

## Philosophical Inquiry in Education

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY IN EDUCATION  
The Journal of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society

### *Integrations: The Struggle for Racial Equity and Civic Renewal in Public Education* by Lawrence Blum and Zoë Burkholder, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021

Robyn Ilten-Gee

Volume 31, numéro 1, 2024

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1112315ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1112315ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Philosophy of Education Society

ISSN

2369-8659 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Ilten-Gee, R. (2024). Compte rendu de [*Integrations: The Struggle for Racial Equity and Civic Renewal in Public Education* by Lawrence Blum and Zoë Burkholder, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021]. *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, 31(1), 94–97. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1112315ar>

This article is free to use with proper attribution (to both the author and Philosophical Inquiry in Education) for educational and other non-commercial uses © Robyn Ilten-Gee, 2024

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Review of

## *Integrations: The Struggle for Racial Equity and Civic Renewal in Public Education*

by Lawrence Blum and Zoë Burkholder, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021

---

ROBYN ILTEN-GEE

Simon Fraser University

The book *Integrations: The struggle for racial equality and civic renewal in public education* by Blum and Burkholder pulls apart and reassembles readers' understandings of racial integration in public schools in the United States. The book leaves readers with an understanding of the coordinated efforts to both promote and prevent racial integration in public schools. In the process of describing these efforts, the authors explain that racial integration cannot be a stand-in for equality. The authors dismantle several arguments for integration, including access to resources and capital, that rely on the very same racist structures that integration was designed to end. They quote Robert Carter, a civil rights activist and NYC district court judge, who said that integration was the means to an end, not the end itself (p. 58). This is a critical point that helps readers disentangle the notions of desegregation, integration, and equality. Blum and Burkholder argue that the true value of integration is not equality at all; integration is valuable because it has the potential to prepare students to live in a democratic, multiracial society. This book is a powerful educational tool that complicates the intellectual conversation about equality and integration and suggests interesting pathways towards renewed civic and moral education.

I did not approach Blum and Burkholder's book as a philosopher, but as someone who teaches social justice education courses in university. In this capacity, I have drawn on the extensive research in Blum and Burkholder's text to illustrate foundational ideas in my courses, including historical examples of how whiteness is wielded as a political tool of those in power, and is *not* an inherent trait. As someone who studies moral education, I was interested in the articulation of the connection between racial integration and moral education. One central argument from Blum and Burkholder is that moral capabilities are one type of essential *educational good*. Educational goods are the skills, mindsets, types of development, and growth that all students should have by the time they leave school. The possession of educational goods, they argue, is how we should measure equality, and specifically racial equality, in schools. There are four categories of educational goods: intellectual, personal growth/flourishing, moral capabilities, and civic. The authors state that these categories overlap and all are intrinsically and instrumentally valuable. The authors explain that moral capabilities include a critical awareness and commitment to rectifying racial injustice. They write, "Civic and moral education should help students ... gain an understanding of race as a social force and social phenomenon, commit to rectifying racial injustice and other racial ills, use their learned capability to analyze racial phenomena in service of informing their civic commitments, and recognize the meaningfulness to others of their ethnoracial identities" (p. 164). This direct connection between race and morality provides a useful mandate for the field of moral education to take up race, racial identity, and racism in classroom spaces.

The words “analyze” and “commit” stand out in the argument quoted above. Moral educators would probably agree that one cannot just present students with answers when it comes to racial justice or any controversial topic; force-feeding students involves zero critical thinking, and the student has no opportunity to be changed. Instead, students should be provided with opportunities to analyze new information and then commit to action. Blum and Burkholder expand on this idea of active construction of learning: “The purpose of education (in its personal growth, moral, and civic modes) is therefore to provide students with the ability to form values of their own, which they recognize may not align with dominant sociocultural values at a given time. ... Not only must educators help students develop their own capacities for social criticism, but they must also affirmatively teach them to recognize when a society is unjust” (pp. 103–104). Blum and Burkholder take the stance that education must prepare students to disagree with and question systems and societies.

This resonates well with the framework laid out in my recent book with Larry Nucci, *Moral Education for Social Justice* (Nucci & Ilten-Gee, 2021). In this text, we align the end goals of moral education with developing a *critical consciousness* (Freire, 1970/2005). Freire argued that it is through problem posing, collective dialogue, and a process of inquiry, action, and reflection that we can foster within students the ability to recognize contradictions in their own circumstances and perceive systemic oppression at work in our immediate environments. In our book, we assert that this ability to perceive contradictions and take action to investigate and rectify injustices is also an end goal of moral education. Developmental psychology research has shown that all children have understandings of harm, fairness, welfare, and rights (social domain theory: see Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, 2013; Turiel, 1983). As moral educators, it is our job to help students find the nuance in these understandings and apply them to the social systems in which they live in order to make society more just. For example, high school students who decide to petition for their school mascot to be changed because it is based on a racist stereotype are applying their understandings of harm, fairness, and equality to status quo representations of race in their community. Opportunities for students to take civic action and articulate their stance on racial inequality are essential to moral development. Blum and Burkholder’s argument that moral capabilities are an educational good, and that these capabilities include analyzing society’s flaws and committing to action, aligns with a social justice approach to moral reasoning. Blum and Burkholder write, “To teach, or to leave students with the impression, that it is an open question whether American society today is a just social order is not intellectually or civically responsible” (p. 104).

