E Pluribus Plures

The myth of the melting pot

Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants

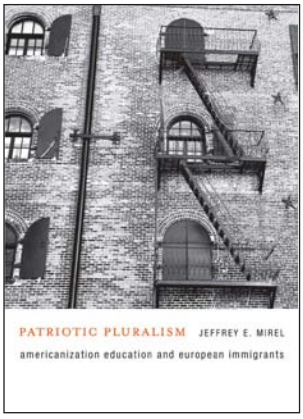
By Jeffrey E. Mirel

Harvard University Press, 2010, $45; 368 pages.

As reviewed by Nathan Glazer

Americanization, argues education historian Jeffrey Mirel in *Patriotic Pluralism*, both the process and the term, has been widely misunderstood and too narrowly interpreted in the literature and scholarship on the assimilation of the American immigrant. The iconic picture is that of the melting pot, literally interpreted, as in the ceremony that capped Americanization education in the Ford Motor Company in the 1920s: immigrants, dressed in traditional costume, lined up to walk into a stage-set melting pot, to emerge on the other side identically dressed. In this view, immigrants were to be stripped of language, customs, national identities, to become like all other Americans, who were assumed to be near-identical. Such a ceremony did take place and it did epitomize one version of Americanization, but that was only one version, and the most extreme.

Mirel's correction of the traditional picture comes about through a close examination of the schooling of immigrant school children and Americanization education for immigrant workers in Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit, all major concentrations of immigrants in the early 20th century. He draws evidence from an enormous mass of translations of editorials and articles from the immigrant press in Chicago and Cleveland, made by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the late 1930s and early 1940s. (The WPA also played a key role in the education of immigrant adults in the run-up to World War II, supporting naturalization classes in English and American government.)



The curriculum for children was far from the "multiculturalism" of recent decades. This education was nevertheless in the liberal spirit, as Mirel notes in making an important distinction: the education of immigrant children was in "civic nationalism," not "ethnic nationalism." The latter insisted that Americanism must have a distinctive ethnic base and disparaged the new immigrants as ethnically so different from the mass of 19th-century Americans as to make them incapable of becoming good Americans. Civic nationalism, in contrast, insists that anyone can become a good American, for Americanism depends on loyalty to principles rather than some specific ethnicity. Mirel is clearly on the side of civic nationalism. Despite the triumph of ethnic nationalists in the new immigration legislation of the 1920s, educators and their allies "ignored the restrictionists' view about the uneducability of the immigrants and persisted in using the schools and the other educational venues to Americanize immigrants and their children…. These programs would produce tens of thousands of new citizens who embraced in varying degrees the values of civic nationalism they had been taught."

Teachers and curricula in Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland in effect assumed the new immigrant children were capable of becoming good Americans and provided them with the kind of education that would make them so. "The reading programs for elementary students… immersed children in the western literary tradition…from their earliest years…. Detroit educators introduced simplified versions of 'classic myths and fairy tales'…Suggested reading for first grade included several of Aesop's fables; the stories of Cinderella, Red Riding Hood and Sleeping Beauty; some of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus tales; brief biographies of Columbus, Washington, and Lincoln; … poems by … Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. For fourth grade, educators recommended stories from Homer's Odyssey, Washington Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle,' Howard Pyle's adventures of Robin Hood, and biographies of Magellan, De Soto, and William Penn." They were being inducted into becoming Americans, as that was understood at the time.

The foreign-language press, in Mirel's analysis, fully supported the efforts of the schools. It encouraged the learning of English; it also encouraged naturalization, and not only because if its practical benefits (protection from deportation in the Red Scare of the 1920s, for example). The foreign-language press supported America's role in World War II, even if the countries we fought against were the homelands of many immigrants; it steadily educated immigrant readers in American history, and through the parents

also tried to educate the children. It linked America's heroes to homeland heroes who fought in American wars. Thaddeus Kosciusko, who fought as a colonel in the Revolutionary War before leading Poland's 1794 uprising against imperial Russia, makes many an appearance in the Polish press, for example. It is noted not only that he had the same birthday as Lincoln (Lincoln was a particular favorite of the immigrant press—he was because of his humble background seen by the immigrants as a welcoming figure who valued their contribution to America), but also that in his will "Kosciusko requested that the large tracts of land he received for his service in the Revolutionary War be used to help end slavery." Mirel notes that, while the immigrant press was enthusiastic about America and its freedoms, it could also criticize Washington and Jefferson as slaveholders: but this criticism, too, was clearly an education in Americanism for its readers.

Mirel extends the story beyond the period of mass immigration into the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, when a new form of Americanization education emerged in the intercultural education movement. Here the African American for the first time enters the story in a significant way: the mission of intercultural education was not only tolerance for immigrant minorities but also for America's blacks. Despite the uniqueness of the black experience, blacks were incorporated into intercultural education as another minority group.

Tolerance, the goal of intercultural education, does not seem much to ask for when we look back from our age of multiculturalism, which calls for much more. But in its time it was an advance. "Patriotic pluralism" is a good description of what education in Americanism became: it assimilated immigrants yet taught all Americans more than tolerance for the culture that immigrants brought, and the culture that blacks had created here in America. Had Mirel extended his story into the last few decades, I am sure he would also have corrected today's overly narrow view of "assimilation," which does not require the loss of all distinctive identity, and of "multiculturalism," which, except in its most excessive forms, also teaches appreciation of American freedoms.

