

## ***Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice, 4th ed.***

Christine I. Bennett (1999)

Boston: Allyn and Bacon

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Christine Bennett's handbook, *Comprehensive Multicultural Education*, was written primarily as an interdisciplinary introduction to multicultural education for students and those new to this field. Each chapter closes with activities and questions for discussion. Supplements to the text include an instructor's manual and a test bank. Bennett does a nice job making complex subject matter accessible. The material is presented in a concise, thoughtful way using charts, illustrations, and boxes to emphasize and summarize main points. A detailed table of contents and index turn a college textbook into a handy reference work.

Apart from providing the reader with a theoretical basis, the stated purpose of this text is to "engage readers on an emotional level, move them to take action in their classrooms, and encourage them to pursue academic inquiry and self-reflection after the book has been read" (p. xi). The personal experiences and mini-case studies indeed make the book at places difficult to put down. Beyond the clarification of key concepts and more ideas for the multicultural classroom, this fourth edition includes a new section on race relations.

*Comprehensive Multicultural Education* is divided into 3 parts. The first deals with the definitions, history, justification of multicultural education, as well as racism, prejudice, stereotypes, and an introduction to the major ethnic groups in the United States. In general, Bennett has mastered the difficult task of describing the origins, diversity, and history of major ethnic groups in the United States as well as their conflicts with mainstream society in a few pages. In some cases, however, the overviews are incomplete and another paragraph or two should have been added. For example, the discussion on African Americans ends with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Much has happened since then. In addition, Bennett would be wise to update her sources in chapters 4 and 5 since American society is changing rapidly. Only one of the sources on the section describing Hispanics is from the 1990s [1]. The problem could have been avoided by including a selected bibliography at the end of the chapter. Such a section here as in other places might also serve to foster the "academic inquiry" Bennett seeks.

Part 2 explores individual differences affecting learning and teaching. Apart from different learning and teaching styles, this section explores individual differences (e.g. gender, physical characteristics, peer relations, family conditions, values, etc.) which affect the way students learn. Bennett explains how ethnicity may influence perceptions of difference. Moreover, she challenges readers to view individual differences as alternatives without attaching value judgments to them.

Part 3 is one of the most attractive aspects of this text. It outlines six goals of a multicultural curriculum, giving sample lesson plans, assignments, and strategies on how to achieve them. Most lesson plans include the following headings: objectives, strategy, materials, instructions, evaluation, and a list of suggested sources or resources. [-1-] These 180-some pages of teaching suggestions are especially useful for the ESL/EFL classroom, as the goals of a) strengthening cultural consciousness and b) improving intercultural competence overlap with those of second language acquisition. Bennett's other stated goals of a multicultural curriculum: c) developing multiple historical perspectives, d) combating racism, sexism, and all forms of prejudice and discrimination, e) increasing awareness of the state of the planet and global dynamics, and f) building social action skills (pp. 251-252), pop up time and time again in a multitude of ESL/EFL courses at various levels of instruction. Thus, the lesson plans might serve as a useful tool, helping instructors to devise similar lesson plans. A companion web site to *Comprehensive Multicultural Education* would be a welcome addition to the text, particularly if it included a searchable databank to which others could add to the classroom ideas included in the book.

Because cultural diversity affects us all in one way or another, educators are bound to find worthwhile information for their professional and personal development in *Comprehensive Multicultural Education*. It would also serve as a useful text in ESL teacher-training courses.

### **End Note**

[1] For recent detailed accounts on Latinos, see for example:

- Suro, Roberto. (1998). *Strangers among us: Latino lives in a changing America*. New York: Vintage.
- Gonzalez, Juan. (2000). *Harvest of empire: A history of Latinos in America*. New York: Viking.

[Sabrina Voelz](#)

Universitaet Lueneburg

<voelz@uni-lueneburg.de >



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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

[Return to Top](#)

[Return to Main Page](#)

Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives, seventh edition, is designed to help current and future educators acquire the concepts, paradigms, and explanations needed to become effective practitioners in culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse classrooms and schools. This seventh edition has been revised to reflect current and emerging research, theories, and practices related to the education of students from both genders and from different cultural, racial, ethnic, and language groups. Exceptionality is part of our concept of diversity because there are exceptional students in e