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Au, Wayne (Ed.) (2009) *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.

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The issues comprising anti-racist and social justice education are as multi-dimensional, varied and complex as are the indigenous heritages and transnational identities they affect. In this anthology, the editor presents four critical topics in education via forty diverse readings and interviews. Following a brief introduction, the reader encounters each of the book's four major sections from a particular perspective and for a specific issue that include: Anti-Racist Orientations; Language, Culture and Power; Transnational Identities, Multicultural Classrooms; and Confronting Race in the Classroom. The sections range from 66 to 116 pages in length and contain an impressive range of resources, celebrated author-educators within their fields of study and practice, as well as thought-provoking interviews. Collectively, the integration of

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themes tends to complement and inform as each chapter examines an important multicultural issue from a unique academic vantage. The selections can be stark or somber, spiritually enlightening or painfully real. We see through the eyes of the professor and elder and sit in the classrooms of the teacher.

Introduction: Rethinking Multicultural Education

Editor and author Wayne Au introduces the reader to a compendium of writings that are both technical for the practitioner as well as analytical for the student and researcher. We are told that the 20-year-old organization *Rethinking Schools* has never published a work that addresses race and culture in the classroom from the viewpoint of experienced educators. The work is, therefore, symbolic of the ongoing struggle against the normalization of systemic racism, colonization mentality, cultural oppression and institutional assimilation tactics. A consideration of each section follows.

Section I – Anti-Racist Orientations

Section one begins as a plea for understanding and change; yet, overall, serves as a primer on the institutionalization of racist ideology and its troubling continuance. The prevailing tenor of the chapters insists the reader receive a glimpse of the nature of historic racism and comprehend the extent to which the pervasiveness of its doctrine has been entrenched into the national mindset and affected the very curricula of our public schools. The message is clear: reform the schools and other educational institutions to the point that all students from diverse racial, ethnic and social-class groups will experience education equality (Banks, 2004).

In Chapter one, Enid Lee, former supervisor of Ethnic Relations for the New York Board of Education, argues that students, parents, teachers, and administrators must recognize cultural bias in education in order to challenge the status quo and the basis of power and to provide an equitable education for all while attending to issues that prevent differences from being valued. One measure of prevention may be to increase the number of teachers of color in order to best address racist domination of schools as suggested by another contributor of this section,

Christine Sleeter, Professor Emerita in the College of Professional Studies at California State University. We read instead how high-stakes testing may prolong the legacy of racism in education (Chapter 5); that multicultural education is effectively diminished by high-stakes testing which has turned classrooms into memory mills and, in effect, ignores achievement in understanding important, basic human rights struggles behind historic dates (Chapter 6); and, finally, that the standardized test is an example of institutional policy that denies students of color equal access to educational and job opportunities (Chapter 7). A major obstacle facing multicultural reform of education in the United States, then, is that the entrenchment of racism may necessitate concurrent reformation in several sectors in order to be effective.

Section II – Language, Culture and Power

Through manipulation of language, culture and power, established constraint, in one sector, effectively achieves a base from which higher levels of control can migrate. As mentioned, the entrenchment of racism may force reformation of education to occur simultaneously in several sectors of society. True change in criterion-referenced testing at the local level, for example, may be impossible without amendment at the national level. The most indicting example of this section, and the strongest hope for change, may very well be the fact that so many veteran educators have spoken communally, en masse, and with unification of purpose.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Stephen Krashen, a contributor to theory and application in the areas of bilingual education and reading, argues that learning to read and write in a first language other than English actually helps to learn a second language, such as English, because it is easier to develop language skills in a primary language prior to learning a second language. Similarly, Kelley Dawson Salas, an editor for *Rethinking Schools*, advocates for solidifying literacy skills in a primary language for non-English speaking students, but confesses that, since NCLB, teachers were forced to abandon effective pedagogical strategies in order to prepare students to perform well on national tests. Once more, the reader is led to recognize the multidimensionality of the problem. However, the arguments are never as inflexible

as to suggest an all-or-nothing mentality. Instead, the contributors advocate for balance and practicality. From the viewpoint of balance, Carol A. Tateishi, Director of the Bay Area Writing Project, advises teachers to be culturally sensitive, but at the same time recognize need for strong language skills. From the perspective of practicality Linda Christensen, director of the Oregon Writing Project at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, writes about “non-standard language” speakers experiencing difficulty navigating the “halls of power” such as schools, banks, government agencies and employment offices while advocating for allowing foreign languages into the classrooms to validate the students’ culture and history. A final chapter reveals the real power of the need for balance when Joseph Suina recounts his experience as a Native American child forced to leave his home, language and traditions, leaving him with but one choice: to make an effort to make sense of both his home world and the white man’s world by competing on the white man’s terms.

