

Book Review

Educational Inequalities: Difference and Diversity in Schools and Higher Education.

Kalwant Bhopal and Uvanney Maylor, eds.
New York: Routledge, 2014.

Reviewed by: Kamal Deep Singh
University of Alberta

Educational Inequalities: Difference and Diversity in Schools and Higher Education is a collection of essays by educational researchers from Europe, North America, and Australia. The editors feel that although there is considerable scholarly work on social equality and education, little recent work explores notions of difference and diversity in relation to race, class, and gender. Therefore, Kalwant Bhopal and Uvanney Maylor asked the contributors to investigate the ways in which dominant perspectives of difference, intersectionality, and institutional structures underpin and reinforce educational inequality in schools and institutions of higher education. In the introductory chapter, the editors state that this collection specifically examines areas of discrimination and disadvantage in education. They see the problems through the lenses of gender, race, and class but identify difficulties with application of such concepts to the study of students' experiences in education. They also seek to analyze contesting discourses of identity in different educational contexts.

The collection is divided into three parts. Part 1, *Difference, Diversity, and Inclusion*, is a group of four essays. Through these, the editors expect readers to explore discourses of "difference" in educational contexts. Zeus Leonardo interrogates the status of whiteness in American education by exploring two significant camps, white reconstruction and white abolition. As forms of social practice, white reconstructionists offer discourses that transform white people into something other than an oppressive identity and ideology. White abolitionists perceive that it would not make any difference as long as white people distinguish themselves from others on the basis of their skin color. Accordingly, this chapter considers white reconstruction and white abolition for their conceptual and political values as they concern not only the revolution of whiteness but of race theory in general, particularly in relation to educational contexts. In the next essay, Gill Crozier assesses fairness in Britain using research in social justice and education. She identifies how injustices operate and manifest themselves in education, and concludes with an exploration of strategies for change to further equality of opportunity. In this essay, she reviews the existing research on educational underachievement among a cross section of black and other minority ethnic groups, especially black Caribbean, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani, and working class and middle class girls and boys to investigate the similarities and differences in their school experiences.

Jasmine Rhamie then reviews the literature on the academic achievement of black pupils, focusing on research that identifies and promotes their academic success. She attempts to raise

concerns about the education policy direction of the coalition government and the implications of some of its key decisions on equality for and inclusion of black pupils in the United Kingdom. Finally, Robyn Henderson examines three short stories and discourses that teachers use when talking about the itinerant farm-workers' children and their successes or otherwise in a rural primary school in Australia's northeast. This chapter investigates the intersectionality of social class, ethnicity, and gender in teachers' narratives. It argues that a re-conceptualisation of itinerancy could help disrupt deficit views and assist teachers to focus on responsive, flexible, and enabling pedagogies.

Part 2, *Understanding Difference: Policy and Practice in Education*, contains four essays. It examines the effects of educational policies and practices, and the contributors interrogate and understand discourses of difference in education. Anne-Sofie Nyström examines privileged young people's gendered and classed constructions of achievement and ability in Sweden. She goes on to argue that stratification processes are not just about cognition but also about social processes such as effect, negotiation of values, and causes of achievement. Farzana Shain's chapter examines the neoliberal restructuring of education that has resulted in a persistent pursuit of educational success through policies and programs in England. Drawing on a wider empirical study of Muslim and predominantly working class Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys' identities and educational experiences, the chapter argues that class, race, and gender remain salient factors in educational outcomes. Shain focuses on boys' orientations to schooling and success, their subject preferences, and imagined choices of post-secondary education programs and careers. Heidi Safia Mirza and Veena Meeto focus on young Muslim women's gendered subjectivity and experiences in an educational environment with powerful Islamophobic discourses. Drawing on interviews with 17 young women in two schools in Britain, this chapter traces the narrative constructions of young Muslim women as they negotiate gendered, raced, and classed structures, dominance, and power in the classroom and in their everyday lives. In the last chapter of this part, Carl A. Grant and Annemarie Ketterhagen Engdahl discuss how comprehension of concepts of politics of difference, intersectionality, and an understanding of and resistance to pedagogy of poverty can be used to help researchers and teachers create a culturally relevant instructional environment.

