

Transforming Ethnic Studies in Schools

Christine Sleeter and Miguel Zavala

New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2020 (xi + 176 pages, ISBN 0807763462, \$29.25)

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Transforming Ethnic Studies in Schools conceptualizes ethnic studies as an emerging field in K-12 education. Ethnic studies is defined as “an anti-racist, decolonial project that seeks to rehumanize education for students of color, center subjugated knowledge narratives and ancestral knowledge, and build solidarity across racial and ethnic differences for the purpose of working towards social justice” (167). The authors, Christine Sleeter and Miguel

Zavala, are both highly-regarded scholars known for their work in this field; their journey to joining the struggle for ethnic studies is a highlight of chapter 1.

The book opens with the seven hallmarks of ethnic studies: curriculum as a counter-narrative, criticality, reclaiming cultural identities, intersectionality and multiplicity, community engagement, pedagogy that is culturally responsive and mediated, and students as intellectuals. The text then explores these hallmarks through an analysis of different dimensions of ethnic studies. Sleeter and Zavala first review a traditional curriculum to demonstrate how it is not ideologically neutral but is positioned from Eurocentric perspectives. Then, the authors review the literature of how ethnic studies affects all students—including both students of color and white students. Following the robust literature review, Sleeter and Zavala showcase examples of excellent ethnic studies curricula in connection to the hallmarks. The authors then introduce an empirical study in which they interview nine ethnic studies educators about their perspectives and experiences teaching ethnic studies. In this chapter, their findings address a gap in the literature, which includes research on the hallmark of students as intellectuals. The final chapter of the book discusses how K-12 ethnic studies can further advocacy and program sustainability.

Transforming Ethnic Studies in Schools is crafted so that both scholars and practitioners can engage with the text in meaningful ways. The book is theoretically, conceptually, and academically robust with thorough research and analyses—and yet the text is clear and reader-friendly. In addition to being accessible, the book is intelligible to both educators who are new to ethnic studies and those who have experience and background in the field. For educators who are new to ethnic studies, the book provides foundational knowledge that is essential to understanding this emerging field. For educators who have experience with ethnic studies, this work provides comprehensive content and consistently challenges the reader to think in new ways and further the field. Additionally, the book makes constant connections between curriculum reform and reinvigoration and the possibilities that ethnic studies open for the transformation of teaching and learning in pursuit of social justice.

Transforming Ethnic Studies in Schools is particularly valuable for teachers of religion and philosophy because the book provides a robust foundation for ethnic studies curricula. As students enter higher education, they may or may not have experienced ethnic studies in their K-12 education, which can influence the ways they engage with curriculum and learning in the religion and philosophy classroom.