



Understanding Community Literacies as Foundational to Teaching Excellence

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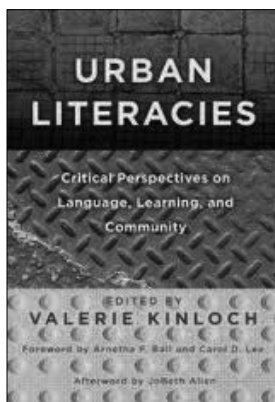
For decades, literacy research has highlighted literacies that thrive in homes and communities but are rarely valued in schools (e.g., Delpit, 2006; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Valdés, 1996). These research reports often suggest classroom implications (e.g., Allen, 2007, 2010; Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010; Valdés, Capielli, & Alvarez, 2010). However, if this research is to be utilized day-to-day in classrooms, educators need as much support as possible to help them envision possibilities for connecting theory to practice.

The books reviewed here communicate that as educators, we can support academic success for all students by expanding understandings about home/community literacies. We can do this by tapping into the valuable resources that communities and families can provide. In particular, these texts focus on the expertise in communities too often marginalized in the curricular picture, helping us recognize why and how we must engage in educational efforts that liberate and educate rather than alienate and, as a result, oppress opportunities for students to succeed.

In unique ways, each text addresses and brings clarity to the issues described above. *Urban Literacies*, edited by Valerie Kinloch, examines new visions for literacy research and teaching across cultural and linguistic contexts in urban settings. Lisa Delpit's *Multiplication Is for White People* consolidates key research studies and practical approaches to inform and support educators in rebuilding practice to contradict

pedagogies that continue to fail many children of color. In *Bridging Literacy and Equity*, Althier M. Lazar, Patricia A. Edwards, and Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon focus on central tenets of social equity teaching to provide practical applications of a revised notion of highly effective teaching. *A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform* by Mark Warren and Karen Mapp takes readers into the realm of parental engagement, community organizing, and educational justice with an emphasis on the agency and expertise of parents and community members. *Mexican American High School Students in the Midwestern United States* by Heriberto Godina is a series of case studies about English language learners' use of literacy practices, thus presenting a strong rationale for incorporating home languages in classroom instruction.

Through our reviews of these texts, we are committed to addressing the ongoing need to grapple with the imbalance of power in schools by recognizing exclusionary practices and drawing on expertise widely accessible in our richly diverse society. These books contribute to the body of work that supports educators in taking major steps toward educational change that is long past necessary (Macedo, 2006); clearly, we must build partnerships with communities and families and use what is learned to transform classroom practice.



***Urban Literacies:
Critical Perspectives
on Language,
Learning, and
Community***

by Valerie Kinloch (Ed.),
Teachers College Press,
2011, 220 pp.,
ISBN 978-0-8077-5182-4

*[This book is a] wake
up call to 21st-century
scholars to move beyond*

*our old paradigms and create new spaces for
knowledge that expands the application of research
to practice.*

(Ball & Lee in Kinloch, 2011, p. x).

These words from the foreword to *Urban Literacies* let readers know immediately that it is a landmark text. It is not only a significant text in the fields of community literacies and equity methodologies, but also a collection that reflects the work of one of the most exciting and influential programs to be developed through the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)—*Cultivating New Voices of Scholars of Color* (CNV). CNV was initiated in 2000 by members of NCTE’s Research Foundation (Arnetta Ball, Carol Lee, Peter Smagorinsky, and Shauib Meachem) for the purpose of enriching the work of NCTE by creating spaces where experienced and novice scholars of color would be supported in a two-year program of mentoring and collaboration. The result is that, after ten years and five cohorts of CNV fellows and mentors, the work generated from those scholars constitutes much of the most thoughtful and impactful research and pedagogy in the field today. Initially directed by Peter Smagorinsky and then by María Fránquiz, CNV has been directed since 2007 by Valerie Kinloch (recipient of the American Educational Research Association’s 2012 Outstanding Book Award for her 2009 book, *Harlem on Our Minds*), who envisioned and edited this book.