The authors describe how integration was not an automatic “win” for communities of colour, since the change often meant their children stopped seeing their own identities reflected in the curriculum. Blum and Burkholder write about movements within Black, Asian, Latinx, and Native American communities to create schools in which their own ethnic and racial identities were valued and sustained through thoughtful pedagogy. The authors elaborate on the challenges of maintaining and preserving this pedagogy in integrated public schools. They call this endeavour the challenge of pluralism. As an example, the authors write about desegregating public schools in San Francisco’s Chinatown in the early 1970s. According to Blum and Burkholder, after *Brown v. Board*, the city of San Francisco began to desegregate “Oriental schools” in Chinatown. Chinese students were bussed away, and Black and Mexican students were bussed in. Chinese parents and students boycotted public schools for an entire year and opted instead to attend “freedom schools,” which were designed in the image of the Black civil rights movement, where students learned Chinese history and culture. This mobilized resistance to integration was in part fuelled by anti-Black racism within the Chinese community, and yet these parents borrowed models of activism and resistance from the Black community. This boycott reveals an understanding on the part of Chinese parents that desegregating schools would *not* result in positive ethnic, racial, and culturally sustaining experiences for their children.

The scholarship of Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017) on *culturally sustaining pedagogy* speaks directly to this challenge. Their framework builds on the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995; 2014) and suggests that public schools today have to do more than be relevant or responsive to students’ cultural backgrounds. Instead, they must actively sustain important elements of students’ diverse identities and

the ways in which these identities intersect with each other and over time: “CSP [Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy] seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88). Paris and Alim do not suggest using cultural practices as a bridge into teaching canonical texts and subjects. Instead, they argue for actively sustaining Black, Chinese, Latinx, Indigenous, etc. cultural practices as part of the curriculum and fabric of schools. Paris and Alim also distinguish between heritage cultural practices and community cultural practices, and emphasize the ways in which young people and others transform heritage practices through remixing them with elements of popular culture.

If public schools in San Francisco in 1971 had actively sustained the Chinese language, valued bilingualism, and focused on the shared community practices that transcend racial divisions, Chinese parents, as well as other parents, might have had more faith in integration as a viable solution. Another example of pedagogy that is culturally sustaining in Blum and Burkholder’s text is the Rough Rock Demonstration School for Native American students, where community elders taught weaving, told stories, and joined students for meals. It was bilingual and bicultural. The authors describe this school as “cutting edge progressive pedagogy,” even though it was not integrated. These examples teach us that integration for integration’s sake ignores the strong desire of families to foster learning environments that put culture, ethnicity, language, and racial identity at the centre of their children’s experience. The authors explain that various groups in the US were not necessarily pro- or anti-integration, but advocated for the specific, complex needs of their communities. Paris and Alim’s culturally sustaining pedagogy framework resonates with Blum and Burkholder’s notion of *egalitarian civic integrationist pluralism*. Blum and Burkholder argue that supporting and sustaining cultural practices of all students in integrated classrooms is essential for preparing students for public life in a multiracial democracy.

Blum and Burkholder explain that the White/non-White binary, which dominates the integration narrative, is problematic, because integration challenges occur(ed) in non-White schools as well, and racism and prejudice take different forms with respect to people of different racial backgrounds. In his book *Deconstructing Race*, race and literacy scholar Jabari Mahiri (2017) explores how people can resist being essentialized into White/non-White racial categories. He poses the question: If race is a social construct, how can we deconstruct it? He suggests making hidden aspects of people’s identities visible, recognizing intra-group differences and *hyperdiversity* in all of us, which means acknowledging the varied cultural practices, activity choices, dialects, musical preferences, religious associations, gender identities, etc. that contribute to the diverse ways we embody racial identities. Emphasizing diversity along these other dimensions challenges the social forces that benefit from White/non-White categories. Mahiri writes, “More efforts are needed to change how race is reductively coded in institutional structures and processes such as the census, job and school applications and records, media representations, and general public discourse” (p. 58). Specifically, he suggests that the census could be altered to ask people about their geographic place of origin, heritage, lineage, or place of birth of their ancestors, in order to allow people to identify with geographies and generations, in addition to racial categories. Mahiri’s ideas represent some of the complexity and nuance that Blum and Burkholder call for in future conversations about integration in public schools.

As a concluding note, Blum and Burkholder’s book provides an excellent backdrop to the podcast *Nice White Parents* (Joffe-Walt, 2020), which investigates the history and evolution of one New York City public school through the lens of race. Throughout this podcast, we hear White parents justify integration with calls for diversity, but parents and students of colour are more concerned with quality education, and securing qualified teachers, materials, space, and working facilities for their children. Just as Blum and Burkholder point out, diversity itself is not a strong enough reason to integrate schools. Diversity and integration can be superficial buzzwords if they do not come with commitments to equity, which, according to the authors, should be measured in terms of the possession of educational goods. They argue that racial integration is valuable for preparing students to live in a multiracial democracy. They also provide a connection between moral reasoning, moral capabilities, and race as a

social force, which makes their text a powerful tool for those engaging in critical thinking about racial justice.

## References

- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum. (Originally published 1970)
- Joffe-Walt, C. (Host). Snyder, J. (Producer). S. Koenig, N. Drumming, & I. Glass (Eds). (August 2020–July 2020). *Nice white parents*. [Audio podcast]. *New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/23/podcasts/nice-white-parents-serial.html>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 465–491.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: A.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84, 74–84.
- Mahiri, J. (2017). *Deconstructing race: Multicultural education beyond the color-blind*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Nucci, L. P., & Ilten-Gee, R. (2021). *Moral education for social justice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84, 85–100.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Smetana, J. G., Jambon, M., & Ball, C. (2013). The social domain approach to children's moral and social judgments. In M. Killen, & J. G. Smetana (Eds), *Handbook of moral development* (pp. 23–45). London, UK: Psychology Press.
- Turiel, E. (1983). *The development of social knowledge: Morality and convention*. Boston, MA: Cambridge University Press.