

Independent Book Reflection:

Examining Multicultural Education with Intersectional Lenses

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Reading the book *Intersectionality* (Collins, 2016) has been a pleasurable experience which has had my eyes pulled open to a series of chapters with both concepts and examples. Considered as “the” tutorial-type resource for the concept, the book is very accessible as it is written in a tone that examines issues from the side, from a common-sense angle; and it has examples, many of which are close real lives and are at a global scope. In this reflection, I aim at making a reflective summary of what this book is about, beginning with a relation to the historical text *Approaches to Multicultural Education in the United States* (Gibson, 1976).

Four “programmatic” items were put forward by Dr. Gibson in her article: culturally-different or benevolent multiculturalism, differences and understanding, cultural pluralism, and bicultural education. She also provided an anthropological perspective which conceptualizes multicultural education as a normal, human experience; what may be interpreted from this is that as a society/civilization, young learners/youth are being educated in a general human process that would prepare them to fit successfully into the environment.

Concept, Exemplification, and History (Ch. 1-3)

I recall starting to think about what it means to conceptualize a term called intersectionality—I began with “intersect”, “intersection”, and then “intersectional”, before finally realizing (until today) that it is an abstract “phenomenon” or “configuration” which is used mostly as an *analytic tool* to describe and consequently analyze a social phenomenon. The first chapter came to me primarily with the definition of it, phrased as “a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences”.

The first chapter then provide three examples—concrete and from various dimensions—the 2014 FIFA World Cup hosted in Brazil, general social inequality globally, and the Black women’s movement in Brazil. The last of the above, for instance, had challenged the national identity narrative in Brazil as it concerns both racial and gender democracies. The author proposed then a six-part “core framework” for (as far as I understood) tackling any social phenomenon/problem with an intersectional view, including social inequality, power, rationality (rejection of the either/or, binary thinking), social context (conceptualizing one’s arguments), complexity, and social justice—which are great resources when it comes to an analysis. The idea *microcredit* proposed by Bangladeshi social entrepreneur Muhammad Yunus (Chapter 2), as a praxis to help poor people with tiny loans, is an alternative banking system which addresses specific aspects of capitalism; Yunus reexamined traditional bank systems and integrated categories of race, class, gender and others into consideration.

The third chapter introduces the history of academic involvement/development for the notion of intersectionality which was coined by Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991) in terms of power and relationality. The discussion dated back to the confining racial/ethnic segregation of communities 1960s in the United States, to the 1980s when some social institutions actively recruited formerly excluded people, before its institutional incorporation in 1990s.

Global Dispersion, Identity, Protest/Neoliberalism, and Critical Education (Ch. 4-7)

The fourth chapter next discusses how intersectionality “disperses” onto generic issues/aspects including human rights (e.g. anti-racism conference by United Nations), its various forms in scholarship, and the role of digital media (e.g. “cyberfeminism”, Plant, 1993).

The topic on identity (Chapter 5) appears a central component of “intersectionality” as the author wrote the many people consider it as a “theory of identity”; I took note of this seemingly apparent concept simply because I (with ignorance) thought about intersectionality as generally about a certain social sciences issue *without* an “emphasis”. Multiple socially constructed identities, as the theory of identity elaborates, combine to create every unique individual among us. For so long, intersectionality has been closely associated with

identity politics (development of political agendas based on identities) and confined within academic settings.

Chapter 6 includes issues on social protest (e.g. struggling women factory workers) and neoliberalism. Chapter 7 introduces the dimensionalities of critical education—classroom, religion, mass media venues, etc.—as education has the potential to both oppress and liberate. It is also brought up the contribution of intersectionality and (forms of) critical inquiry/education to each-other, in that on one hand intersectionality is keyed on those “power relations” (i.e. what is the enabling “power” or force behind an activity, action, or phenomenon), and on the other its “critical praxis” is essential to its success in education. In the concluding chapter, it gives a discussion on *relationality*, on its various forms in scholarship and constitution of major contribution of intersectionality, social context, and complexity, the last of which the major challenge is pointed out as the ways moving into the politics of the “not-yet”, namely beyond its self-sustaining intellectual and political dynamism and heterogeneity.

References

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