

Book Review: Innovative Voices in Education

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With the pervasive nature of ethnic and linguistic diversity in public education today, the almost cliché maxim reminding all involved in the field of education that “it takes a village to raise a child” is more relevant than ever before. In a book patterned after the need for collaborative relationships to improve education, editor Eileen Gale Kugler brings together 19 creative perspectives on diversity in *Innovative Voices in Education: Engaging Diverse Communities* (2012).

Recent demographic shifts in the United States support the need for the discussion of diversity espoused by this book. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, the number of people identifying themselves as non-White minorities increased from 86.9 million to 111.9 million, a growth of 29% in just a 10-year span of time. This accounts for a third of the total population of the country. In the Western part of the United States, this diversity is even greater, as 47% of the population identified themselves as non-White. Census data also predicts that the Latino and Asian populations will triple in the United States by the year 2050. As student populations across the U.S. and also in many other countries around the globe increase in diversity, there is a greater need for all those involved with the education of these students to increase in both knowledge and understanding of how to best engage these diverse communities. The stories in this book, told by the innovators themselves, help reach Kugler’s goal of “bringing innovations in diversity out into the open” (p. xvi) to inspire anyone who has a stake in the field of education, including educators, administrators, parents, and community members. This book review will briefly

overview the value of each of the five parts into which the book is divided, as well as suggesting some applications for this book within the field and detailing the book's major strengths and weaknesses.

Kugler has organized the 19 chapters in *Innovative Voices in Education* into five different topical parts. The first part is entitled "Building Respectful Schools" and serves as a good introduction to the rest of the book because it contains items of value for all stakeholders in the field of education. In the first chapter, Howie Schaffer, vice president at Cook Ross, Inc., speaks to the significance of a book like this. In a clear and cogent commentary, Schaffer says, "It is clear that we need to muster the courage to both explore and repudiate our collective willingness to relegate our most vulnerable children to an educational system that too often does not recognize nor value our unique strengths" (p. 5). Too long, Schaffer implies, have we been unwilling to examine ourselves and how we may be contributing to the ongoing system of injustice and lack of respect for diversity in our schools. The rest of this part of the book continues with a firsthand account of public schooling in the U.S. from two immigrant students (Chapter 2), which is a perspective too often missed by those in the field. Kugler herself finishes this first part with Chapter 3, which deals with the importance of valuing individual students by understanding our own assumptions and expectations.

Part 2 of *Innovative Voices in Education* is entitled "The Personal Power of a Teacher." This section is of particular value to education practitioners, as it contains both inspiring stories and some practical resources. The authors in this section write of the importance of student storytelling (Chapter 5) and bilingual education (Chapter 6) as means through which teachers can value diversity while also increasing student language acquisition. Of particular value to teachers is Chapter 7, "Addressing Silences," which gives practical suggestions for how to talk about difficult issues of diversity, race, sexual orientation, and religion with students of all ages. Sara Kugler, the chapter's author, discusses first helping students to understand their own beliefs and prejudices, exposing them to plenty of resources expressing diverse perspectives, and then allowing them to reconstruct their own new beliefs about these controversial and difficult issues. This section of the book also opens and closes with two chapters about specific stories of diversity and how innovative teachers are overcoming obstacles. Chapter 4 discusses the unprecedented Indian Education for All Act in Montana, which requires teachers across all content areas to incorporate Native American Studies into the curriculum. While at first glance not specifically applicable to all educators, the respect for Native American culture and concerns about presenting cultural history in a respectful and thorough manner is a valuable model for any teacher dealing with issues of diversity

in the classroom. Chapter 8, the final chapter of this section, discusses a successful charter school system in Texas (YES Prep) and how spectacular teachers are making the difference there.

Part 3 of the book is entitled “Courageous Leaders” and contains chapters written by principals and administrators facing issues of diversity in their schools. They discuss issues such as leading for equity (Chapter 9), helping to build student–parent–teacher relationships (Chapter 10), and empowering teachers for collaboration and problem-solving (Chapter 11). In addition to providing some powerful suggestions for school administrators, this section also provides some theoretical perspectives on leadership and how to use administrative power to the advantage of the culturally disadvantaged.

