

Book Review

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Rac(e)ing to Class: Confronting Poverty and Race in Schools and Classrooms is a four chapter call to action by H. Richard Milner intended for anyone working in the field of education, especially formal and informal educational leaders, teachers, and professors of teacher preparation. This text would also be of use to policy makers outside of the school setting who have the power to change schools. In the text, Milner calls on school districts- from the superintendent to the individual classroom teacher to reframe the way they make decisions to consider the needs of the most vulnerable students first. Milner provides a comprehensive overview of what this shift would look like in schools, and why it is necessary in order to provide an equitable education for all students, especially those students who live in poverty and are of color. To support such a shift, Milner also provides strategies for reforming teacher education so that future teachers are ready to support their students who need it the most. Moving beyond establishing the “why” schools need to provide such an education, Milner provides the framework by which teachers and educational leaders can provide such an education.

Tyrone C. Howard’s forward draws on the reality of childhood poverty in the United States to provide the background for Milner’s arguments regarding the need to

reform teacher practice and education to better service students of color who are also poor.

In chapter one, Milner considers the ways in which schools and school districts have established systems which don't benefit every child, especially those who are school dependent, which he defines as those students "... who rely on school for basic needs such as breakfast and lunch, nutritious snacks, and academic support, as well as exposure to museums and other learning centers outside the traditional classroom..." (Milner, 2015, pp.48-49). Milner provides a comprehensive exploration of the lives of people of color who also live in poverty, and argues those experiences are not a primary consideration when constructing systems of education and educational policy, yet they should be the primary focus of educational decision makers. Milner outlines four goals for school reform: understand and practice equitable decision making, understand and respond to neighborhood conditions, rethink and reform the inflexible, narrowed curriculum and reduce class size for school dependent population. Milner uses the notion of school dependence to reframe the traditional equality v. equity and provide a concrete example of how schools can create equity in the classroom. Milner argues that because some students are not having all of their needs meet at home, they need a smaller class size than students who are in order to thrive. This is a compelling point and one which cannot be overlooked if schools are truly to meet the needs of their most vulnerable students.

Milner uses chapter two to consider the instructional reforms necessary to provide an equitable education for students of color who are poor. Milner provides a rebuke of Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* and rejects notions of a culture of poverty, which he says many teachers base their perceptions of their poorer students and their families on. Teachers, and schools as systems, then teach to and reinforce these perceptions and students end up being grossly underserved.

Milner challenges educators to consider the ways in which their own success comes from class and sociologic privilege, and not only from their hard work alone. Milner also outlines the ways in which teachers can and need to engage with the parents of their students. His suggestion of schools providing things they need or expect from parents is both noble and problematic. Telling parents they are expected to help with their child's homework, when they may not have received an education which allows them to, may create an unreasonable demand. This was seen recently with the implementation of Common Core math standards, even the most educated, affluent parents had a difficult time providing aid to their child because they themselves did not receive that education. Just as teachers need to provide realistic expectations for students, and give them the supports necessary to meet them, so too do schools need to do so with parents. This may lend itself to future work regarding how schools educate or should educate the families of the students to better support students.

Chapter three provides the reader with case studies for reflective practice. Milner's intent with this chapter is to provide cases which will challenge current teachers and educational leaders to consider the ways in which they can modify practice and policy to best serve their most vulnerable students. Earlier in the text, Milner established that teachers need to spend more time considering race and its relation to education. With these case studies, which are based on Milner's own experiences as both an educator and researcher, he provides relevant examples for educators to consider their own professional practice.

Chapter four builds off of the case studies in chapter three and considers the reforms necessary in teacher education, if schools are to actually best serve the needs of school dependent students, and he backs up his assertion that, "Although teachers tend to have good intentions, good intentions are simply not enough for the work necessary to support all students" (Milner, 2015, p. 143). Milner provides many recommendations which have been discussed in previous literature, however his idea of teachers and educational leaders participate in a common preparation program, then moving into a school as a cohort, is especially intriguing and would be of interest to school districts who operate near universities where they may be a reality. This would then allow the cohort to maintain the values they were imbued with during their preparation program, rather than simply conforming to the values of the school they work. This is Milner's strongest point in the text. If teacher preparation programs do turn out educators who are ready to modify their practices to account for the intersections and impacts of race and poverty on their students' education, and they enter an environment that doesn't do this, then the training would be lost and change wouldn't happen.

In the conclusion, Milner calls on teachers to consider race and poverty as they make instructional decisions with integrity. I agree with Milner when he argues that approaches and poverty from positions of deficit leaves teachers more likely to replicate attitudes which promote the "culture of poverty" which he rightfully criticized in chapter 2, as it gives schools a cover to pass the buck onto students and their families.

This book is recommended for teachers, formal and informal educational leaders, and all policy makers. The proposals for reforming teacher education are worth consideration by universities who have the power to make the changes he recommends to teacher preparation and pre-service teachers would benefit from considering their school dependent children

About the Author

H. Richard Milner IV is the Director of the Center for Urban Education and a professor of education at the University of Pittsburg.