

BOOK REVIEWS

RICHARD MAJORS (Ed.). *Educating Our Black Children: New directions and radical approaches*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer (A member of Taylor & Francis Publishing, Inc.) (2001) 271 pp., C\$35.95 (ISBN 0 750 70964 2).

Why are ethnic minority youths over-represented in cases of institutionalized racism and school exclusion? Leaders of educational and race relations organizations raised this question in a letter, addressed to policy makers in the British education system, that was published in the Times Educational Supplement in January 1998. (Majors, Gillborn & Sewell)

Government leaders and educational advisors were not prepared to analyze the underlying causes for the exclusions, nor to assess current and potential failure rates. Two major problems they continued to not recognize were, (1) high male student exclusionary rates (83% of permanent exclusions in 1995-6) and (2) Black males being 4-6 times more likely to be excluded than other students. If it had been a smallpox outbreak there would have been an immediate quarantine and a disaster squad sent to the scene. Unfortunately, in the U.K., the U.S. and even Canada, when it comes to Black males and even females, we are talking about individuals seen as socially expendable.

This is not an overly harsh assessment, given the decades of research and even popular press publications that have described this continuing malaise and pointed the way out of it. Instead, as *Educating our Black Children* shows, the emphasis has been on reassuring White parents that the progress of their children was not being restricted by the presence of ethnic minority children whom society has branded as intellectually inferior.

Fortunately, Richard Majors, in this five-part book, has assembled authors from an excellent range of fields and with on-the-ground experience in order to analyze the challenges as well as provide possible remedies.

Part I: Tackling historical and contemporary education problems

David Gillborn, in "Racism, Policy and the (mis)education of black children," quotes a Royal Proclamation of 1601, in which the Queen is

“. . . highly discontented to understand the great number of Negroes and blackamoors which . . . are crept into this realm . . . to the annoyance of her own liege people. . . .”

It would seem the school system is still annoyed. In the late 1960's the Labour Home Secretary, on the topic of integration, spoke of 'mutual tolerance.' The late 70's brought The Race Relations Act. Curricular materials stressed 'tolerance' and 'diversity,' and the 3S's – saris, samosas and steel bands – which were added to teach the celebration of difference. Later the vocabulary was broadened to 'cultural pluralism and multiculturalism.' Maude Blair, in *The Education of Black Children: Why do some schools do better than others?* provides two examples of successful schools. Factors which allow these schools to succeed with black students are parents and teachers working together and the development of a non-judgmental environment to support open and honest discussions. One exemplary school recognized that the eurocentric curriculum marginalized black students and enrolled all students in a six-week course on Afrikan Studies followed by a six week course on Irish Studies as part of a Personal, Social Education (PSE) program. However, as Blair states in her Notes, "Approximately 98 per cent of teachers in British schools are white." So the beat goes on.

Jason W. Osborne's *Academic Disidentification: unravelling under achievement among black boys*, poses questions based on the Black/ White gap. Disidentification, (detaching of self-esteem from academic outcomes), he states, is more likely to be experienced by Black students, especially males, than any other group. The theoretical perspectives of Steele, Ogbu, Majors and Billson are reviewed and a question posed is, "Why do African immigrants (children not born into the majority White culture) do better in school than African-descended children born into the majority White culture?"

Part II: Radical approaches to education

Mekada Graham in her, "The 'Miseducation' of Black Children in the British Educational System – Towards an African-centered orientation to knowledge," points to the historical role European philosophies have played in establishing racial, hierarchical perceptions of the human race. This plays out in Black students' anger at teachers who don't know about the contributions of African Diaspora societies.

Graham states, "Spirituality forms the cornerstone of the African-centred worldview and is the essence of human beings." Thus, the African-centred rites of passage programs are important to intergenerational unity. Further, "schools must recognize the validity of knowledge and appreciate the variety of perspectives that contribute to our human existence."