Representing the work of many CNV fellows and mentors, *Urban Literacies* reflects the mission

of CNV, which is to “forge new paths and conduct critical, rigorous research that honors the lives and literacies of all children, youth, and adults, particularly but not exclusively, those of color attending school and/or residing in urban settings” (Kinloch, 2011, p. xii). Grounded in this mission, the book responds to “the visible gap in research that articulates new visions of literacy studies and teaching on the lived conditions and daily interactions of children, youth, and adults of color” (p. 3).

Kinloch organized the book around three intersecting foci: a) family and community literacies, b) teaching and teacher education, and c) pop culture, digital media, and forms of multimodality. This organization creates a text that is accessible to classroom teachers as well as researchers focusing on what teachers can learn from the educative practices that take place in urban settings outside of school. Contributors’ inquiries lead to significant questions, such as: a) What does this (re)situation [from schools as the only sites of possibility] mean and imply for education and urban settings? b) What are examples of projects and practices that capture the cultural and linguistic identities of children, youth, and adults of color in urban contexts? and c) How can critical educational research in urban settings be used to dispel unfounded notions that students in urban settings are disengaged from or not capable of learning? Each chapter ends with a section on “Critical Perspectives,” charging teacher educators as well as preservice and inservice teachers to reconceptualize learning, literacy, language, and teaching by learning in the communities of their students.

Juan Guerra, in his introduction to Section One, clearly expresses the urgency of the work by writing that we, as educators, have no choice but to probe deeply into the connections between home and school literacies because, until we do, we continue to run the risk of “losing another generation of children of color” (p. 12). With that premise in mind, we highly recommend this book for all areas of education. Teachers, teacher

educators, and educational researchers will find that their vision and purpose are enriched and energized through the work of exceptional scholars who focus on *work that matters* in the lives of young people. (JL-R & TMW)



***“Multiplication Is for White People”*: Raising Expectations for Other People’s Children**

by Lisa Delpit, The New Press, 2012, 256 pp., ISBN 978-1-59558-046-7

We can educate all children if we truly want to. To do so . . .

we must be convinced of their inherent intellectual capability, humanity, and spiritual character. We must fight the foolishness proliferated by those who believe that one number can measure the worth and drive the education of human beings or that predetermined scripts can make for good teaching. Finally, we must learn who our children are—their lived cultures; their interests; and their intellectual, political, and historical legacies. . . . [then] we must create “intentional communities” designed around a counternarrative—one that affirms black brilliance both to the students themselves and to their communities. . . . [W]e must call upon the connections to their heritage to touch the spirits of the children we meet. . . . Then we can begin to educate the inheritors of the planet.

(Delpit, 2012, p. 49)

Lisa Delpit’s books are quite simply inspirational, and this one is no exception. It builds on the legacy begun with her now classic text, *Other People’s Children* (2006), which caused educators to challenge the imbalance of power in schools, particularly as that power differential is reflected in attitudes that separate a predominantly White teaching force from effectively educating children of color. Delpit’s newest book also builds on the

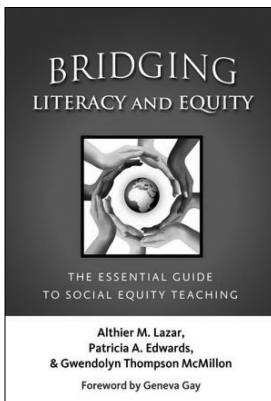
legacies of *The Real Ebonics Debate* (Perry & Delpit, 1998), coauthored with Theresa Perry; the widely cited collection of language essays, *The Skin That We Speak* (2008), coedited with Joanne Kilgour Dowdy; and the provocative, *Quality Education as a Constitutional Right* (Perry, Moses, Wynne, Cortes, & Delpit, 2010). Through these and many other texts, Lisa Delpit has built a strong history of leadership in guiding educators to address an unjust status quo. *Multiplication Is for White People* picks up that challenge and provides strongly crafted arguments, solutions, and specificity that are very much needed in colleges of education and schools across the country today.