Americanization has meant acquiring citizenship, enlisting and fighting in the American army in World War II, and embracing American patriotism, while accepting the retention of language, religion, and attachment to another identity, and finding no contradiction in this amalgam. Many great American leaders defined Americanization as including all that. Franklin Delano Roosevelt commended immigrants who "may still retain their affection for some of the things they left behind—old customs, old languages, old friends," and "wove into the pattern of American life some of the color, some of the richness of the cultures from which they came.... We gave them freedom. I am proud—America is proud—of what they have given to us.... They have never been—they are not now—half-hearted Americans." These are sentiments every American president since could have embraced.

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How Schools Spend Their Money

Just ignorantly or with purposeful indifference?

Educational Economics: Where Do School Funds Go?

By Marguerite Roza

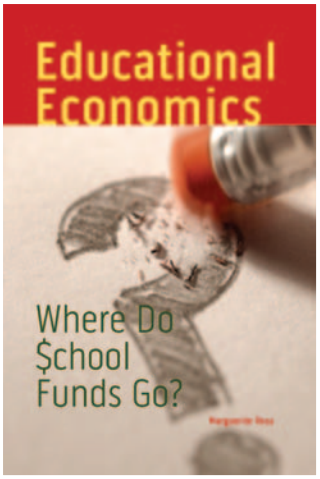
Urban Institute Press, 2010, $26.50; 128 pages.

As reviewed by Jay P. Greene

University of Washington professor and Gates Foundation advisor Marguerite Roza is the Indiana Jones of school finance. In her short but powerful new book, *Educational Economics: Where Do School Funds Go?*, Roza uncovers the hidden caves and tunnels that store the treasure of the public school system. Revealing where the money goes requires intrepid sleuthing, detailed analysis, and occasionally braving hostile natives.

The main finding of Roza's explorations is that education dollars are allocated in ways that are sharply at odds with the stated priorities of public school systems. Education leaders say they want to devote greater funding to low-income students, but within most school districts per-pupil spending is higher at schools with more-advantaged students. Education leaders say they want to focus resources on the core subjects of math, reading, history, and science, but per-pupil spending tends to be much higher for electives, extracurricular activities, and sports. Education leaders say they want to emphasize remedial instruction to help lagging students catch up, but in most school districts per-pupil spending is significantly greater for Advanced Placement (AP) and gifted classes than for remedial ones.

The chief culprit in this misallocation of resources relative to stated priorities is the uniform salary schedule for teachers. In virtually every public school throughout the country, teachers are paid primarily according to their credentials, seniority, and "additional" work assignments and not at all according to subject taught, number of students served, or the difficulty or importance of their assignments. The net effect of this arrangement is that labor costs, the bulk of per-pupil spending, are distributed by formulas that are completely unaligned with stated priorities.



Schools with more low-income students tend to receive less per-pupil spending within districts because the higher-paid teachers with greater experience often transfer to schools with more-advantaged students who are less difficult to educate. Non-core electives, like art, music, gym, and shop, receive higher per-pupil spending because they tend to have fewer students per class than required core subjects, like reading, math, history, and science. Since all teachers are paid the same regardless of the subject they teach, smaller classes necessarily translate into higher per-pupil spending. Extracurricular activities and sports receive higher per-pupil funding because fewer students participate and teachers receive extra pay for assuming these "additional" assignments. Per-pupil spending on AP and gifted classes exceeds remedial classes because, again, fewer students tend to be in those advanced classes.

"How can those inside and outside the system allow such blatantly contradictory spending patterns to persist in their own schools?" Roza asks. Her first explanation is ignorance: "They generally do not know these patterns exist, as district budgeting and accounting practices make it incredibly difficult to identify detailed spending patterns." But elsewhere Roza suggests that the problem is less benign than ignorance. She writes, "Powerful forces work to protect the interests of those who benefit from the present allocation of resources. Among those who benefit from the status quo are the more experienced teachers, influential parents with children in high-achieving schools, and board members who represent wealthier neighborhoods." She also highlights the role that teachers unions play in determining the allocation of resources by championing the uniform salary schedule, transfer rights for more experienced teachers, and work rules.

Roza's ambiguity about the causes of the mismatch between stated priorities and actual spending undermines her ability to propose solutions. If the problem is caused primarily by ignorance, then the solution lies in greater transparency through more rigorous and open accounting policies. But if the problem is caused primarily by the influence of powerful interest groups, then a political restructuring of incentives is required. If poor kids get the short end of the education stick because teachers unions and wealthy parents pursue their own benefit with indifference to the consequences for those less fortunate, then those interest groups have to be stripped of their control over allocating resources. This could be achieved

by empowering families with direct control over education resources via vouchers or a weighted student-based formula for allocating government funds.

For most of the book, Roza leans toward the ignorance explanation: "The most important answer is that they don't know about real spending patterns … Bad information leads to mistaken assumptions and ultimately misguided strategic resource decisions." Unfortunately, this explanation for misallocated school spending is unsatisfying and fails to yield compelling solutions, even according to Roza herself. She lists a variety of school-finance reforms and argues that they are all "guaranteed to fail" because they do not address the "entire package of incoherent, inefficient, and inequitable spending."

The solution, she acknowledges in the final two chapters, requires a more comprehensive restructuring of the education system than just transparency measures. On the final page of the text, she reveals how that restructuring might take shape when she emphasizes "the need to separate the functions of allocating resources, setting standards, and defining accountability from the function of making decisions about resource use. If states could recognize that they play some role in the first three, they might be convinced that they should not also take on the fourth." This sounds like vouchers or weighted student-based funding, where the government funds education and establishes accountability for results while decentralizing to the family or individual school the power to decide how money is spent.

The book would be stronger if the political restructuring of the education system were addressed earlier and more fully. As it stands, readers are likely to get the mistaken impression that ignorance is the primary cause of the failure of school funding systems and improved awareness the solution. Ignorance is a problem, but it is the willful ignorance of malicious indifference. No solutions are possible without addressing that.

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