

## BOOK REVIEW

Review of *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings

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Ladson-Billings' *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (2009) underlines the integral role of culture in education. Organized into seven chapters, the book exemplifies different critical factors that teachers need to consider in their understanding of culture in the teaching process. The chapters include an introductory quote as a highlight of the sequential text. In this context, the author borrows from empirical and personal insight into the relevance of a subject in the culturally competent teaching environment. Most importantly, the approach involving inclusion of such diversity in the sources of insight influences the text by making it comprehensive enough and relevant to its audience.

The writer focused on the experiences of African Americans in the U.S. education system that is heavily marred by racism. *The Dreamkeepers* allows readers to reflect on the importance of an education system that is all-inclusive for students from different cultural backgrounds. Ladson-Billings has highlighted some significant issues affecting youngsters from minority groups and low-income families during the learning process. The book is credible since the writer based the highlighted theories on classroom observations and interviews to provide a snapshot of eight teachers identified by principals and parents as having strategies that can transform an archetypal classroom to one that offers excellent education to African American children.

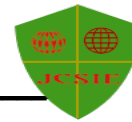
The credibility of the author is shown by her achievement in the education sector. She is a prominent educator who has conducted in-depth research on the best practices for teaching. The writer has also explored the educational issues facing African Americans because she is from the community. In addition, the book is also informed by contributions from teachers who have been successful in educating black children. To eliminate the racial bias that instructors could have regarding a particular group of students, the author used information from eight teachers, five of whom were Blacks and the rest Whites. Therefore, the materials that have been covered in the text are associated with reflections of educators who are perceived to be successful in teaching pupils from different backgrounds.

Ladson-Billings has used various writing techniques that ensure that the target audience is informed about the ideal strategies that enhance the successful delivery of educational

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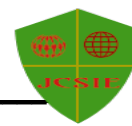


materials to learners from minority groups and underprivileged families. Although the book focused on the learning experiences of African Americans and the distinct approaches that have been utilized to enhance the success of the learning process, the ideas brought forward by the author are crucial in the identification of the ideal classroom setting for such pupils. The teachers who were interviewed when Ladson-Billings was researching the text's materials have provided powerful sentiments about their role, in the creation of the ideal strategy that will improve the ability of students to successfully engage in the learning process. Teachers described African American children as uninterested, at risk, and unmotivated. Furthermore, most educators have the misconception that Black learners are from abusive homes or low-income and violent communities.

However, the interviewees have a different perception of African American children. Some of the phrases they used to describe the youngsters include verbal, bright, God's little flowers, and geniuses. Teachers' perception of children from minority groups is an essential factor that determines the success rate of the learning and teaching process. Ladson-Billings argued that identifying the potential of a student is pivotal to understanding the strategies that should be applied in a classroom setting to enhance the success of the learning process. Furthermore, teachers should not be discriminative in a classroom based on the cultural background of their learners. Instead, it is their duty to fathom the unique abilities of each student and polish their brilliance through the creation of supportive relationships and applications of ideal instructional philosophies.

*The Dreamkeepers* ascertains that the different needs of African American students should be a priority for teachers. Accessing quality education systems has been problematic for Blacks in a historical context. During the slavery era, educational institutions primarily focused on providing educational materials to the other races but not African American slaves. Only a few Blacks had access to education, particularly those in the Southern States. The Whites were unwilling to provide the slaves with the tools and resources that could empower them politically and socially, and allow them to create strategies of fighting against the oppressive social institutions of the time. Similar experiences have been documented after the abolition of slavery when segregation impeded the quality of education offered to different members of the U.S. Even in the contemporary American society, discrepancies exist between the education provided to African American students and those from other ethnicities. For instance, since many Blacks are afflicted by poverty, they rely on public learning institutions, whereas the high-income Whites usually take their children to private schools, which have more teaching resources.

Regardless of the economic, social, and cultural differences existing amongst students, there are elements that make a teacher successful in creating the ideal learning environment for all students. Observations that are similar to Ladson-Billings' have identified various classroom settings preferred by instructors who have been identified as successful in teaching children from diverse cultures. Some of the classrooms have been described as orderly and traditional because they are teacher-oriented. Child-centered classroom settings are also efficient although they are noisy and chaotic. Nevertheless, all successful teachers have one surmounting characteristic; for instance, they recognize the fact that all learners have unique abilities and that it is their duty to

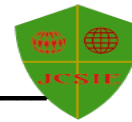


ensure they have the ideal support mechanisms to enhance students' learning outcomes. Furthermore, successful teachers understand that students have different lifestyles when not in school; therefore, they may not have a social support system to help them realize their potential. Since children have disparate abilities to realize their strengths and capitalize on them, instructors are ethically bound to help them realize their full potential.

