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LADSON-BILLINGS, G. (2001). CROSSING OVER TO CANAAN: THE JOURNEY OF NEW TEACHERS IN DIVERSE CLASSROOMS. SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY-BASS.

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> New teachers are often placed in the schools serving the poorest students and those who have failed to benefit from schooling, so the students with the greatest educational needs find themselves being taught by the teachers least prepared to teach them. The beginning teachers experience few successes, and their own sense of failure drives them from the classroom. Then more new teachers are hired. The cycle repeats itself year after year. (p. 17)

With every graduating class of bright-eyed and eager educators, this failing cycle of new teacher retention occurs in schools and communities all over the country. Gloria Ladson-Billings writes in her book *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms* of a metaphor that places teacher educators as Moses-like figures capable of leading new teachers up to the gates of the promised land. The journey into this promised land of Canaan belongs to the new teachers themselves, who are compared to "modern-day Joshuas who are excited about the possibilities for transformation that lie just beneath the surface of most urban communities" (p. xii). Ladson-Billings writes about the experiences of these new teachers in realistic ways that validate their struggles while celebrating their adventures in the profession of teaching.

Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms is a book that contributes to the field of teacher education not only by addressing difficult issues of teacher preparation, but also by tackling more elusive topics such as the relationships between diversity in classrooms and culturally relevant teaching practices. By taking on issues of pedagogy in a variety of ways, the practices of new teachers and their experiences with student academic achievement, cultural responsiveness, and the teaching of social justice are illustrated through the words and actions of not just educational authorities but through the voices of the new teachers themselves.

If teacher education programs are ultimately responsible for preparing new teachers to teach in our diverse educational landscapes, then it is in the redesign of these teacher education programs that Ladson-Billings sees progress in the future of teacher education. Ladson-Billings initially points out that there is a distinct difference between knowing the support that is needed for new teachers and the support that these new teachers actually receive. She states that the factors influencing the lack of change in teacher education could be that the teacher educators themselves have not experienced the situations their new teaching students are being presented with in their fieldwork experiences. The current system also often provides certain perks and privileges for teacher educators, and overall, change is not an easy process to undergo no matter what the focus or field of study. Finally, Ladson-Billings comments that potential liberal arts additions and diversifications of teacher education programs might undermine the educational preparation programs themselves (p. 6). "We do what we do because it is the way we've always done it" (p. 7).

Ladson-Billings expresses deep concern in Chapter 1 about the plight of new teachers as they enter a profession where the limited diversity in our current teaching workforce is not reflected in the present and growing diversity of the student populations in our communities and schools. As she states that "88 percent of the full-time education faculty are white" (p. 12), Ladson-Billings asks the all important question "How is it that teacher education programs can be surrounded by diversity and continue to be oblivious to it?" (p. 13).

In this book, Ladson-Billings discusses a program that she and her colleagues introduced called Teach for Diversity (TFD). This "fifteen-month elementary certification program with a clear mission to prepare teachers to work in diverse learning environments" (p. 24) was designed to address issues such as "the failure of [teacher education] students to demonstrate a clear understanding and commitment to principles of human diversity, equity, social justice, and the intellectual lives of teachers" (p. 30). While this program is thoroughly outlined in the text (Appendix B), a large part of this book uses the experiences and reflections of a small group of TFD students who were part of a cohort that had been assigned to the Langston Hughes Elementary School for their student teaching experiences. Ladson-Billings uses Chapter 2 to introduce this group of eight women (one African American, one Latina, and six European Americans) who formed a type of community with varying life experiences and motivations for entering the field of teaching.

> I realized that to be a good teacher you needed to be yourself, and when I tried to play teacher, it didn't work. I wasn't being myself, but when I was myself and told the stories and got them excited…and they knew me as who I was, and what my life experience was, [things] worked a lot better. (p. 39)

By presenting evidence of their journeys through student teaching, Ladson-Billings' intention "is to tell a richly textured story of what it means to become a teacher in a program [TFD] devoted to preparing teachers for diverse classrooms" (p. 54).

Over the years, schools have been asked to take on many roles when it comes to serving student needs in our educational system. Physical needs such as sickness and appropriate nutrition, emotional needs in dealing with both personal and larger community issues, and psychological needs of students of all ages are all student concerns that are being shouldered by our schools and our teachers. "My argument," Ladson-Billings states, "is not that pressing human needs must be ignored by schools and teachers but that teachers cannot forget their primary mission – helping students learn" (p. 56). The actual process of increasing students' intellectual and academic achievement should continue to be a focal point of our teacher education programs as the issues surrounding our schools become more pressing.

