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Au, Kathryn. (2011) *Literacy Achievement and Diversity: Keys to Success for Students, Teachers, and Schools*. NY: Teachers College Press.

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In her Foreword to Teachers College Press's Multicultural Education Series, Patricia Edwards provides some history to the contemporary multicultural education movement, tracing the evolution of its rationale from multiethnic education to multicultural education to the current approach that champions culturally relevant classrooms. She also outlines different explanations that have been offered for the underachievement of minority students. There is the "cultural deprivation" view, where the achievement gap is allegedly caused by minority students' limited cultural capacities. There is the "cultural deficit" view, where teachers are blamed for lacking appropriate expectations for and internalizing negative views toward minority students. And there is the more current "cultural difference paradigm," where cultural differences are said

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to account for disparities in schooling experiences, the remedy to which is to embrace more culturally relevant pedagogical theory and practice. Curiously, for a forward to a book about literacy, there was no discussion of the historical language research that has also informed the debate about the achievement gap among minority students.

Kathryn Au's Introduction indicates that her intended audience consists primarily of graduate seminars and teacher learning communities concerned with the literacy issues of diverse populations. She describes four "keys to success": (a) Understanding that the achievement gap is multifaceted; (b) Improving the literacy achievement of diverse student populations is contingent upon higher level thinking and reading comprehension; (c) Improvements in literacy must build upon students' diverse backgrounds; and (d) Improving literacy requires the development of school-wide professional learning communities where teachers can work together. Au advances four main goals: (a) overcoming the achievement gap; (b) providing effective instruction of phonics and basic skills; (c) acknowledging that culturally relevant instruction is important for all teachers; and (d) a whole-school change approach that extends constructivist principles.

In Chapter 1, " Schooling, literacy, and cultural diversity in research and personal experience," Au reflects on her positionality as a researcher. She delves into her own biases, background, and experiences of growing up in Hawaii. She provides rich detail concerning the children's texts that influenced her in her youth. She then identifies the disconnect she experienced between her home and school literacy experiences. Au calls for readers to do likewise, to reflect on their own diverse school and home literacy experiences. This was a compelling aspect of the book, emphasizing how essential it is for literacy professionals to reflect upon their own backgrounds and biases when working with children.

In Chapter 2, "Social constructivism and the school literacy learning of students of diverse backgrounds," Au's primary purpose is to explain the literacy achievement gap from a social constructivist perspective and to move the reader from a mainstream constructivist perspective to a diverse constructivist perspective. The next chapter,

"Culturally responsive instruction: Application to multiethnic classrooms," further addresses the achievement gap and the underlying rationale for culturally responsive instruction. Au also highlights strategies identified in the research literature that seem effective for multiethnic classrooms. Chapter 4, "If Can, Can: Hawai'i creole creole English and reading achievement," centers on language, student resistance, and literacy learning. Au compares the experiences of students that speak Hawai'i Creole (HC) to students that speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Here she draws attention to the common misconception that a student's home language constitutes a barrier to learning English. In the next chapter, "Ownership, literacy achievement, and students of diverse backgrounds," Au relates the research conducted at the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) in Hawaii. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Ogbu, Fordham, and Erickson, Au illuminates broader issues related to trust, schooling experiences, and the society at large as those factors relate to educating minority students. Here an overarching theme is that students must be taught to take greater ownership over their own literacy experiences. The penultimate chapter, "Balanced literacy instruction: Implications for students of diverse backgrounds," addresses issues pertaining to students in Pre-K through third grade. Although, this chapter focused on a balanced literacy approach, it was surprising not to see a discussion of critical thinking. Au's final chapter, "Negotiating the slippery slope: school change and literacy achievement," concerns her attempts at KEEP to implement her ideas via a range of curricular strategies. Although collaborative and apparently worthwhile, Au's work with the teachers at KEEP did not seem to evoke anything very unique; for example, the literary experiences there seemed to be basic—and there was no emphasis on critical thinking beyond those centered in literature discussions.

From my perspective as a literacy professional, the literacy experiences presented in this work were often rich, authentic and meaningful. It would have been helpful to supplement the presentation with illustrative examples of students' work, sample classroom schedules, and more information about the perspective of the teachers themselves. Au has definitely given us an important contribution to the field of literacy. More concrete

examples of what culturally relevant instruction actually looks like would have augmented this contribution, at least in terms of assisting literacy professionals.

Although written primarily for practicing educators and graduate students in the areas of literacy instruction, *Literacy Achievement and Diversity* has a wider significance for scholars of educational policy as well. Au brings attention to many factors that are sometimes neglected when education policy researchers write about diverse populations. A range of issues, including students' linguistic and cultural differences, teachers' beliefs and practices, and a range of curriculum issues are all important factors to consider. By helping to bring such focus, Au significantly contributes to the field of literacy and adds helpfully to the growing body of research regarding culturally relevant teaching.

About the Reviewer

Tiffany A. Flowers is an Instructor of Education at Georgia Perimeter College. She is an Indiana Minority Faculty Fellow and a Frederick Douglas Teaching Fellow. Tiffany has also taught grades K-3 in public schools in Virginia, Florida, and South Carolina. She has also served as a statewide Education Program Specialist in Georgia, where she assisted in coordinating K-12 early intervention and remedial education programs. Her research interests include African American literacy development, literature, diversity issues in education, and emergent literacy.

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