speaking students, which were implemented in the eighties in an atmosphere that was largely anti-bilingual education. According to the authors, the issues in Texas were,

narrowed down to how much native culture and language was to be included in the curriculum, the degree of urgency in the rate at which English was to be acquired, and subtle but important differences about the legitimacy of Spanish or other ‘foreign’ languages in the public school (p. 157).

The differences in attitude are described as either that of “temporary tolerance” in English immersion programs or that of valuing the first language in bilingual programs. Unfortunately, even transitional bilingual education programs focus more on ‘transitional’ than on ‘bilingual,’ hence supporting the “temporary tolerance” view. Worse yet, Ovando and Pérez assert that “many Texas transitional bilingual education programs are in reality more like immersion programs” (p. 157) (meaning by “immersion programs” what is often called “submersion” because of the typically negative outcomes).

Ovando and Pérez lighten this rather dismal portrait of bilingual education in Texas with their consequent contrasting description of a two-way immersion program in southern Texas. In this program,

The native Spanish speakers and the native English speakers learn to work cooperatively with each other in the two-way classroom environment. An embrace rather than rejection of cultural diversity becomes the established school norm, and both languages are valued equally (p. 157),

as each group learns the other’s language while experiencing high degrees of academic success.

In Chapter 9, *In Search of a New Border Pedagogy: Sociocultural Conflicts Facing Teachers and Students Along the U.S.-Mexico Border*, Calderón and Carreón set out to create a new pedagogical framework for educating language

minority students, posing important questions about the future development of border pedagogy. Border pedagogy should challenge educational reformers “to appreciate and capitalize on the diversity of their students” (p. 168) since “attempting to assimilate students into a ‘mainstream culture’ does not work, because the ‘mainstream culture’ along the border is very different from what the schools have erroneously attempted to establish all these years” (p. 168). The authors highlight the role that principals, teachers, and teacher educators can play in transforming school culture. They argue strongly for multicultural education in emphasizing that because school culture ignores the identity of students, language minority students who successfully navigate the educational system, even those who become school principals, are not necessarily any better prepared to promote the effective education of other language minority students. “Racism and the boundaries of power marginalize and continually oppress even those who rise to power” (p. 169). Calderón and Carreón describe the major conflicts for teachers, principals, parents, communities, etc., but characterize them as opportunities to address needs and meet challenges. They present some promising practices of a new border pedagogy, ranging from dual language programs to teachers’ learning communities (TLCs), which encourage teachers to work together to continually improve learning and working in schools.

Chapter 10, *Crossing Borders: The Politics of Schooling Asian Students*, describes interviews with East Asian immigrant students about their experiences in U.S. high schools. Here, Minami identifies a need for teachers and policy makers to change the way immigrant students are treated in schools. He finds support for the claim by Hakuta (1986) and other researchers that there is a common assumption in the United States that immigrant students should only be concerned with learning English, and that their further educational needs and interests tend to be put on the back burner. Minami considers the lack of parallel between Asian students’ early socialization in the home language and culture and later school socialization in the United States, and describes the conflicts that typically ensue. These conflicts may be intrapersonal, affecting students’ feelings, understandings, and motivations, and they may be interpersonal, affecting, for example, teachers’ tendency to attribute Asian students’ passive, observational style and lack of participation in classroom interactions to a lack of interest or intelligence. On yet another level, Minami has found effects of these socialization differences in tracking, with only the most vocal and assertive of Asian immigrant students being allowed to push for inclusion in the higher-level courses.

Meanwhile, students consigned to ESL classrooms and low-demand remedial content courses expressed either frustration that their intellectual needs were not met, or satisfaction that at least their ESL classes provided a safe, comfortable, supportive learning environment. Whether their experiences were negative or positive seemed to depend on the quality of the individual ESL classroom, and Minami concludes that teachers can maximize the participation of all students by being sensitive to their backgrounds and

needs. Unfortunately, the problem of providing intellectually challenging content to students who are at various stages of learning English remains unaddressed for many of these students.

