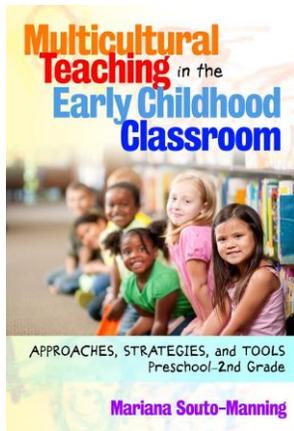


## Professional Book Review

Souto-Manning, M. (2013). *Multicultural Teaching in the Early Childhood Classroom: Approaches, Strategies and Tools, Preschool-2nd Grade*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. 168 pp., 978-0807754054. \$25.16

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Multicultural educators want practical resources to support the needs of the growing population of racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse young learners in their classrooms. There has been much talk about the concepts of multicultural education; despite its promise, little is actually known about how to *do* multiculturalism in schools. In her book, *Multicultural Teaching in the Early Childhood Classroom*, author Mariana Souto-Manning addresses this concern by documenting her exploration of a wide range of rich approaches, strategies, and tools for teaching multiculturally in the early childhood setting. Through the lens of the teacher, Souto-Manning documents dynamic, real-life samples to illustrate how multicultural teaching has been and can be brought to life in diverse classroom settings. However, the book is not designed to be a “how-to-guide” to multicultural education. Rather, Souto-Manning’s purpose is to offer samples of powerful pedagogical approaches in action in preschool-through-second-grade classrooms, which educators can use to enhance and inspire their own teaching and learning while meeting the Common Core State Standards. These powerful examples underscore the importance of engaging in and promoting education that is inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive.

Souto-Manning takes a critical, situated perspective that seeks to problematize and reimagine the everyday issues and tensions in early childhood classrooms and society, including race, class, gender, sexuality, power, and injustices in the classroom, in order to create new possibilities for a more hopeful future. Souto-Manning seeks to interrupt the racist or privileged ways people see the world by inviting early childhood educators to step out of their comfort zones and actively engage in critical reflection. Throughout the book, the author poses thoughtful questions that invite teachers to consider their own biases and assumptions seriously and to reflect on how new insights can be used to inform and reframe their teaching practice in culturally responsive ways. While introducing new multicultural teaching approaches, strategies, and tools, Souto-Manning asks educators to consider, for example, if they are advantaging some students over others and how their upbringing and experiences may be impacting their interactions with children and their classroom environment. This empowering approach encourages multicultural educators to participate in an iterative process

of self-examination, reflection, and transformation, both inside and outside of the classroom walls.

The book is divided into nine chapters that collectively link accessible theory to meaningful and inclusive practices in early childhood teaching. The first chapter presents background information on the historical context and current perspectives on multicultural education, providing a solid foundation for understanding both the tensions and benefits of teaching multiculturally. To accomplish this, Souto-Manning relies heavily on the well-known works of Paulo Freire (1970, 1998), James Banks (2004), Sonia Nieto (2010), and Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia Ramsey (2011), among others. In the second chapter, the author defines and reframes multicultural education, as articulated by Paul Gorski (2010), as transformative education, where students and teachers are seen and identified as cultural beings. Here, she invites the reader to engage in an exploration of six curricular strategies and tools introduced in the following chapters. These multicultural techniques include interviews, critical inquiry, culture circles with multicultural literature, community resources and home literacies, technology, and storytelling and story-acting in action. To bring these strategies to life, the author takes the reader inside a variety of preschool-through-second-grade classrooms throughout the United States where diverse early childhood educators enact critical multicultural teaching. The personal perspectives and reflections of actual classroom teachers shed light not just on the benefits, but also the stresses and struggles that arise as teachers work towards creating rich spaces of equity and inclusiveness in their classrooms.

Souto-Manning thoughtfully addresses some of the most pressing concerns of early childhood educators. She opens the book by clarifying the multiple understandings and misconceptions of multicultural education. To teach multiculturally, by her definition, means “to teach inclusively, to create spaces of possibility, to bring differences front and center in the life of the classroom” (p. 17). She debunks the notion that merely adding multicultural materials to a classroom constitutes multicultural teaching, arguing that material possessions do not necessarily result in a change in learning or instructional practice, or in the interactions or beliefs of students and teachers in the classroom. From a critical perspective, multicultural education is grounded in ideals of social justice, educational equity, and a commitment to providing all students with educational opportunities that enable them to reach their full potential as learners and become agents of collective change. Multicultural education, in this context, uses education as a vehicle for positive social change by addressing three layers of interrelated transformation: the transformation of self, of teaching, and of society. Throughout the book, the author pushes readers to move beyond just the multicultural theory and into praxis by encouraging dialogue and reflection at all three levels of transformation.

What sets this book apart from other literature on multicultural education is its practicality and applicability for classroom teachers. Every chapter invites early childhood educators to think critically about how to effectively integrate a specific multicultural strategy in developmentally appropriate ways that reflect the

backgrounds and needs of both the students and teachers. The author describes each approach by posing and answering a series of critical questions and presenting ideas for how to apply these strategies in diverse classroom settings. For example, in Chapter 5, titled “Cultural Circles with Multicultural Literature: Addressing Issues of Fairness,” the author eloquently invites educators to deeply consider why the specific approach is important by asking and then answering the question: “Why Culture Circles as a Way of Teaching Multiculturally?” In the same chapter, the author then presents ideas for how to implement culture circles using culturally-relevant literature in the classroom, breaking down the process into specific steps that build off one another, including getting started, considering obstacles, exploring possibilities, enacting culture circles with multicultural literature in an early childhood classroom setting, and, lastly, reflecting on multicultural circles as a way of teaching multiculturally. Actively engaging in each of these stages provides early childhood educators with a deeper and more critical understanding not only of what the approach is (i.e., the theory behind it), but more importantly, how to *do* the approach in the context of their own classroom (i.e., the praxis).

Teaching educators about multicultural strategies, approaches, and tools through the perspectives and stories of real teachers in diverse classrooms is the book’s greatest strength. The teachers and classrooms portrayed in each chapter provide preschoolers through second graders with profound learning experiences that inspire them to develop as critical thinkers and active agents in a democratic community. The spotlighted preschool-through-second-grade teachers demonstrate how to effectively create culturally responsive learning environments that promote educational equity while simultaneously meeting the Common Core State Standards. These powerful vignettes, featuring diverse early childhood classrooms, can be used as resources for educators committed to developing new ways to enhance their teaching practice and transform their classroom environments to empower children from all walks of life.

Overall, this unique book provides early childhood educators with a comprehensive and multifaceted set of strategies, approaches, and tools designed to help transform their classrooms into more equitable and inclusive spaces. While this book would benefit teachers already interested in implementing multicultural practices in their classrooms, it would be particularly powerful for those teachers who are not yet engaged in conversations surrounding issues of multiculturalism and inequity. Thus, whatever their background or experience, all early childhood educators could utilize this book as a resource to enhance their capacity to create inclusive and loving classrooms that serve the diverse needs of young learners.

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