

Book Review



Miskovic, M. (Ed.). (2013). Roma Education in Europe: Practices, Policies, and Politics. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hungarian Educational Research Journal
2015, Vol. 5(1) 80–83
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<http://herj.lib.unideb.hu>
Debrecen University Press



DOI: 10.14413/herj.2015.01.08.

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The Romani have historically lived on the margins of European society. An important barometer of Romani welfare is thought to be educational participation and attainment. However, educational access on all levels for the Romani has been and continues to be particularly problematic throughout Central and Eastern Europe. In a seminal article written in 2003 that appeared in the Harvard Educational Review, Claveria and Alonso state, “The situation for the Romani is critical, and education is a key element for their inclusion in an information society, as well as their political, social, and economic security” (p. 584). Despite governmental policy efforts across Europe, and significant NGO advocacy, only marginal progress for the Roma has been reported on the educational front. Fortunately, scholarship about Roma and their educational condition has been emerging in greater abundance and at a faster pace. As a result, this growing base of literature is better able to inform educational policy and practice. One such piece of literature, entitled *Roma Education in Europe: Practices, Policies, and Politics*, is a particularly timely and significant piece. This recent work is an edited volume aimed at exploring various facets of the complex educational milieu of the Romani in Europe. The contributors to the volume include a diverse group of international scholars and advocates who bring their expertise to bare on this important issue. As stated in the introduction of this work, “Both Roma and non-Roma contributors to this volume write from multiple places: theoretical, empirical, political, ethical, and personal” (Miskovic, 2013, p. 8). This characteristic of the work sets the stage for a robust exploration of the topic at hand; allowing the reader to view important issues related to Roma education from multiple perspectives. Specifically, including the voices of Roma contributors sets this book apart from much of the other literature on this topic. The book is aimed at connecting to a broad audience consisting of educators, researchers, policy makers, and activists.

This work is divided into three distinct parts with different foci. Part one focuses on Roma education as it relates to theory, policy, and politics. Part one contains five chapters that

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pose some challenging and important questions about Roma identity, the purpose of education for Roma, education as a human right, societal racism, power vs. oppression, scapegoating, media coverage of Roma and many other important related topics. The concept of “containment” is one of those important topics addressed in the first section of the book. In chapter 2, Teasley clearly articulates this concept as it relates to Roma education. Teasley defines containment as “dominant group structural and cultural practices aimed at dominating other groups or members thereof by marginalizing, neglecting, denying, isolating, restricting, and thus ‘containing’ them, and any aspect of their identities or ways of life as perceived as ‘undesirable’” (Miskovic, 2013, p. 30). The exploration of this topic leads the author to conclude her chapter with some pedagogical strategies that educators can use to combat containment in educational settings. One of those strategies she advocates for is awareness—that is, helping both non-Roma and Roma students identify places where structural barriers impede the ability of Roma to thrive. This particular chapter and the others in this section do an excellent job of helping the reader grasp some conceptual and theoretical underpinnings that relate to Romani. Another strength of this section of the book is the coverage of the political environment and policy efforts in the European Union in regards to Roma. Many of the chapters in this section of the book touch on these issues, but Curic and Plaut in chapter 5 provide a detailed and thorough overview—especially focusing on perhaps the most significant policy effort to date—the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015).

Part two of the book broadly examines models and practices of educating Roma children and young adults. The five articles in this section are primarily research-based and focus on practices in a variety of locations including the United States, Great Britain, Hungary, and Bulgaria. The study described by Levinson in chapter 7 was particularly noteworthy. This study was funded by the British Academy and set out to “explore the attitudes towards secondary school held by Gypsy children, and to consider their aspirations in the context of their wider communities” (Miskovic, 2013, p. 100). This research, known as the Cornwall research project, examined students living in two separate locations in Cornwall, Western England. The researcher did not mix data from both sites, but rather viewed the sites separately which allowed for comparison. The findings were notable due in part to the differences in attitudes toward schooling found in each of the groups that were studied. Levinson points out that at one of the sites studied clearly expressed “a greater sense of belonging in the school” (Miskovic, 2013, p.104). Levinson goes on in the article to explore possible reasons for the more positive attitudes expressed at this site. Levinson states,

Since 2006 the pupils have been supported by a teacher assistant/GRT liaison officer, who has developed stable and warm relationships with the children and their families. The sense of trust engendered by the presence of this single person seems to be of central importance....In effect, there is an acceptance of cultural difference, and Romani practices and traditions are not viewed as a challenge to the wider school ethos. All of the GRT children of secondary age at site A are now attending school. Up until five years ago, most

of the GRT pupils left school as soon as they were sixteen years of age. Currently, all of them are remaining at school to take GCSE examinations in year 11, and on leaving school, a number of them are going on to college. (Miskovic, 2013, p.104)

This particular chapter, and the other chapters in this section help the reader appreciate the potential for research to lead to better pedagogical practice. Scholarship, such as the Cornwall project, that leads to replicable, concrete ideas that advance the educational condition of Roma students is a powerful tool for educators working directly with Roma students.

Part three, is a less thematic section that examines a variety of important topics related to educating Roma in eastern and central Europe. In my view, a very important component in this section of the book is the exploration of Roma advances in tertiary education. This topic is also covered excellently by Forray in section two of the book (chapter 9). In chapter 11, Friedman and Garaz examine how support for Roma tertiary education has “contributed to Roma’s inclusion in the societies in which they live and thus to social cohesion” (Miskovic, 2013, p. 149). One of the main thrusts of this article is evaluating data related to Romaversitas programs in Hungary and Macedonia as well as the Roma Education Fund Scholarship. The Romaversitas Programs are designed to support talented and motivated students as they engage a tertiary educational program or degree. Hungary Romaversitas and Macedonia Romaversitas are designed to provide training, financial, moral, and intellectual support for talented Romani students enrolled in higher education. Forray states, “The main goal of this initiative is to train the elite with strong Romani/Gypsy identity and breadth of view, who can speak foreign languages and act on a high level in any professional role in social, economic, or policy-making positions” (Miskovic, 2013, p. 130). The Roma Education Fund Scholarships have a similar objective. These awards currently are provided to students in 16 different European countries and generally help toward covering tuition and fees. Friedman and Garaz make a strong data-driven case that these programs are making a difference. The authors conclude,

[W]e can see that the programs’ clearest successes – with the exception of Romaversitas Macedonia, for which the relevant data are not available – have been in increasing participation in and completion of tertiary education among Roma from families with lower levels of educational attainment. This suggests that the programs have contributed to reducing educational disparities within the Romani population. (Miskovic, 2013, p. 161)

The strengths of this book are numerous. First, I know of no other work about Roma education that brings together such a diverse group of contributors that covers Roma educational issues with the depth and erudition found in this work. The biographies of the contributors found in the beginning of the book is indeed impressive, including thought-leaders from around the world who are passionate about their particular topics/specialties. Secondly, although the articles in this volume vary greatly by topic, focus, or geographical region, the book in its entirety helps to paint a holistic picture of

Roma education in Europe On the whole, Roma Education in Europe: Practices, Policies, and Politics is an important contribution to the literature and I highly recommend it as a tool for educators, researchers, policy makers, and activists.

References

Claveria, J. V. & Alonso, J. G. (2003). Why Roma do not like mainstream schools: Voices of a people without territory. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(4), 559-590.