In Chapter 11, *With, Not For: The Politics of Service Learning in Multicultural Communities*, O'Grady and Chappell are concerned with the question of how to provide white college students with a community service experience that has the potential to transform them into truly multicultural people. In their touchingly honest reflections on teaching and learning in a course designed to prepare pre-service teachers to work successfully in a diverse society, the authors reveal many of the conflicts and fears faced by even the most enlightened of activists committed to social justice. O'Grady and Chappell were struck by the realization that for white students volunteering in communities of color, the service component of the course was actually reinforcing racism and negative stereotypes. The service requirement had been initiated because O'Grady felt that in a course (and in college), "in which all or most of the students are white, voices of marginalized peoples must somehow be brought into the classroom so that dominant-group students learn to identify the social relations that lead to social inequity" (p. 213). Unfortunately, what she found by reading student journals and in consultation with Chappell, then a student in the course, was that as a result of tutoring Latino children, many students came away blaming the children, their families, and/or their language and culture for their socioeconomic and educational difficulties.

The authors attribute their misplacement of blame in part to a lack of opportunity for students to engage with the children's parents and wider communities. By restricting students' exposure to children within schools, the service experience obscured the presence and the involvement of parents, many of them migrant workers, in the lives of their children. O'Grady confesses her own fears and biases and how they led her to "avoid potential conflict with members of a racial group different than my own," with one result being the exclusion of the larger issues from students' experiences. Hence, in the end, white students were not able to truly empathize with members of a subordinated group, nor were they able to analyze education as a social institution or critique the social dynamics of racism and poverty that contribute to the inequities they witnessed in the schools. Instead, the white students managed to maintain their positions "in the center of the experience" (p. 219), with little concern for the wider interests of the children or their community. In Chappell's words, "my experiential learning may have been at some cost to the community of color" (p. 219). The candor with which these authors discuss the progression of their thoughts and feelings about their experience in multicultural education is refreshing and inspirational, evoking in this reader, at least, the desire to engage in similar self-analysis, difficult and even painful as that can be.

In very different ways, from their wide variety of perspectives and concerns about education for a more multiculturalist society, each of the articles in this book provoke readers to question and critique their own

thoughts and assumptions about multiculturalism and bilingual education and to commit or recommit more deeply to the cause of promoting social justice through education. It is the hope of the editors of this volume that the book will,

Inspire the development of policies and school practices that will be more in tune with the multicultural and multilingual realities and dreams of our children and that students and teachers will develop a dialogical habit of the mind and heart that will prompt them to step out of their familiar class, cultural, racial, religious, and linguistic frameworks and enter into the experience of others (p. 226).

The value of this anthology as a college level textbook is likely to be quite high, with every expectation of achieving the hopes of its authors. Graduate students will find the variety of positions presented highly stimulating; many undergraduates and practicing teachers may well benefit from pre-reading discussions of some of the chapters. But as usual, this will depend on the expertise of course instructors who know best the climate and needs of their student population. More generally, *The Politics of Multiculturalism and Bilingual Education* effectively captures the state of these two often overlapping fields at the end of the last decade of the 20th century, and hence constitutes a powerful, important addition to the personal library of every scholar with an interest in language minority students and/or socially responsible education for a multicultural world.

References

- Cummins, J. (1978). Metalinguistic development of children in bilingual education programs: Data from Irish and Canadian (Ukrainian-English) programs. In M. Paradis (Ed.), *Aspects of bilingualism* (pp. 127–138). Columbia, SC: Hornbeam Press.
- Cummins, J. (1981a). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In California Department of Education (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (pp. 3–49). Los Angeles: National Dissemination and Assessment Center.
- Cummins, J. (1981b). Age on arrival and immigrant second language learning in Canada: A re-assessment. *Applied Linguistics*, 2, 132–149.
- Hakuta, K. (1986). *Mirror of language: The debate on bilingualism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lambert, W. E. & Tucker, G. R. (1972). *Bilingual Education of Children: The 5th Lambert Experiment*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Ruiz, R. (1984). Orientations in Language Planning. *NABE Journal*, 8, (2), 15-24