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Howard, Tyrone C. (2010) *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Changing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms*. NY: Teachers College Press.

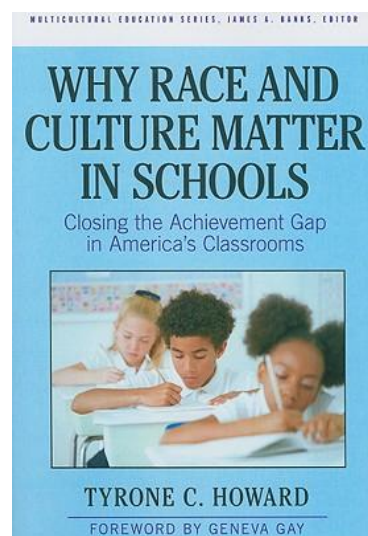
Pp. 182

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Reviewed by Veda Jairrels
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This seven-chapter book is part of a multicultural education book series. James A. Banks and Geneva Gay, renowned scholars in multicultural education, wrote the series foreword and book foreword, respectively. Gay set the tone for the book, warning that it would be “challenging” for some while “affirming” for others (p. xviii).

The author examines the effect of race and culture in schools and the consequences for the achievement gap. Howard begins the book with an introduction where he explains that his book is grounded in theory and empirical research with a focus on the “social, cultural, economic, and historical factors” that affect different groups (p. 2). He notes that for various reasons, his book does not focus on the “Black-White dichotomy” (p.6).



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In chapter 1, Howard presents data documenting the achievement gap regarding reading and math differences; retention, suspensions and expulsions; graduation rates; gifted and advanced placement enrollment; special education placement; and SAT scores. The author also provides explanations for the achievement gap such as the cultural mismatch theory, stereotype threat, and the lack of resources.

The second chapter focuses on the changing demographics of the nation. Howard provides census data; indicates the population shifts that have occurred over the years; and states that the achievement gap could have political and economic consequences. Howard discusses the implications of the changing demography for the student population. He stresses the need for teachers to be prepared to instruct students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. There is an interesting table (Table 2.2) in this chapter. It lists the differences between sympathetic and empathetic educators. He also describes an empathetic teacher from his childhood.

Culture is the title of chapter 3. The author states that “culture...shapes learning in unique and meaningful ways” (p.53) and that it can be shaped by various factors such as gender and social class. Howard contends that culture, race, and ethnicity are different concepts and he explains the differences. He says that culture is not restricted by ethnicity and he cautions against planning instruction based on stereotypes. He also discusses sociocultural theory and cultural modeling.

In chapter 4, Howard examines culturally responsive pedagogy and states that it is complex and cannot be reduced to a single step or procedure. He lists the key tenets of this pedagogy; reviews the research; and lists areas where more research is needed. He contrasts the cultural deficit theory with the culturally difference theory. Howard provides examples of specific teaching strategies and the description of a program to enhance academic achievement.



Tyrone C. Howard is Associate Professor of Education in the Division of Urban Schooling, and Director of Center X in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA. His research focuses on academic achievement in urban settings, critical race theory, social studies, and multicultural education.

Chapter 5 addresses the interplay of race and achievement. He details how different scholars “approach” (p. 92) the importance of race as it concerns education. He also discusses how a belief in racial superiority has affected education. Howard argues that the issue of race should not be avoided. He also discusses the framework of critical race theory, explaining how critical race theorists approach their analysis of the impact of racism on education.

Developing cultural competence and racial awareness is the focus of the next chapter. Howard defines cultural competence and provides five concepts that underlie it. He discusses the importance of teachers engaging in self-reflection on race and culture. Howard also defines racial awareness and explains why it is important that teachers develop an awareness of it. He questions the extent to which teacher educators can prepare future teachers to instruct students from diverse backgrounds, when they have not thought critically about the issues raised in this book.

The last chapter provides examples of schools that have been effective in increasing the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. He profiles two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, and discusses the common characteristics of these schools.

Given the achievement gap and its political and economic consequences for the nation, there can never be enough books to examine this topic. This book emphasizes what educators can do and how they can examine the roles of culture and race in schools. This book also provides a beneficial synthesis of the research and theoretical literature on the interaction of race and culture in education. Throughout the book, Howard also discusses the research that he has conducted.

The book can be useful to undergraduate and graduate students, school administrators, teacher educators, and teachers. Undergraduate and graduate students can use the book to guide them as they critically reflect on issues raised in the book. Teachers, school administrators, and teacher educators can review the research and the effective programs described in the book to see how they can revise their current curriculum.

Chapters 4 and 7 may be particularly useful to educators. These chapters are helpful because they contain specific teaching strategies and details about effective instructional programs. For example, Howard discusses research which concluded that cultural experiences could be used in math instruction.

Howard incorporates discussions about actual events that could be quite informative, especially for pre-service teachers. One event involved his son's preschool teacher. The conversation between Howard and the teacher indicates some of the problems that teachers may have in their interactions with students. Howard also discusses a letter about education that Native Americans sent to Benjamin Franklin. Although hundreds of years old, this letter reflects some of the issues that Howard raises in the book. Teacher educators could use these events as catalysts for class discussions.

College professors can adopt this book for courses that focus on multicultural education, urban education, or field experiences. Professors could use the questions, personal stories, historical events, tables, and figures in the book to develop critical thinking skills in their students. Professors can also use the book as a general reference guide to assist them in course planning. The author's tone conveyed that in addition to writing as a scholar, he was also speaking sincerely and emotionally from his heart. He is imploring all educators to critically examine their thoughts and deeds as they pertain to culture, race, and education. This book is well worth reading more than once.

About the Reviewer

Veda Jairrels, J.D., Ph.D., is a Professor of Exceptional Education at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, GA. She received her undergraduate degree in political science and her law degree from Indiana University. Her masters and doctorate degrees in special education are from Columbia University and the University of Alabama, respectively. She taught in the New York City Public Schools and is licensed to practice law in Pennsylvania. She is the author of *African Americans and Standardized Tests: The Real Reason for Low Test Scores*.



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