

Book Review

Color-Blind Teaching: Excellence for Diverse Classrooms

by Daryao S. Khatri and Anne O. Hughes

(Lanham, MD: R&L Education, 2005),
288 pages, \$43.95

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Emphasizing structure above student needs and focusing on perceived failures of the “teacher training industry” (p. xxi), Khatri and Hughes purport to have developed the single text necessary for the preparation of a new breed of teachers. This new breed is needed at the high school and college freshman levels to work with diverse and underprepared students.

The overarching theme of *Color-Blind Teaching* is one of educational failure. We are confronted early in the text by the assumption that our schools are failing, our teacher education programs are overwhelmed, and our children are being lost. But never fear! Khatri and Hughes have the solution—a solution that is marketed in the first instance to “professionals who want to enter teaching without enduring the tedious and largely irrelevant education courses” (back cover).

Organization of the Text

Color-Blind Teaching is organized into three sections: preteaching activities, management tactics, and teaching principles; pedagogical techniques using universal computer applications; and increasing demands for color-blind teachers. Although this structure could serve as the basis for a well-developed, powerful approach to teacher education, Khatri and Hughes fail to bring the full force of their organizational model to bear. Moreover, they emphasize behaviorist management strategies and highly teacher-centered instructional approaches.

In short, Khatri and Hughes advocate the banking model of education (Freire, 2000). As they work to prepare a new kind of teacher—a teacher prepared to work with what they call diverse and underprepared students—Khatri and Hughes champion the educational practices most closely associated with our failure to serve diverse groups of students: lecture, teacher-defined/teacher-centered activities, and uniform instruction.

Color-Blind Teaching describes instruction guided almost exclusively by the teacher. We are told that, as teachers, we are “on center stage, baby” (p. 21). Not only that, but for the perspective teacher, you must “view yourself as being in the starring role and, whether you like it or not, as a teacher, you really are” (p. 21). Within the context of a student-centered instructional philosophy, the teacher would more appropriately be seen as a director—and a director of multiple simultaneous plays at that. Instead, Khatri and Hughes support the *sage on the stage* view of teaching that so many of our teacher education courses (however tedious and irrelevant) attempt to eliminate.

Indeed, the perspective with which Khatri and Hughes approach teaching is reminiscent of the schooling that bell hooks illustrates in *Teaching to Transgress*. Describing her experience in the newly integrated schools of her childhood, hooks (1994) says, “For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom” (p. 3). It is, we are told in *Color-Blind Teaching*, precisely the practice of freedom that we are meant to avoid in our classrooms.

Khatri and Hughes begin their discussion of preteaching strategies with the idea of establishing a daily class agenda. At base, the benefit of agenda setting is that “the agenda gives students a real stake in a class session: they are participants in a *planned* meeting” (p. 9; emphasis in original). The instructional concern with planning in this sense is that it (a) does not include students in the planning process, (b) structures the class in a way that limits flexibility to respond to student needs, and (c) attempts to automate the teaching/learning process.

Such attempts to rigidly structure the progress of class instruction are counterproductive and increasingly lead to breakdowns in what is traditionally referred to as *classroom discipline*. Engagement and excitement are essential characteristics of a meaningful learning environment, and “excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices” (hooks, 1994, p. 7). Teaching is an art. It cannot be effectively done in a predetermined, prescribed series of action items. Agendas as they are described in *Color-Blind Teaching* have no place in the classroom. Indeed, if we hope to meet the needs of underprepared students, we must be constantly aware of the changing—and divergent—needs of each student.

The reader may think me overly critical of the description of agendas as preteaching tools. In isolation, the reader may well be justified in such criticism. Khatri and Hughes, however, combine their agendas with multiple lengthy discussions of the importance of outlines. Seemingly innocuous, outlines become tools for cognitive control. In one of their teaching examples (Case 1.4), Khatri and Hughes argue, “If students are just scratching down words, trying to write what I have said verbatim, and/or numbering points regardless of their significance, I—and they—have a problem with outlining. Ultimately, they will have a problem studying for tests and passing the course” (p. 14).

The idea that note taking must be undertaken in outline form or that it must be organized according to the prescribed notions of the instructor is specious at best. Such emphasis on a singular note-taking form discounts the variety of learning styles and immediately and completely devalues any coping mechanisms that underprepared students may have developed. In short, the emphasis on agendas and outlines as teacher-defined absolutes works against *Color-Blind Teaching's* central purpose: the development of a new breed of teachers who are prepared to work with underprepared students.