Ladson-Billings gives several hypotheses to explain the decline in the importance of school-based achievement for students of color in Chapter 3. There is a possibility that this trend among students of color is merely a reflection of the negative societal attitude towards academic achievement or that these students "cannot see the value of investing time and energy in academic pursuits" because even if they do succeed academically, this does not automatically guarantee them an job equal to their educational level (p. 59). These students also may not be buying into the idea of academic achievement because they have themselves witnessed others who are successfully financially and socially without having to educate themselves in the traditional sense. Ladson-Billings announces that it is the teachers who must "help students choose academic achievement in the face of powerful and competing alternatives" (p. 60).

Chapter 4 is entitled "Nobody Wants to Be Urkel" and it describes the culturally relevant teaching practices relating to cultural competence. The term cultural competence is explained by Ladson-Billings to "refer to the ability of students to grow in understanding and respect of their own cultures" and this important factor is especially important due to the growing number of teachers who "have little or no genuine experience with cultures different than their own" (p. 78). New teachers need time and support if they are to examine and realize how their own cultural identifications can play essential parts in their educational decisions and teachings in the classroom. Ladson-Billings worked with one new teacher named Candy who, when struggling with a difficult student, reflected on her own cultural competence and said, "I don't expect to be perfect. Heck, at this early stage of the game I don't even expect to be good. I'm concerned that I'm not thinking this situation with Bobby through well enough…I want to get better at working with him" (p. 93).

This idea of being culturally competent is an all-encompassing term when it comes to teaching diverse students. The title of this chapter sets the stage for the much-needed discussion of how teaching students' cultures relates to the development of their individual identities as culturally responsive teachers working in our larger society. How do teachers transfer their own sense of cultural awareness into their teaching of students?

> Teachers who are prepared to help students become culturally competent are themselves culturally competent. They do not spend their time trying to be hip or cool and 'down' with their students. They know enough about students' cultural and individual life circumstances to be able to communicate well with them. They understand the need to *study the students* because they believe there is something there worth learning. They know that students who have the academic and cultural wherewithal to succeed in school without losing their identities are better prepared to be of service to others; in a democracy their commitment to the public good is paramount. (p. 97)

Developing a socio-political consciousness is one of the most difficult things to teach new teachers to do; they must experience this level of critical analysis for themselves in educational settings where they are intellectually and emotionally invested in the learning that occurs. Chapter 5 examines a culturally relevant teaching practice that "[asks] teachers to function as change agents in a society that is deeply divided along racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and class lines" (p. 104). However, the teachers cannot become these agents of change by merely fulfilling the requirements of higher education service learning experiences. "Students need the opportunity to not only participate in community service but to receive help in understanding their community service" (p. 106). The students in TFD were given choices as to the service opportunities they were engaged in throughout their program schedule. Their assignments varied in both level of structure and nature of social service experienced, but all opportunities were to be authentic and engaging for the new teaching students in a personal way that helped them to develop their own critical understandings. A true depth of critical understanding with regard to teaching for social justice is needed for new teachers to embrace this aspect of their growing culturally relevant pedagogy.

In the concluding chapter of her book, Ladson-Billings describes various criticisms of teacher education programs and the way

they operate in terms of recruitment, pre-student and post-student teaching. She also shares with her readers a vision she has for "The Urban Teacher Academy" – a fictitious academy whose design "contains elements high on my wish list for teacher education" (p. 130). It outlines a rigorous course of study that uses teaching experiences, faculty support and guidance, and critical reflection of one's own practices as tenets that mark the development of a truly successful educator of diverse students. The intense commitment needed by teachers in this program mirrors the commitment that Ladson-Billings desires all new teachers and teacher educators to exhibit in order to fully commit to their practice of culturally relevant teaching for students of all ages.

By using the life experiences and voices of new teachers in her descriptions of culturally relevant pedagogy and new teacher preparation, Ladson-Billings takes a critical look at how we prepare new teachers to educate in diverse classrooms with even more diverse learners. Adding an essential piece to the writings on new teacher education, she also includes in her book the methodology of her study on which the book was based (Appendix A). She comments in her writings that "Students do not come with instruction manuals", and neither do 'how-to handbooks' accompany our new teachers or our teacher education programs (p. 98). So while Ladson-Billings does not proclaim to know *all* of the answers on how to prepare new teachers for their profession, she presents a coherent and reflective landscape (with accompanying road maps) for all of us to follow into our very own promised land of education.

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