Ethnicity and Race: Creating Educational Opportunities Around the Globe

reviewed by Nicholas D. Hartlep — January 05, 2012

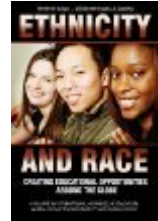**Title:** Ethnicity and Race: Creating Educational Opportunities Around the Globe
Author(s): Elinor L. Brown & Pamela E. Gibbons (eds.)
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Ethnicity and Race: Creating Educational Opportunities Around the Globe, edited by Elinor L. Brown, a nationally recognized expert on equity and social justice and a professor of Education at the University of Kentucky, and Pamela E. Gibbons, Associate Dean International for the Faculties of Arts, Business and Education at Charles Sturt University, is a volume about culture, ethnicity, and race. A pleasant change from the many books on ethnicity and race that merely quetch vociferously about inequality without suggesting actionable solutions, *Ethnicity and Race* is uniquely more positively-oriented, given that it suggests possible and applicable reactions to social inequality. With an emphasis on sharing solutions and strategies for creating educational opportunities around the globe, this collection of chapters by twenty-four authors addresses models, programs, interventions, and frameworks that are positively impacting educational challenges near and afar—ideation that fosters possibilities in seemingly negative situations. A volume in the Information Age Publishing series: *International Advances in Education: Global Initiatives for Equity and Social Justice,* the book is reader-friendly and inclusive, and aims to reach a global audience by sharing the global research and initiatives of different people in different places. *Ethnicity and Race* accomplishes its goal of global influence handily since the chapters are based on research from five continents in more than fifteen countries (including Australia, China, Israel, Russia, Thailand, Tanzania, Uganda, and the United States).

Ethnicity and Race is as impressive as it is comprehensive; its chief contribution lies in insightful discussions inspired by its contributing authors. Insofar as each reading provides newer and deeper insights, this book is an immediate classic, bound to be cited by the global research community for years to come. This frontline-edited volume contributes to the social study of global education in general, and global citizenship education in particular, by assembling together, in a new and thoughtful way, the traditions of social justice, citizenship education, and global education.

The 331 page book examines educational policies and practices that have actually improved the academic and social success of disenfranchised groups around the globe. These groups include the Kalmyk in Russia, 57 diverse ethnic minority groups in China, the Māori in New Zealand, and numerous refugee groups on the Thai-Burma border. Its chapters are organized thematically into four parts. Part one is *influence of politics and policies on racial and ethnic education*. Part two's theme is *higher education training for racial and ethnic social justice*. The theme of the

book's third part is *international technology initiatives that nurture multiethnic unity and social justice,* and the three chapters that comprise this section are particularly well researched. The final part of the book addresses the theme of *community and global citizenship for ethnic and racial social justice.*

What makes Brown and Gibbons' editorial work so noteworthy is not simply the breadth of chapter contributions—certainly that is a part—but the ways in which they examine how and why creating educational opportunities around the globe is so challenging and complicated for project planners. To illustrate from a personal anecdote how such examination can complicate how one thinks about these issues, just recently I was sent an electronic-mail from a petition web site that I joined a while back (http://www.thepetitionsite.com). Being socially conscious and an activist for social, as well as scholastic justice, I thought signing such petitions would be helpful for the various social protests it published on its web site. The subject line of this particular electronic-mail read as follows: "Mali, Stop Child Labor in Gold Mines." The message's subject line jogged my memory of *Ethnicity and Race's* chapter 11, "Freedom from Exploitive Child Labor Practices in East Africa: Strategies and Complications," written by Vachel Miller. Miller's chapter juxtaposed "child labor" and "child work." Miller writes that "what distinguishes child labor from child work is that child labor is harmful to the development and well-being of the child" (p. 248). But equally as important as Miller's differentiation between the two concepts— child work and child labor—is her own notion that creating educational opportunities around the globe does not automatically mean that children should *not* work, per se; it is much more complicated than that.

Readers of *Ethnicity and Race* quickly understand that the social problems in Sub-Saharan Africa (and elsewhere) are not so simply ameliorated. The problem is not that children work in Africa; that would be too simple. It is not an either-or proposition of children working or children in schools learning; rather, the social, systemic, and scholastic problems of children being absent from schools stem from the facts of inordinate amounts of abject poverty and staggering numbers of orphaned children as a result of HIV-AIDS in Africa, which forces children to work instead of attend school. In fact, Miller writes that "[i]n Africa, HIV-AIDS has become a critical factor in the continued prevalence of *child labor*" (p. 250, italics added). Miller (p. 258, italics added) also writes that "[e]fforts to eliminate *child labor* outright, grounded in a human rights perspective, can fail" to understand the situational and economic realities of the ethnically-marginalized and economically-deprived. A better approach, she believes, would be to reconfigure the relationship between work and school, such that children, if they must work, are able to work in safer environments that give them a sense of self-worth while still allowing them to break the chain of intergenerational poverty through education. A school-work reconfiguration requires a paradigmatic shift in education, not simply protestation against children working and not attending schools. This is what is so revolutionary about Brown and Gibbons' edited volume—it advocates a reconfiguring of our thoughts about global social justice.

Returning once more to the petition drive to stop child labor in gold mines in Mali, the electronic-mail message exhorted, "Child laborers in Mali need people around the world to raise an outcry against these inhumane, potentially deadly conditions." After reading *Ethnicity and Race*, I can comfortably disagree with portions of the petition's rallying cry without feeling that I have "sold out" or become "uncaring." More important than our raising an outcry against

inhumane and potentially deadly working conditions, the children in Mali also need people around the globe to be what Ron Israel, Vachel Miller, and Susan Reed consider to be "global citizens." According to Israel, Miller, and Reed's chapter, global citizenship tempers "globalization's" and the "knowledge-economy's" ultracompetitive ethos—an ethos that inevitably leads to social class exclusion and a widening of inequity. I am convinced that it is competition caused by first-world capitalism (manifested in financial greed) that leads to the widening of global economic disparities. The "haves" (capitalists) exploit the "have-nots" (proletarians) in a winner-take-all system, leaving racial, ethnic, and resource-deprived minorities to fend for themselves. Gold mining in Mali is no exception, but global citizenship education must move students, scholars, and society past "awareness" of social and economic inequity and injustice, toward civic and social commitment (e.g., see Hartlep, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This translates into the idea that if something hurts one individual, it hurts us all; all of humanity is interconnected in a global community.

Ethnicity and Race is a breath of fresh air in that the programs, initiatives, and ideas presented in each chapter were largely successful in bringing access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and tertiary education to socially isolated minority groups, while also curtailing child labor through innovative approaches that met the economic and educational needs of marginalized communities. Although well-intentioned social justice scholars feel instinctively that societies and states with children who "work" rather than "read" (regularly attend school) are somehow wrong, Miller, charting qualitative field study data on child labor/work in sub-Saharan Africa, shows that such basic values as education for children cannot be realized without a radical reconfiguration of the society's school-work relational paradigm. *Ethnicity and Race* equips readers with deeply reflective and revelatory possibilities for positive change by moving the discussion from the social justice philosophical to the social justice practical. It is such a needed book in an era of educational research that tends to be hypercritical, which has led to a sort of nihilism of spirit and possibility, for lack of a better term. Too many books only point out the bad, and the research community's inability to locate the good makes for a depressing no-good-news state of affairs. This book bridges this divide. Although *Ethnicity and Race,* as many books have before it, asserts that justice and "doing the right thing" is often complex (e.g., see Sandel, 2009), perhaps its chief contribution lies in its clarion call to rethink and reconfigure our approaches to actualizing social inclusiveness and global equity.

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