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Delpit, Lisa D. (2012) *"Multiplication Is for White People": Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*. New York: New Press.

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Reviewed by Yvette Latunde

Azusa Pacific University

The purpose of Lisa Delpit's new book, "*Multiplication is for White People*," is to provide the reader with factors that she believes influence educational outcomes in urban schools for children of color. She draws from both her personal experience and her work as a scholar to outline evidenced-based practices for raising the expectations for African-American students. The content of the book includes information on the inherent abilities of African American children, effective practices for educating young children, adolescence, and beyond. The book is constructed in four major parts and is an easy read.

Part one addresses the achievement gap and African American students' capabilities. Part two examines some

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of the trends in education related to literacy, reactions to poverty, educational practices used for students who learn differently, and cultural disconnections in schools. Part three examines educational practices related to critical thinking, assessment, and what motivates students to learn. Lastly, part four analyzes the experiences of African American students on college campuses and how education can be used for the good of society. Having just read Jawanza Kunjufu's book, *There is Nothing Wrong with Black Students*, my reaction to Delpit's book is complex. This is a good book for helping educators (K-12 & faculty) to be more reflective of their own values, strategies, and ideas about teaching African-American students.

Contextually speaking, this is the right time for this book. The country is in the midst of elections and soon the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will be reauthorized. The achievement gap has continued to persist despite reforms such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and it is expected to outlast Race to the Top. NCLB has a large emphasis on standards-based assessments and Highly Qualified Teachers. Race to the Top provides monetary resources for initiatives that demonstrates the use of standards and assessments that prepare students for life after high school, data systems that measure student growth, and inform teachers and principals how they can improve instruction, turning around low-achieving schools, and recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining the "best" teachers in the most needed schools (U.S. Department of Education). Despite these reforms, African-American children are overrepresented in special education, underrepresented in gifted and talented education and advanced placement courses, and have the highest high-school drop out rates. This book is being judged on how well it addresses these critical issues as well as how well it provides solutions.

Delpit states that, "One of the reasons given for the persisting achievement gap of African-American children is that they are innately less capable" (p. 3). Chapter 1 starts by dispelling the myth that African-Americans are born genetically inferior. She does this by using the research of Marchelle Gerber, William Frankenburg, Joe Dodds, and Phyllis Rippeyoung to support the fact that there is no achievement gap when African-American

children are born. “There were no items on any intelligence scale where White children outperformed African-American children in the first year of life” (p. 4). Delpit makes a point that children come to school with various levels of knowledge and schools should meet them where they are then support them into the next levels, however early school assessments rarely measure what children do know. “Successful teachers of children marginalized by income or ethnicity need to know that the students may lack skills and not intelligence” (p. 57).

Delpit believes that education should connect to student lives culturally by addressing real-world problems through rigorous instruction consistently integrated across disciplines. She notes that, “What we call basic skills are the conventions of middle-class society and strategies successful people use to access new information” (p. 53). Unfortunately she says, teachers get caught in politics regarding popular programs such as the federally funded Reading First program which Delpit sees as an inappropriate government mandate that is fiscally unethical (p. 61). Such politics keep teachers from engaging in the type of instruction that works. According to the National Center for Education Statistics there is a 25 point gap between White and African-American students in reading scores and 53% of African-American students are reading below “basic” in 4th grade (NCES, 2009; 2011). The same critical thinking necessary for literacy is necessary for success in math. “Students who do not advance in mathematics are predestined by middle school to be excluded from the possibility of attending college” (p. 195). Delpit outlines in chapters 3 and 7 evidence-based practices, from scholars like Dr. Asa Hilliard and Dr. Adululahim, that are successful in teaching math to students with deficits.

Families who are “school dependent” need good teachers. Delpit expresses concern with programs like Teach for America (TFA). She suggests that it is a problem when many veteran and African-American teachers are laid off to make room for TFA teachers: teachers whom she states rarely teach long enough to become excellent teachers,

Several young Teach for America recruits have told me that their colleagues frequently run back home or to graduate school with the belief that the children they went to save were

unsalvageable – not because of poor teaching but because of their student's parents, families, or communities (p. xx).

These teachers did not consider that their poor teaching was a factor in poor student outcomes.

This book addresses pertinent issues in education. Similar to Kunjufu (2012), Delpit believes that when poverty, culture, and parenting are used as the reasons why African-American students are experiencing an achievement gap it leaves schools with no responsibility. In fact the achievement gap does not just affect low-income African-American students (Kunjufu, 2005).

“Their schools, unable to accommodate any behavior and learning style outside a narrow range deemed acceptable, teach them a lifelong lesson: They learn that they are inadequate, incompetent, and damaged” (p. 94). These same students reject schools or use anger as a defense mechanism. The book confirms what we know: children in poverty can and do learn, families are important, collaboration is necessary, there is nothing wrong with African-American children, culturally competent educators are needed, good instruction and instructional accountability matter. I believe that this book is comparable and complementary to Drs. Jawanza Kunjufu, Beth Harry, Gail Thompson, Janice Hale, Baruti Kafele, and Asa Hilliard's works to name a few.

The achievement gap has gained national attention. Recently, I was called into a meeting with a school's site council chair and later principal to brain storm strategies to close the achievement gap locally. The school site council is responsible for outlining resources and strategies for closing the achievement in the School Single Plan at each school. The chair asked me why I thought there was a gap and when I began to discuss the importance of the culture in regards to teaching and learning, I was immediately met with indifference. These were her thoughts, “As long as you talk about race, no one will listen.”

When working with schools, I too believe that many have come to accept the achievement gap as a permanent fixture. It has been my experience that many educators do believe that poverty, poor parenting, and low family involvement are the only reasons for the achievement gap

(Kunjufu, 2012; Latunde, 2009). Principals almost seem desperate to find solutions as African-Americans lag in standardized test scores. Oddly enough many principals and educators that I have worked with have not accessed resources such as *Keeping Black boys out of special education* (Kunjufu, 2005), *200+ Strategies for Teachers of Children of Color* (Kunjufu, 2009) or *Other People's Children* (Delpit, 1995), or any of Gail Thompson's work. There are entire handbooks on culture-based pedagogy and school practices.

When trying to share resources for working with African-American students I am often met with, "I do not have time to read all of that." Scholars are asked to condense the information into two- or three-day workshops and the culture of the school/district is expected to change. It usually does not. Since we know that African-American children are not born genetically inferior, African-American families have some of the highest college aspirations for their children and are involved in ways that improve student outcome (Jeynes, 2005; Latunde, 2009) how can we raise the educational expectations for all children? This book has answers to this complex question.

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About the Reviewer

Yvette Latunde is an Associate Professor at Azusa Pacific University and Coordinator of the mild/moderate programs at the Los Angeles Regional Center for Azusa Pacific. Her research interests include culturally diverse family engagement practices in special education, best practice for inclusion, RTI, and African American student outcomes. Currently, she is examining the role of teacher preparation programs in facilitating family engagement in special education.



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Editors

David J. Blacker

blacker@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info