Ladson-Billings also highlighted the importance of teachers applying available resources to empower their students. Hence, she described several characteristics unique to successful educators. For instance, instructors who are dedicated to empowering learners from diverse cultural backgrounds sacrifice most of their time for the benefit of the children. The teachers interviewed to generate content for the book emphasized the need to push challenged students to achieve their optimal best. According to the teachers, they have had to spend extra time in the mornings, evenings, and weekends with African American students because, although they have differing abilities, they need to be given extra support to realize their potential. In effect, since the youngsters are provided with an ideal classroom setting, they can critically think about any challenging concepts that they come across during the learning process. Correspondingly, this ability of critical thinking is reflected in the future when they are forced to solve complicated issues affecting their lives or the society.

Ladson-Billings also ventured into the sensitive issue of racism. The interviewees in the text acknowledged the fact that institutional racism has been prevalent in the U.S. education system. Therefore, children should be provided with tools that can help them deal with this reality. Even so, the approaches used by different teachers define how youngsters will adapt to a world that is not always fair. Incompetent instructors are likely to instill into children from minority groups the idea that they are not capable of learning in the same way as other students can. African American children have not been offered ideal motivational incentives that will enhance their ability to be successful in learning. In contrast, successful teachers have been noted for their ability to make Black learners perceive themselves as unique. The students were convinced that they are not bound by the stereotypes that are prevalent within the society, as they were given the appropriate support mechanisms that helped them acknowledge the fact that they are bright, intelligent, and capable of achieving their goals despite the hurdles and milestones they have to overcome to achieve success. Therefore, successful teachers of African American learners used ideal strategies to ensure that minority group students are not prevented from achieving success because of the institutional racism that has plagued the American community for many years.

The interviewees also believed that most teachers failed in their mandate of empowering children from minority groups because they focused on an outdated methodology of education that fails to make a difference on students from disparate sociocultural backgrounds. A community that has been marginalized historically needs to be given ideal resources that will enhance its learning outcomes. However, the underlying perception of instructors and the classroom settings need to be changed to enhance the ability of students to successfully integrate into the learning environment. However, a casual observer may fail to comprehend the importance of these factors; thus, this will result in teachers focusing on the traditional



approaches of instruction. On this note, successful educators ought to apply strategies that will have a positive impact on all students in spite of their cultural backgrounds to ensure that they benefit from the learning process.

Ladson-Billings is primarily concerned about the lack of an educational infrastructure that supports the educational achievement of youngsters from minority groups. Although she focused on the African American community, it is imperative to note that the book is reflective of the entire U.S. education system and its impact on students. Racism is one of the factors that has caused learners not to realize their potential. The historical context and experiences of African Americans have been marked by institutional racism. As a result, the community has had difficulties accessing critical services that could play a pivotal role in empowering the community. Even so, the policies that have been implemented in various ways have denied African Americans the right to access services such as healthcare and education. Subsequently, the wellbeing of the community has faced many challenges. Teachers have the resources and ability to improve the well-being of students; this can be achieved through the provision of high-quality education and enhanced learning environments. Some teachers have been able to go beyond the racism barrier and become successful in identifying the ideal classroom setting strategies that enhance the ability of all students to benefit from the learning process. In addition, the book ensures that instructors have knowledge of what society expects of them so that they can offer a learning environment that is accommodative of all students' needs irrespective of their backgrounds.

Ladson-Billings has highlighted some approaches that teachers can apply to make a difference in their learners. Interviewing some of the teachers who have been recognized as successful instructors of African American children has elicited significant insights on the different strategies that teachers can use when dealing with children from underprivileged backgrounds. Furthermore, encouraging diversity in the classroom is crucial in ensuring that students from different cultural backgrounds can enjoy a conducive learning environment. The book also cautions teachers to desist from judging the learning abilities of children based on the lifestyles they lead outside school.

In essence, the book offers significant insight into the cultural impacts of educational processes on issues such as race. However, it would be more impactful had the author provided further information on the implications of teacher commitment on student retention levels. The argument's direct relationship to subpar motivation for African American students appropriately exemplifies the implications of race on academic success. More attention on race differences and resource availability among minority students could have effectively highlighted the implications of culture on learning. Nonetheless, the interplay between personal perspectives on the different issues and research was an ideal method of presenting the arguments to the audience. Hence, I would highly recommend the book to anyone interested in learning about the role of culture in education.

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