Diane S. Pollard and Cheryl S. Ajirotutu were the evaluators of the first elementary and middle school immersion program that was established by the school board of a large Mid-western U.S. public school system. "Lessons from America: the African American Immersion Schools experiment" shows how the eurocentric perspective on education has been challenged by the incorporation of African and African American curricular strategies. Staff development for teachers, regardless of their color or ethnicity, plays a major role. Another key factor is the utilization of African American adults in activities where their modeling of appropriate behaviors and sharing knowledge and culture with the students is valued.

In *Black Supplementary Schools: Spaces of radical blackness*. Diane Reay and Safia Mirza take the reader into the social and philosophical foundations of education and the impact of feminism on combatting racist outcomes of political mismanagement of social capital. The work of women as social activists, taking on the power structure in small ways, underlies African-Caribbean supplementary schools. These English schools, mainly set up by women, are the basis for a small-scale study. Two bold and important statements they cite are, "Unlike 'separatist' private independent white schools which are welcomed as standard bearers and examples of good educational practice, black supplementary schools as sites of black solidarity are openly perceived by the white majority as threatening." And, "the variety of ways in which black supplementary schools are seen by both the educational establishment and the broader British public raises questions around power, normativity and the endemic terror and fear of blackness that lurks deep within the white psyche."

Those two statements are lived out in so many ways. This reviewer can attest to the veracity of that statement because as Black professors, (even though we are few on U.S. campuses), if three or four of us gather to chat, invariably a white colleague will pass by and 'jokingly' ask, "What are you plotting?"

Part III: Reflections on social exclusion and inclusion

In "The Exclusion of Black Children: Implications for a radicalized perspective," Richard Majors, David Gillborn and Tony Sewell cite a study that "found that 22 percent of children they sampled felt they had been subjected to racism from the teacher over the previous four weeks." Another topic they tackled was 'racelessness' or the need, particularly of Black males, to take on white attributes by acting white in the classroom to gain acceptance and to lessen the teachers' fears of being challenged when the students exhibit cultural characteristics representative of their community.

The authors note, too, the impact of the government supported concept of "color-blindness" in burying the underlying causes of Black exclusion from

the schools. (I have long asked why couldn't "color appreciative" have been selected as the phraseology instead of a form of negation?) The authors find the exclusion of black children to be of such national importance that they recommend an independent commission be established to deal exclusively with this systemic problem.

At last, the role of counselors is brought into the miseducation hodgepodge. In "Educational psychologists and Black exclusion: toward a framework for effective intervention," Karl Brooks and Denny Grant note that the "seemingly inextricable link between the educational experiences of black children and the development of special education is well-documented." And they state, "a legacy of confusing legislation has contributed to a morass of illegal and morally questionable professional practice."

Except for the long overdue utilization of education psychologists in assessing students, families, teachers and the system, all the racist policies are duplicated across the Atlantic in our own backyards. The depth of the racism is reflected in the bibliographies attached to all of these articles which document just how long research findings have been available. In the meantime, the students themselves have had to learn to 'psych out' the teachers in order to overcome the negative stereotypes the teachers have grown up with and which underlie their expectations and treatment of children of color. But at last there is a glimmer of hope. One of the official remedies brought about in 1998 in the UK context states that, "money [is] to be taken from the school's budget and follow the student if they are permanently excluded."

Richard Harris and Carl Parsons in, *Black Exclusion in a Moral vacuum*, examine the roles of justice, economics and morality. They begin with three goals: 1) to report the costs to the full range of services of permanent exclusions, (2) to consider the ethical environment in which resource allocation decisions are made, and (3) to judge the impact of school exclusion legislation and policy. They pose the ethical question, Who is school for anyway?

Part IV: Rites of passage, manhood training and masculinity perspectives

The authors and their articles listed below provide various aspects of the male in civil society as shown by initiation practices which are Eurocentric and negating to black males. In Allford, McKenry and Gayazzi's article they even define the usage of Black in the British context as covering all persons of color. In the U.S. context it is more usually seen as referring to African American and Caribbean descendents because of their high risk, 'endangered species,' life experiences. "Knowing your roots" translates into an African-centred Rite of Passage experience, necessary to fortify them for the social rejections they will continually face.