Section III – Transnational Identities, Multicultural Classrooms

In section three, the personal family history is celebrated in the eagerness of the students’ desire to tell their stories. It offers the reader a rare learning experience to share in the lives of students as they and their teachers confront the institutional state of affairs from their meager positions. Although sparsely stocked with stories of painful reality, such accounts do not dominate the section. Instead, stories of improvisation leading to motivation and triumph seem to prevail. It is difficult to leave the section without a sense that a very human trait throughout the teeming populations of the world is the high esteem held in each of our personal family’s histories.

Jody Sokolower, an educator in Berkeley, California, shares an account of her classroom’s motivation for a project of personal reflections on how immigration affected their families and the ramifications of globalization (Chapter 19), and Steven Picht – Trujillo, a Spanish teacher at Valencia High School in Placentia, California, and Paola Suchsland, also a Spanish teacher at Valencia High School in Placentia, California, record team-teaching with a substantial percentage of the student

body comprised of immigrants and observations of motivation for researching and presenting personal histories (Chapter 25). Similar stories of personal histories provide an introduction to the final, and perhaps most important, section of this anthology.

Section IV – Confronting Race in the Classroom

Section four builds on the success of section three by involving the reader as if we are present in class. We are introduced to pedagogies that deal with difficult issues of race. We learn one person's story of how difficulties, once revealed, were initially assessed, how confrontation of the situation commenced, and how the final outcome was realized. At times our hearts might ache at the anger and confusion coming from the young, but the effect for this reader is that the final emotion is one of unwavering resolve. In this final section, I am drawn to Wayne Au's pedagogy of the historical context. I too, am an advocate of "the big picture" wherein the student has knowledge of where a particular class is leading. Instead of traveling an unknown road to an uncertain end, the student is given details concerning the purpose of the trip, the expectations of experiences along the journey and the final destination.

In this final section, the reader is brought into the classroom, and no one account is more important than another. For example, Rita Tenorio writes of her experiences as an instructor in a racially diverse classroom and how class projects on personal histories helped bridge cultural divides; Alejandro Segura-Mora engages a kindergarten class to talk about deprecating affirmations of skin color; Heidi Tolentino discusses race issues in a high school class and documents a black female student who is defiant about her race; Lisa Espinosa, writes about her 7th grade class comprised mostly of Mexican American students who report having little to do, and almost no friendships, with African American students from other schools in Chicago; Nathaniel W. Smith recounts his experiences with discussions of race perceptions in 10th and 12th grade classrooms; Bob Peterson records his experience with a 5th grade class research project on which of the first 18 presidents were slave owners; Kate Lyman retells her experience in teaching about the Civil Rights Movement to 2nd and 3rd grade students and the issues which arose with parents who disapproved of the

curriculum; Bill Bigelow writes of his trial use of an instructional computer history game for the classroom and reveals its strengths and shortcomings in its density of historical information but its lack of historical completeness that excludes sexism, racism, imperialism and exploitation issues; Linda Christensen discusses a teaching strategy of using poetry to affirm dignity and self-worth to students of color; Eric Gutstein documents his experience with an attempt to use technology and math in the classroom to discuss issues of social justice; Larry Miller writes of the power of video as an instructional tool to teach about the Civil Rights Movement; Jody Sokolower discusses her students' right to be architects of their own education in her class project to study African history and African struggles with Europeans from an Afro-centric perspective; and, finally, Bob Peterson writes of organizing a biographical research project on a famous person for his class using an electronic encyclopedia only for the students to discover bias in the treatment of various persons.

The anthology has been edited with the experienced instructor in mind, but it holds valuable readings for everyone interested in equity issues. If the work has a weakness, it lies in the absence of introductory statements to each section. A few words to enlighten the reader as to considerations involved in how the section was compiled might be valuable to someone not versed in the discipline of education. Furthermore, the biographical sketches of the authors are placed in an appendix instead of accompanying the works. I think it would have been a better choice to include the author's biography with the title of each essay or interview so as to place a human perspective on the piece as well as to present a sense of ownership and affirmation of what is being stated to the reader.

Overall, the anthology is a remarkable compilation of education research, professional opinion and personal experience. A thematic continuity of advocacy for the multicultural reformation of schools remains intact throughout the work. The inspirations and ideas for social change are applicable and can be adapted to myriad other sectors from private business to public policy to foreign affairs. Such relevance may be a testament to the universality of what is being presented in these pages. The emotions within these pages run the spectrum of devout

passion, academic justification and healthy cynicism. The reform issues involve racism, bigotry, colonialism, slavery, assimilation and denials of cultural heritage and languages. The perspectives include the historical, the personal, the international, the transnational, and the political. Venues range from the remote rural to the modern urban. Populations extend from the indigenous to the immigrant and from those stricken by poverty to those obligated by religious tradition. For all this to be accomplished within the pages of one book makes this a remarkable testament to the ongoing struggle against the normalization of systemic racism as well as an extraordinary handbook for the instructor of racial and cultural justice.

Reference

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About the Reviewer

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