In the opening pages, Delpit takes us back to the main thesis of *Other People’s Children*: “African American children do not come into this world at a deficit” (p. 5). She proceeds to craft arguments that remind us of the insidious nature of racist practices and dispositions that continue to keep us from educating all students. She draws on Tatum’s metaphor of the “racist smog” through which many “children have internalized all of the negative stereotypes inherent in our society’s views of black people” (p. 14). Through balanced critiques, she counters the work of those who would place “African American students [as] part of a ‘culture of poverty’” (p. 6), emphasizing that these approaches once again avoid discussions of and responses to oppression and racism, stressing the often expressed but rarely actualized notion that African American children “do not have a culture of poverty but a culture of richness that can be brought into classrooms to facilitate learning” (p. 6).

After identifying barriers to the successful teaching of children of color, Delpit shares a wide range of teaching strategies for educating “the children we have heretofore failed” (p. 34). Drawing from the wisdom of traditional African thinking and the Freedom Schools movement, Delpit urges us to believe in the children, fight against teacher-proof curricula and scripted low-level instruction, learn who children are, and

discover the legacies they bring by “building on some of the deep cultural gifts that African American children bring to school” (p. 155). She supports these ideas with perspectives from students, families, communities, and teachers to let us know that we must stop toying with change and truly envision and enact it.

This book is an *essential* read for every educator. Delpit writes in ways that are deeply informative, engaging, provocative, and energizing while providing solutions that, if adopted, will move the field forward in ways that have been long considered but rarely enacted. She raises critical questions but never leaves them hanging. Through explicit examples, ideas come to life in ways that will give teachers renewed vigor, purpose, and practical approaches for challenging and changing an unjust status quo. With this motivation, we can *finally* make a substantive difference in the education of the “inheritors of the planet.” (SL)



Bridging Literacy and Equity: The Essential Guide to Social Equity Teaching

by Althier M. Lazar,
Patricia A. Edwards, and
Gwendolyn Thompson
McMillon, Teachers
College Press, 2012, 146
pp., ISBN: 978-0-8077-
5347-7

I dove into this book with passion and concentration because I would categorize myself as one of the educators described by Lazar, Edwards, and McMillon as “lacking the time” (p. xii) to locate and read the literature necessary to develop a solid, deep understanding of issues and principles related to social equity teaching. On a weekly basis, my work in schools bears witness to the “crisis . . . [of] too many culturally marginalized students failing in schools” (p. xi). Lazar, Edwards, and McMillon offer a vision of teaching that honors children’s strengths

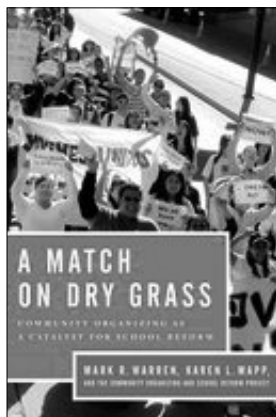
embedded in their race, ethnicity, communities, and families and, in doing so, challenges and extends notions of highly effective teaching. Each chapter ends with suggested reflections and inquiries to help readers examine their own assumptions about children in high-poverty, nondominant communities, as well as to inspire them to find and enact ways to confront the structural racism that exists in all schools.

The seven chapters uncover five central tenets of social equity teaching (literacy achievement, cultural significance, power issues, transformative practice, and personal orientation), helping readers combine history, research, and pedagogy to develop the dispositions and understandings necessary to create instruction grounded in the legitimacy and strengths of languages and literacies of culturally marginalized students. The authors suggest that when teachers apprentice themselves to children and families, they are more likely to become “professionals for social equity . . . [and] to work past the restrictive policies that negatively impact teaching” (p. xii).

For example, readers are presented with clear and compelling evidence that an over-emphasis on standardized testing and curricula harms students and that these practices perpetuate the “inequities that prevent students in high-poverty and culturally non-dominant communities from realizing their inborn literacy potential” (p. xi). Indeed, if teaching and learning truly are dialectical endeavors, teachers must envision classrooms as spaces where we learn from the uniqueness of each and every child and family as they simultaneously “help [children] access the literacies and languages needed for full participation in mainstream contexts” (p. xii).

