THE DILEMMA FROM THE PAST TO PRESENT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN CHINA’S MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Min Yu
Missouri State University, Springfield, MO, USA

Background and Focus

This study works to create greater understanding of the struggles in which parents and teachers in the displaced/migrant communities in China are involved, given their efforts to provide children with access to schooling.

Research methods

The author conducted qualitative research in four different migrant communities in Beijing and did extensive archival research on population displacement and state educational responses to it over the past thirty years. This study pays close attention to the organizational battles against social and political constraints, in addition to focusing on the mobilization of resources in the development of this collective action.

Theoretical framework

Prominent studies have provided sociological research addressing the power of ordinary people coming together to create change in their communities to reverse the downward spiral of educational problems, historical accounts of describing the challenges and rewards of community organizing, and cultural politics analyses of recognizing the democratic values of collectively promoting the public interest instead of private benefits (Anyon, 2005, Apple, 1996, 2006, Binder, 2002, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, Payne & Strickland, 2008, Reese, 2002, Walker, 1993)—all of which offer rich understandings of struggles taking place in schools and around issues of education.

Findings and Contribution

It is crucial for this study to document the processes and effects of the various and contradictory elements of the migrant children school movement—specifically, the ways in which contestations are mediated, compromised, accepted, and used in different ways by different groups (Apple, 2006). By documenting the history of migrant children schools, sharing the stories of migrant families, and identifying the very real effects of socioeconomic changes in China, this study recognizes the collective efforts of parents and teachers in the migrant communities and works towards ensuring that the children of migrant workers receive quality education in officially sanctioned schools.

Given the increasing globalizing flows of people, capital, language, and ideas, it is critically important to learn from the experiences of migrant communities like those in China. Not only is this of importance given the challenges and suffering experienced as a result of social and economic inequity in China, but it is also increasingly relevant to other nations throughout the world as they face concerns relating to the education of children from migrant worker families. The lessons learned from these struggles in China help to provide broader understandings of the complex and vibrant realities in which global communities are situated.