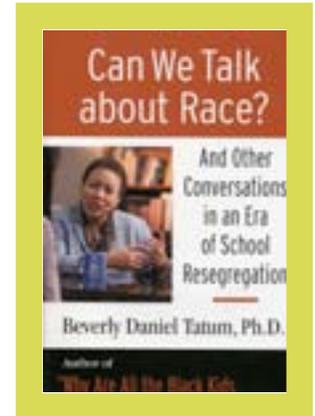


Book Review

Can We Talk about Race? And Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation

by Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph. D., Beacon Press
reviewed by Marie-Claude Provencher



This new offering from Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, focuses on race and the concept of school "resegregation." The premise of Tatum's new work is that schools today are as segregated as they were in 1954 when the Brown vs. Board of Education decision struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine. Tatum reviews all the latest court decisions surrounding schools and racial demographics, and points out the growing trend towards 'getting rid of race' as a criterion for school admission. In her view, unless we encourage residential integration, schools will remain segregated. Since residential integration is a remote goal, she suggests that all children, but particularly white children, need to be in schools that are intentional about having an anti-bias curriculum. Otherwise, we risk entrenching institutional and personal racism because of the lack of experience the younger generation will have with multiracial relationships.

Tatum proposes an "ABC" approach:

- **A**ffirming Identity: every student, including those who have been marginalized, must see themselves reflected positively in schools.
- **B**uilding Community: every student needs to feel they belong to a shared community.
- **C**ultivating Leadership: every student needs to learn to think critically but also needs to develop the ability to have positive interactions with people from different backgrounds.

With this approach, Tatum believes that any teacher can validate their students' identities, if they truly strive

to know the students they teach. She acknowledges that this validation is likely to require more stretching and work for white teachers who will have to learn to understand children and parents who may have different life experiences than their own because of race, culture or class. But she is confident her theory can work for all teachers who are interested in supporting diversity and making sure that children of all hues and cultures are given real opportunities to excel and be supported by the American educational system.

There is an interesting chapter on the history of the concept of intelligence and expectations for different racial groups in the United States. She relates stories of Black schools before the Brown vs. Board legislation where teachers mostly looked like the students they taught and where the curriculum was relevant to the students life experiences. There is a very touching chapter on how Tatum herself created a meaningful friendship with a white woman. She describes some of the difficult conversations about race and racism they had to have in order for their friendship to move forward.

Can We Talk about Race? argues that talking about race and education requires an ongoing dialogue with our kids about their experiences at school. Though this book is mainly for educators, I found it a useful parenting guide if I just substituted "kids" where Tatum uses "students" and "parents" in place of "teachers." It suggests that we have to work harder to encourage cross-racial relationships because they are "essential for the possibility of social transformation." As a mother of both children of color and white children, I am compelled to believe in that possibility.