Readers will be provoked to reach beyond themselves, to become like Michele, a featured teacher, who is “*delightfully obsessed* with her students,” ensuring their academic success by finding ways to access their limitless potential. Transformative teachers will not only “understand privilege and subordination associated with

all schooling” (p. 115), but they will accept responsibility to create new ways of thinking and teaching that will uplift the achievement of children traditionally marginalized by schools. Ultimately, “social equity is an *integral* and *obligatory* part of literacy teaching” (Gay in Lazar, Edwards, & McMillion, p. viii). (AD)



A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform

by Mark Warren and Karen Mapp, Oxford University Press, 2011, 328 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-979358-7

I was immediately drawn to the book

A Match on Dry Grass:

Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform by the image of the all-consuming energy bursting forth from a match set to dry grass—a metaphor for school reform. This coauthored book focuses on “parental engagement,” a term originally coined by Dennis Shirley (1997). This text places a much-needed emphasis on parents as collaborators and change agents in transforming urban schools and neighborhoods.

A Match on Dry Grass represents the ultimate recognition of community literacies as it details the work of The Community Organizing and School Reform Project housed at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, which studies how communities can use literacies to affect change. Members of the research team embedded themselves within six organizing groups that spanned the US from New York City to Los Angeles: People Acting in Community Together (PACT) in San Jose, CA; One LA in Los Angeles; Padres y Jóvenes Unidos in Denver; Southern Echo in the Mississippi Delta; Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago; and Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition in New York. Case studies of each project

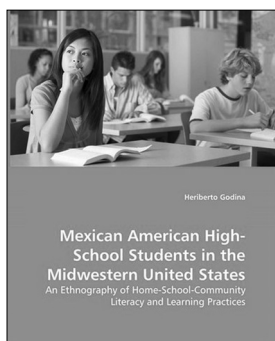
document the transformation that is possible in public education when parents, young people, and other leaders in low-income communities and communities of color become active participants in shaping reform processes (p. xi). Through these case studies, this book advances a movement for *educational justice* by describing examples of community organizing for equity-oriented educational reform (p. 4).

Each case study presented in this book offers a different avenue for tackling issues of educational equity. For example, PACT in San Jose, California, describes a project organized by Latino parents that led to the opening of several small autonomous schools to address parents’ concerns that children were failing in the large, impersonal schools. The PACT schools, reflecting strong partnerships between educators and parents, were ultimately among the most successful schools in that district. In Los Angeles, One LA is a group that worked within existing schools to develop the capacity of parents, teachers, and administrators to build powerful alliances that improved instructional practices and addressed the health problems children faced because of a local dump.

Parents and youth in Denver’s Latino community organized Padres y Jóvenes Unidos (PJU) to address issues of education and immigration at North High School. Southern Echo in the Mississippi Delta drew upon the organizing traditions of the Civil Rights movement to address racism and inequities; as a result, they were able to stop the opening of a segregated public school and dramatically increase state funding for public education in their communities. The Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in Chicago, Illinois, created a parent leadership program that trained over 1,200 parents across eight neighborhood schools to support teachers and address health and housing issues in their communities. Finally, the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition in New York City organized parents, youth, and community members to address issues that impacted their congregations,

neighborhoods, and schools. With the cooperation of unions and other groups, they addressed unresponsive bureaucracy and overcrowding in schools, demanding the construction of new schools and improved classroom spaces.

In the final chapters, the authors synthesize lessons from their research that have implications for educators and the broader public who “care about advancing quality and equity in American public education” (p. 12). Processes used across all case studies illustrate how building relationships for transformational change allowed for collaborative efforts led by parents to shape reform and revive the democratic promise of public education in their communities. Families and communities gave voice to those who have long been excluded from participating in the educational process; together, they are making vital contributions to improve education and advance equity and social justice in their schools. In these ways, *A Match on Dry Grass* focuses on mobilizing the literacies of communities to affect change—not merely by engaging parents, but by looking to their expertise to inform and lead educational reform. Taking action through the commitment and mutual respect of highly engaged people, communities are able to forge new relationships and broader alliances that lead to real change in the education of young people. (DD)



Mexican American High-School Students in the Midwestern United States: An Ethnography of Home-School-Community Literacy and Learning Practices

by Heriberto Godina, VDM Verlag Dr. Mueller, 2011, 243 pp., ISBN 978-3-639-32949-0