Part 4, “The Village It Takes,” is focused on engaging parents and community members in schools as a means to further diversity. Chapter 12, written by Young-chan Han, discusses four stages of immigrant parent involvement, meant to differentiate between the needs of parents at all four levels. These stages provide a valuable framework both for understanding the needs and concerns of immigrant parents as they develop and deepen in their school involvement and for how best to engage them at each developmental level. Such a framework has value for teachers, school administrators, and community members as they seek to understand that all immigrant parents are not the same. The other two chapters in this section discuss utilizing community resources to ready children to enter preschool (Chapter 13) and how schools are providing resources for parents, thereby giving them the power and education necessary to help their children succeed in school (Chapter 14).

The final part of this book is entitled “Global Perspectives” and contains three chapters, each written by authors who have experienced diversity and come up with innovative solutions for valuing that diversity in their own communities in different corners of the world. Chapter 15, written by Amineh Ahmed Hoti, provides a review of the necessity of diversity as a path to compassion, understanding, and love in a post-9/11 world. Hoti has helped create a curriculum resource for teachers known as “Valuing Diversity” and explains its successes as it is currently being used in the United Kingdom. The final two chapters of this section are written by teachers who have experienced diversity in the classroom in Australia and Canada, respectively.

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 17, serves to bring the entire book full circle as author Sean Grainger discusses the importance of respect, understanding, relationships, and responsibility in what he calls the Hope Wheel of respecting diversity. Diversity, he says, must be more than a one-shot deal or a yearly “cultural festival.” Rather, in order to make a lasting impression, diversity must permeate every aspect of the public school, thereby allowing culture to become the school culture.

This book has value and possible applications for a variety of stakeholders in the field of education. With the shifts in population and demographics in the United States (and, in fact, in many countries), almost all educators are in classrooms with diverse students and will find both inspiring stories from their colleagues as well as some practical resources for engaging their own students in this book. Part three may be of particular use to administrators and school district personnel in order to initiate school leadership that values diversity from the top down. Education researchers will also find many fascinating stories of innovation in this book that may provide avenues for further research and resources for further inquiry. Individual chapters in this book would even be of value to teaching programs throughout the country dealing with specific issues of diversity. However, the true value of this book lies in taking all five sections together and reading the book as a whole, to enhance the realization that engaging diverse communities involves the much-needed perspectives of all five parts.

In order to better understand the value and applications of this book, it is important first to consider some of its key weaknesses and strengths. The weaknesses of this book are few, but important to review regardless. Although the book is divided into five parts, some of the differentiation is slightly unclear between parts. Certain chapters, such as Chapter 8 on the YES Prep Schools, and Chapter 15 on the “Valuing Diversity” curriculum, could have fit easily into multiple categories. An introduction to each individual part might have been helpful in understanding the divisions. Additionally, as with any book containing chapters from multiple contributing authors, some authors write with more readability than others, and there is a variance between the amount of autobiographical storytelling and theoretical concepts between chapters. Finally, likely because this is a first edition, there are some minor editing issues in the book.

Despite some small flaws, the strengths of this book far outweigh the weaknesses. As previously mentioned, this book contains a wide array of perspectives, furthering the point that many different groups must work together to engage diverse communities in the field of education. The chapters contain some very practical information, although not without theoretical bases. The theme of a need for humility in educators, administrators, and schools as an important facet of valuing diversity is reinforced throughout, which is important for all education stakeholders to remember as they deal with these issues. Overall, the stories of the educators, administrators, students, parents, and community members in the book are inspiring, reminding the reader that everyone can make a difference, even on a small scale. Kugler’s presentation—bringing stories of innovation in diversity out into the open—rather than furthering the

image of despair that we so often associate with our broken education system, paints a picture of hope for the future of public education brought about by individuals willing to engage in innovations for diversity and equity.

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