

***HELPING ORDINARY KIDS
BECOME EXTRAORDINARY LEARNERS:***

***Effective Strategies for
Closing the Achievement Gap***



Zakiya M. Stewart, Ed.D.

Copyright © Zakiya Mwanatabu Stewart, 2003

All rights reserved. No part of this manuscript may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the Seattle Black Child Development Education Committee Chair.

We, the members of the Seattle Affiliate of the National Black Child Development Institute remain eternally dedicated to the work of Dr. Zakiya Mwanatabu Stewart, who joined our ancestors on July 22, 2007. All of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be used to support the projects and scholarships initiated and supported by Dr. Stewart.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		Page
	PREFACE	5
1	ORDINARY CHILDREN	9
2	SHIFTING THE PARADIGM	14
3	TEACHER EFFICACY	22
4	HIGH EXPECTATIONS	25
5	POSITIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	28
6	ACTIVE TEACHING: ROUSING MINDS TO LIFE	45
7	ASSESSMENT: A TOOL FOR MOTIVATING CHILDREN TO SUCCEED	55
8	TIME ON TASK: THE ANTEDOTE TO CREATIVE BUSYNESS	61
9	RETEACHING: THE POWER OF MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN	66

10	CULTURAL COMPETENCE	68
11	SOCIAL JUSTICE AS PEDAGOGY	73
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	77
	MANUSCRIPT ASSESSMENT	88

PREFACE

We are in the midst of a paradigm shift about teaching and learning. Educational theory has moved from the belief that it is what the child brings to the classroom that determines student learning to the belief that it is what happens to kids in school that drives academic achievement. Most educators today embrace the phrase, "All Children Can Learn." It is not unusual, in visiting schools, to see banners professing this sentiment in the hallways and in classrooms. This notion, that all children can learn, represents a shift in our paradigm about children and learning.

What is a paradigm shift? In philosophical terms, a paradigm represents a belief or value so commonly held as truth that it guides how people see and interpret the world around them. For example, a long time ago, Europeans believed that the world was flat. It was an accepted idea and people shaped their behaviors accordingly. In the 15th century, a new paradigm was offered. Maybe, the world was round. This hypothesis began an era of attempts by mariners to reach China and India by sailing west. The move from the belief that the world is flat to the belief that the world is round represents a paradigm shift.

Most paradigm shifts are confusing and messy, complicated by mixed messages that permeate public dialogue and public policy. But never before have educators felt more empowered in their practice. We now know, more than ever before, that what we do counts. There is a feeling that what we do matters and we become inspired by an appreciation that what we do can transform the lives of children and their families.

My earliest consciousness that what happens in the classroom makes a difference in the lives of children emerged during my undergraduate education. I found myself challenged by all my classes – writing, math,

science, foreign language – and I didn't understand why. I was what people called back then "smart." I had consistently earned top grades beginning in kindergarten. I had received several "double-promotions," skipping grades as I raced up the academic ladder. I had taken honors classes in high school. I was consistently on the honor role, and did well on standardized tests. I was a member of the National Honor Society and ranked #6 out of a class of 350 students. I earned a four-year scholarship to college.

But, I was underprepared for college. As I talked to my classmates, I realized that they had been exposed to a greater variety of subjects and a higher quality of instruction in high school. I had taken chemistry, physics, and algebra in high school, too. But they had learned different things in their classes than I had learned in mine. They knew about DNA and cell biology. I had never heard of those things.

Despite that fact, I worked hard and did well in college. But, what emerged from that experience was an evolving desire to make sure that other students of color did not leave high school knowing so little. I suspected that I would not have had to struggle so hard my freshman year had I had better teachers. I committed to become a teacher.

Although I did not exit college with a cogent theory, this experience made my later exposure to the notion that teaching mattered personal. I didn't know it then, but that desire to make sure that students got what they needed academically became my passion for teaching.

I began my teaching career in the inner city of Chicago. What I learned in those first few years, and what has been reaffirmed in the many years since by researchers and by outcomes for children in cities across the country, is that it is often difficult for educators to see children of color, in general – and children of African descent, in particular – as ordinary children. They become blinded by the belief that the African child, his/her parents, and his/her community exist in a stew of pathologies. The list is

disturbingly familiar (e.g., children of poverty, single parent households, behaviorally disordered, etc). Thus, children are "at risk." Not from environmental or inherent deficiencies, but because they are unserved, underserved, and/or inappropriately served by school (Barnes, 1989). It is the belief in the pathology of children, their families, and their communities that gets in the way of caring professionals who want to help children learn.

This book outlines the necessary ingredients for helping ordinary kids become extraordinary learners. These strategies, approaches, and guidelines to teaching are a composite of 30 years of classroom experience and educational research about best practices for promoting academic achievement.

Chapter 1 outlines how difficult it is to close the achievement gap when children are seen as carrying within themselves the seeds of their failure. Chapter 2 describes the paradigm shift that is taking place in education from viewing children and their communities as a quilt work of pathologies to the notion that all children can learn. Chapters 3 – 9 detail research-based strategies for closing the achievement gap. Chapters 10 and 11 address the role of cultural competence and social justice in developing extraordinary learners.

The intent of this text is to provide a resource for teacher trainers, teacher interns, beginning teachers, and seasoned veterans who want to convert the adage, "all children can learn," from theory to practice and who want to close the achievement gap by helping ordinary kids become extraordinary learners.