In what can be described as the final demeaning body blow to the needs of the underprepared student, Khatri and Hughes call for a reduction in the taught curriculum. Again, in and of itself, this is not an unreasonable coping strategy for teachers in diverse classrooms. In their suggestion that teachers prune “the course to its essentials” (p. 6), Khatri and Hughes tell teachers to keep an eye to the test and “eliminate ‘interesting asides’” (p. 7).

Color-Blind Teaching is, at heart, a call for an essentialist curriculum using behaviorist management tactics. Although in line with much of the political rhetoric of educational policy, the instructional implications of the book are devastating—especially to the particular audience to which the book is directed. Teachers (current and future) of underprepared children deserve better than the methods described in *Color-Blind Teaching*. And underprepared students certainly deserve better.

Technology: To What End?

Khatri and Hughes make much of their inclusion of a section on universal computer applications in *Color-Blind Teaching*. In the world of technology—especially technology in an educational environment—there simply is no such thing as *universal*. Within a single school, there may be Windows-based and Macintosh computers; each of these platforms will likely be running multiple operating systems; and the applications on each machine will certainly vary from room to room, if not from desk to desk. To address such issues, however, Khatri and Hughes simply assume the applications of Microsoft Office 97 as the universal standard and move on. Even if this made sense, that they chose to use a version of Office that is four generations out of date is troubling.

More troubling, though, is the emphasis on the administrative applications of technology. Using electronic gradebooks, creating syllabi and tests, and developing PowerPoint-based presentation materials are all useful skills. Developing such skills to the exclusion of developing methods for incorporating student use of technology is problematic to say the least. Indeed, it flies in the face of No Child Left Behind, which calls for student use of technology as an integral part of the instructional process. In addition, the focus on administrative technology ignores the rapidly emerging practice of schools and districts' requiring the use of standard administrative software by all teachers.

As with the rest of *Color-Blind Teaching*, the technology section of the book misses an opportunity to engage teachers and potential teachers in an investigation of the instructional applications of technology. Not fair you say? No single text can cover the entire range of the teaching/learning process! This is exactly my point. Khatri and Hughes have undertaken to provide the single text necessary to the preparation of a new breed of teachers. Just by the example of their section on technology, we can see how far from the mark they have fallen.

Implicit Philosophy of Education

As problematic as what is in the text is what is missing from *Color-Blind Teaching*. Educational philosophy is completely absent from the discussion in the text. There is an implicit essentialism, but the only way to know this is to have studied philosophy of education before coming to the text.

I begin my Introduction to Education classes with a simple question: Why do you want to be a teacher? And as breathtakingly simple as that question seems, it is often a class meeting or two before preservice teachers begin to fully conceptualize their answers to the question. Why do you want to be a teacher? What is it that you intend to do? These fundamental questions are never addressed in *Color-Blind Teaching*. There is no call to reflection—no discussion of the importance of continued professional growth and development. Indeed, the very premise of the book is anti-intellectual.

Khatri and Hughes argue that education courses are tedious and largely irrelevant. One can only assume that the irrelevant content of education courses includes the study of educational psychology and theories of human learning. Or perhaps Khatri and Hughes are referring to specific methods for improving reading in content area classrooms when they discount education courses as tedious. Certainly, they are not arguing that topics such as methods of assessment, professional/legal requirements for teachers, and lesson/unit planning are irrelevant to the work of teachers. These and other topics, however, are conspicuously absent from *Color-Blind Teaching*.

Teaching, it would seem, is about setting agendas, showing students how to outline, and engaging in management tactics. *Color-Blind Teaching* is truly an essentialist manifesto.

Conclusion

No matter the skill or intentions of the author, teaching cannot be taught in a single text. The notion that education courses are both tedious and largely irrelevant is a dangerous place from which to start the preparation of future teachers. Part of the value of education courses is the community they can

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foster. Teaching is an isolating enough profession without the propagation of correspondence schools of education.

Philosophy matters. Psychology matters. Differences matter. *Color-Blind Teaching* discounts each of these. And in a text explicitly dedicated to the development of a new breed of teacher to work with diverse and underprepared students, it is disheartening to see authors so blatantly ignoring the idea that “one of the great failures of methodological teaching in American education involves its lack of sociopolitical context” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 39). **TEP**

References

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*Jarod M. Lambert, Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership, PO Box 13018-SFA, Nacogdoches, TX 75962.
E-mail: lambertjm@sfasu.edu*