

Crossing Over to Canaan: A Book Review

Deborah Bambino, Pennsylvania

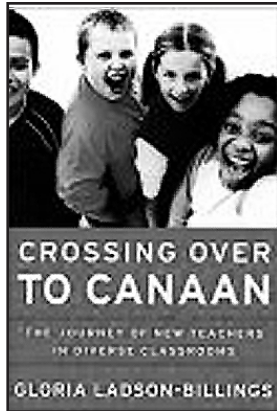
Having read *The Dreamkeepers*, I was anxious for my copy of the new Gloria Ladson-Billings' book, *Crossing Over to Canaan*, to arrive. From the introduction, where she explains the metaphorical title that compares our new teachers to the "chosen as they cross over into the Promised Land," I knew I was hooked.

The entire book held my interest, with its questions about cultural competency and the ways our cultural baggage and bias impact on our teaching and learning in diverse classrooms. I enjoyed the easy back and forth, from her personal experiences, to the vignettes about the new teachers, to the research based structure of the Teaching for Diversity Master's Program that she helps to administer.

My favorite chapter was number four, entitled, "Nobody Wants to Be Urkel." As I read about the dilemma of students who are capable and want to succeed, but don't want to be separated from their peers and families, I was deeply moved. However, when I read one new teacher's experience

with the "two Myron's," I was transported into my teaching memory bank.

How many times had I been "confused" by the behavior of my students, generally African American



males, who performed well in my class and got in serious trouble in others? Why were so many kids like night and day, articulate and capable on the outside, and practically incompetent in our schools? What were we doing to elicit this transformation?

I thought about my two Jamars, Ervins, and so many others. I also remembered the boys who could lay me or any other white teacher out in class, only to become practically docile in front of their mothers and grandmothers. Clearly, these young men "knew how to behave"; the prob-

lem was not in their upbringing. I had to ask myself, "Why have I been so willing to accept labels of this or that deficit on the part of our kids, but so reluctant to examine myself and my practice?"

The students choose to act in different ways in response to different types of treatment. It's really not hard to see, if we're willing to look. Ms. Ladson-Billings has done us a big favor by surfacing the seemingly schizophrenic behavior of many of our children and tracing it back to the cultural bias that we play out in our classrooms despite our good intentions.

We recently used chapter four in a text based discussion at the Winter Meeting in Houston, and hope that it will form the basis of ongoing discussions about cultural competency and its relationship to both what, and how, we teach and view our young people. □

You can contact Deborah Bambino at <dbambino@earthlink.net>

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001). *Crossing Over to Canaan*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass Inc.

Reflections from the Field

I'm not sure how to create the conversation around equity that gives justice to the complexity, authenticity and emotions it raises for ourselves personally and with our children.

Winter Meeting 2001, Houston

As far as equity. I keep seeing more instances of how it impacts not only on my profession but also on my life. I can't believe that I have never examined this issue before.

Winter Meeting 2001, Houston

In the fifth grade, a teacher named Ms Brown told me I wasn't smart enough to do a science fair project that she suggested. I told my mother and that was the end of that.

Student, Eisenhower High School, Houston

The comment about "how American it is to discuss equity as equal opportunity, but not equity of outcomes" was thought provoking ...

Washington State

CONNECTIONS

is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year by the Harmony School Education Center, it provides a forum for CFG coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

Editors

Deborah Bambino
Katy Kelly

Layout & Design

Camellia Cosgray

Our special thanks goes to the
Foundation for Educational Renewal.

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to *Connections* contact us at 812/330.2702

<kkelly@harmony.pvt.k12.in.us>
<dbambino@earthlink.net>