What does it mean to be a student asked to eschew cultural identity in order to fit inside the cookie cutter that dictates much of today’s educational

practice in the United States? Heriberto Godina asks readers to consider this question in a text that reflects his ethnographic study of 10 Mexican American sophomores living in the Midwest. He selected these students to highlight the difficulties faced by children of color who see their home language devalued and discarded in educators’ efforts to assimilate students into the country’s dominant language. Godina lends support to the argument made by language scholars across the country that learning English need not come through the silencing of home languages, and, in fact, English language learning can be accelerated when home languages are embraced in schools (Fu, 2009; Nieto, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). In communicating this message, Godina’s work makes the case that taking home languages out of schools comes at the expense of tapping fully into students’ learning capacity, since students are then more focused on translation than meaning making. By offering teachers and researchers these important examples of lost opportunities to engage students in effective literacy practices, Godina provides valuable insights into the benefits of embracing students’ home languages and funds of knowledge.

This work is particularly important because, as Godina writes, data show that Mexican American students, along with Puerto Rican students, account for some of the highest dropout rates among ethnic groups. And, although the “demographic imperative” (p. 11) on which Godina draws is indeed an important consideration, his work also suggests that there is a strong moral imperative to be considered, since Latino/a students, particularly Mexican Americans, have been marginalized in this country for many years. Thus, Godina argues that the language and literacy practices of Mexican American communities, as well as strategies for using those literacies to support success in schools, need increasingly close examination. Such scrutiny is necessary if we are to address not only the high dropout rates of the fastest growing ethnic group in the country, but also our moral responsibility to support the enrichment of students’ educational lives—not to mention the enrichment of our

society—by embracing the diverse languages in our midst.

Godina structures this book as a series of case studies that lead him to suggest that educators need to challenge transmission models of education (whereby the teacher looks for one correct answer and one individual skill completion) by embracing a constructivist approach that values the learning process and focuses on the student. The case studies were developed through Godina's interviews with individual students, their family members, the principal, school librarian, school counselor, and teachers; he conducted observations, shadowed students' activities, and collected literacy artifacts. These rich data provide insights that teachers will be able to transfer to their own instructional practices. For example, Godina found that when school personnel accommodated the linguistic needs of students (embraced home languages), those children were better able to succeed in content-area instruction. Additionally, he found that, in contexts where students had support to use home languages, they often translated information from English into Spanish to make their comprehension and application of the material more accessible. However, because the utilization of home languages was not always supported in classrooms and because positive literacy experiences were not typical for these students, Godina did not see the same transference at school.

This text serves as an entry point for conversations into ways that schools can transform support for developing bilingual students by helping educators understand the importance of valuing home identities and languages. By using those languages in daily classroom life, teachers acknowledge the challenges students face and the skill required for them to navigate dual cultural and linguistic identities. In this way, the book urges teachers to support students in using all dimensions of their expertise—linguistic and otherwise—in the interest of promoting learning across languages and utilizing students' knowledge to promote further educational gain. (MS & NW)

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Search for New Editor of *English Education*

The Conference on English Education is seeking a new editor for *English Education*. The term of the present editors, Lisa Scherff and Leslie Rush, will end in July 2015. Applicants for the editorship should be tenured (or have completed the tenure process with a reasonable certainty that tenure will be granted) and should have published in *English Education* or a national journal of similar quality.

Applicants should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 31, 2013**. Letters should be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one published writing sample (article or chapter), a one page statement of the applicant's vision for the future of the journal, and letter(s) specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to consult with administrators on the question of time, resources, and other institutional support that may be required for the editorship of this journal.

Applications should be submitted via email in PDF form to kaustin@ncte.org; please include "EE Editor Application" in the subject line. Direct queries to Kurt Austin, NCTE Senior Developer for Publications, at the email address above or call 217-328-3870, extension 3619.

Finalists will be interviewed by the search committee at the NCTE Annual Convention in Boston in November 2013. The applicant appointed by the CEE Executive Committee will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue to be published in October 2015. The appointment is for five years, nonrenewable.
