

James A. Banks. *Multiethnic Education: Theory and Practice*. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1981) ix, 326 pp. \$29.95, \$11.95 paper.

Aware of the philosophical disagreement and conceptual confusion over the proper place of multiethnic education in the American school system, Banks has gone a long way in providing educators with a clear **modus operandi** in the field. The book is comprised of seventeen chapters divided into six parts; it also includes three useful appendices and an index.

America has always been a multiethnic and multicultural society; the initial wave of immigrants came mostly from western and northern Europe. The English emerged as the dominant social, political, and economic force among the “old” ethnic groups, and thus anglo-conformity became the pattern of Americanization. The second wave— “new” immigrants—was mostly of southern and eastern European origin. They were “Americanized” in the schools to fit the anglo mold; outside the schools, and sometimes in conjunction with them, various kinds of voluntary associations with assimilationist ideologies also aided the process of Americanization. In general, it was not until after World War II that assimilationist ideology was seriously questioned by new concepts of intercultural or intergroup education. Put differently, as long as the American school curriculum paid lip service to the notion of cultural pluralism, ethnicity posed no serious threat to the perpetuation of anglo values through that curriculum.

The real challenge came in the wake of the black protest movement of the 1960s. Blacks were later joined by other ethnic, racial and “cultural” groups, such as women, the handicapped, and even religious groups, (although they are not examined in this work) who demanded the inclusion of their history and culture in school curricula. The outcome of this inclusive thrust was recognition of the need for multiethnic and multicultural education aimed at enhancing intergroup competence.

But the *implementation* of multiethnic education is still hindered by lack of a basic definition of ethnicity. Banks observes that “it is impossible for a single definition of an ethnic group to adequately describe the multiple and complex dimensions of ethnic groups in contemporary American society.” (p. 43) Rather, he categorizes ethnic groups as being *cultural* or *economic* or *political*, and an ethnic group possessing all these characteristics he labels *holistic*. He also acknowledges that ethnicity varies with social, economic, and political conditions in society. Rather than focus on a definition of ethnicity, Banks prefers to use “concepts related to race and ethnicity that can best guide research and programmatic efforts related to the education of ethnic minority students.” (p. 191)

To use effectively a multiethnic curriculum, teachers should possess democratic attitudes and values, a multiethnic philosophy, and a broad perspective on and knowledge of ethnic diversity in American society. They should be able to operate comfortably and efficiently in an increasing level of ethnic diversity, including global ethnicity. Moreover it is the teacher's task to help students acquire knowledge, skills, and values to make them competent citizens, regardless of the social power of the individual student's ethnic affiliation. Finally, Banks offers twenty-one guidelines to expedite an ethnically and racially plural curriculum where "teachers, administration; support staff, parents, students, and others in the school community" are continually evaluated. (p. 278)

The attempt to include the reality of American ethnic differences in the nation's school system is relatively recent, and, in fact, is still in the early stage of development. However, if the current right-leaning zealots have their way in exercising control over what they believe our children should be exposed to in the school curriculum, excellent and innovative works, such as Banks' *Multiethnic Education*, will neither reach the library shelves nor the classrooms so desperately in need of them.

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