Part 3, *Educational Inequalities: Identities, Inclusion and Barriers*, consists of five essays and a concluding chapter by the editors. It specifically examines how educational inequalities persist through an understanding of identities and barriers to inclusion. Alexandra Allweiss documents the experiences of a teacher participating in a research project designed to shape instructional practices responsive to intercultural and bilingual education reforms in Guatemala. Allweiss uses a narrative inquiry approach to investigate the intersections and influences of racism, gender inequalities, and place-based classism on education policy and practice. Amy Johnson Lachuk, Mary Louise Gomez, and Shameka N. Powell share the life history of an African America woman living in a small community in the southern United States. The woman surpassed many social, economic, and contextual barriers to earn postgraduate degrees and returned to her community to live and work. This chapter shows that educational pursuit in rural areas is framed by intersecting dimensions of race, class, gender, and place.

Edwina Pio, Ali Rasheed, Agnes Naera, Kitea Tipuna, and Lorraine Parker explore experiences of minority ethnic academic and administrative staff in a university in New Zealand and examine the persistent impact of ethnicity on their lives. With a message of respecting ethnicity, the authors indicate that although there is a good deal of progress made in terms of university policies that are written and articulated, there is much work to be done in the actual

performance and implementation of these policies. Elżbieta H. Oleksy documents the critical analysis of films to empower students. She finds films give students the incentive to oppose normalizing power effects. It is a demonstration in which students give structure and value to their lived experience at the time they compose their personal narratives. In the last essay of this part, Alistair Ross investigates the lives of young people between the ages of 12 and 18 in Romania and Bulgaria. He analyzes how these young people conceptualize, as compared to the older generations, the changing political circumstances of Europe, especially with Romania and Bulgaria as newer members of the European Union. He concludes that these young people are confused and have multiple identities. They are proud of their home country where they live and work but are confused enough to leave the country for a better future. They think that their country could not be modern, prosperous, and “European.” Finally, a chapter by the editors serves as a reflective summary and conclusion.

The collection of essays adequately responds to the theme of the book, which is about investigating the ways in which dominant perspectives of difference, intersectionality, and institutional structures strengthen educational inequality in schools and institutions of higher education. Some of the essays are sufficiently diverse, and all contributors use the concept of intersectionality to understand educational inequalities. The collection presents a distinctive and engaging voice with an assortment of intellectually rigorous and accessible chapters. They broaden understandings of intersectionality beyond the simple confines of the education sphere into an arena of sociological and cultural discourse. The collection highlights that many of the educators conceptualize the children, especially immigrants, in terms of what they cannot do. For example, one contributor, Henderson, finds students’ bilingualism and specific knowledge of their home languages and experiences of travelling across states many times becomes irrelevant in the school context.

To bind these diverse chapters into a book, the editors begin with a weak introductory chapter, which introduces the reader to issues of inequalities in education based on gender, class, and race. It also contains a summary of the essays, but instead of paraphrasing the sentences, it has the same sentences as used by the authors in their essays. The editors give no reason for why the focus of the introductory chapter is on the United Kingdom and why most of the essays from the book share experiences with education in developed countries. It has to be acknowledged that there are other countries in the world where issues of gender, race, and class are significant in education. Some chapters suggest that the effects of the dominant cultures, languages, and traditions of the developed country in which the subjects currently live are strong, as compared to the underdeveloped or developing countries of their origin. With these experiences, there is a need to add essays that reflect the fears, expectations, and mental preparation of the people before they were planning to migrate to the developed and culturally diverse world. This would help the editors provide a more realistic condition of the “victims” of the educational inequalities.

The concluding chapter by the editors summarizes the essays but leaves the reader unsatisfied. The significance of the anthology for educational research and practice is never addressed. There is not a single idea that connects this collection of essays. The reader expects the editors to introduce the idea that is most important for readers to know in an opening chapter. Then the different essays can be introduced by the editors. And the editors can give their own thoughts about the issues to be raised in each part of the book. The concluding chapter is expected to ask questions for future research. It is disappointing to find that the voice of the editors is missing from the book.

As the chapters focus on the theme of educational inequalities, the book is more useful for teachers, as compared to researchers and policy makers, because teachers have more direct contact with this theme in their professional lives. Pre-service teacher educators can include this book but as a supplementary reading in their courses on issues of gender, race, and class in education, as pre-service teachers should have a conceptual understanding of these issues. Overall, this collection of the essays sensitizes the reader to prevailing educational inequalities.

Kamal Deep Singh is a graduate from the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta. He completed his M. Ed with specialization in Theoretical, Cultural, and International Studies in Education from the Department of Educational Policy Studies. Currently, he is employed by the Canada Revenue Agency.