“The cool pose” and other adaptive behaviors are analyzed. These chapters are especially important for white male and female teachers who so overwhelmingly predominate as the authority figure at the front of the classroom. Due to the segregated societies so prevalent in the U.K. and U.S. but less so in parts of Canada, an understanding of linguistics, body language, kinesics and cultural attitudes are basic requirements in this migratory, rapidly changing global demography.

The titles in Part V include:

- Keith Alford, Patrick McKenry and Stephen Gavazzi, *Enhancing achievement in adolescent Black males: the Rites of Passage link*
- Aminfu R. Harvey, *An after-school manhood development program*
- James Earl Davis, *Black boys at school: negotiating masculinities and race*
- Tony Sewell and Richard Majors, *Black boys and schooling: an intervention framework for understanding the dilemmas of masculinity, identity and underachievement.*

Part V: Mentoring and education

Richard Majors, Vincent Wilkinson and William Gulam in “Mentoring Black Males: Responding to the crisis in education and social alienation,” start off at the outcomes in the earlier articles. They pinpoint the racial stigmatization that results in the focus on Black males for many law enforcement and social welfare efforts. “In many respects, the British response follows the American approach, where one out of every three Black males between the ages of 20 and 29 is now involved in the criminal justice system.” With racism as the number one social problem (yet least openly discussed) in the U.S., Britain should know, ‘not to go there.’

Finally, it is always so rewarding, after pages of sad but true analyses, to come to a step in the right direction. In “School-based Mentoring for Minority Youth: Program components and evaluation strategies,” Teresa Garate-Serafini, Fabricio E. Balcazar, Christopher B. Keys and Julie Weitlauf provide a model for at-risk populations with accompanying evaluative tools to stem the tide of exclusion.

Some of the steps delineated in this book are small. But they are necessary because large steps are just not on the agenda. Unless countries with populations of African Diaspora descendents and new immigrants start training the educators who must be the frontline troops in bringing about change, there will be high levels of exclusions and a higher price for all of society to pay.

For North Americans the lack of coverage of specific Latino needs in the book is a deficit. But there is a growing recognition among peoples of color that 'color blind' really means The In-group (white) and the Out-group (all those blinding colors) This book gives plenty of reasons for educators and other social service professionals to be proactive. It should be in individual collections, in staff rooms, on education course bibliographies, part of parent-teacher awareness workshops and so on and on.

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YOON K. PAK. *Wherever I Go, I Will Always Be A Loyal American*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer (2002). 204pp, US\$21.95. (ISBN 0-415-93235-1).

How would I feel and react if I were to be incarcerated on the basis of my being Japanese by the government of my residence?

As a Japanese who has been living abroad for many years, I had this question in mind as I read Yoon K. Pak's new book, *Wherever I go, I will always be a loyal American* (2002). In this study, Pak attempts to offer a deeper understanding and interpretation of the Japanese Americans' incarceration during World War II. His point of departure is his acknowledgement that "[c]ontrasting messages of what it meant to live in a democracy during wartime became embodied in the lives of these youth" (p.2). By presenting writings of Japanese American and non-Japanese American students at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, he examines how the students at Washington School in Seattle dealt with the national message of race hatred against Japanese people, and how Washington School in turn addressed wartime events while holding up the ideal of democratic citizenship education and tolerance as school policies.

Pak begins his book by situating his stance within this approach to historical research; he views history as "stories of everyday people, living everyday lives, disrupted by ephemeral moments testing the bounds of humanity" (p1). He believes that the government's actions, such as the order to incarcerate Japanese people, can be better understood from the perspective of those people whose lives were affected by them.

In Chapter 1, Pak introduces the letters written by both Japanese American and non-Japanese American students about the evacuation of Japanese people from Seattle. Following the Japanese "surprise" attack in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Executive Order 9066 was declared on February 19, 1942, ordering all Japanese to be evacuated from the West Coast. The author states, "President Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 marked all Japanese residents and Japanese Americans as targets of hatred. While growing up not having to think explicitly about how race shaped their lives,