

**“CAN WE TALK ABOUT RACE? And Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation”
by Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 2007**

Reviewed by Nora Martin, Senior Associate, Ray.Taylor and Associates

In her follow up to the extremely successful, “Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum focuses on critical issues with relevance in Education and Race Relations in America. She presents four essays: 1) *resegregation of our schools* 2) the *need for educational curricula and staff that respect the diverse communities they serve* 3) *the possibilities and tough complications of intimate cross racial friendships* and 4) The *inherent racism of standardized testing*. All four of these conversations are clear, concise, research based and emphasize the following serious issues facing our country today:

- a. The need for African-American and other minority students to see themselves reflected in curricula and institutions.
- b. The need to understand how unexplained racial attitudes can regularly affect minority student achievement.
- c. The possibilities and tough complications of intimate cross-racial friendships.

In the first essay Dr. Tatum reminds us that she was born in the same year that the U.S. Supreme Court issued the *Brown v. Board of Education* school desegregation decision. She emphasizes in this essay our nation’s steady retreat from *Brown*’s legacy of equal educational opportunities for everyone. She provides evidence that the State and Federal Courts have worked consistently to undermine the letters and spirit of “*Brown*”.

Next, Dr. Tatum discusses how housing patterns in cities have created a landscape of de-facto segregation. She cites the city of Detroit whose plans to include the suburbs in its desegregation efforts were struck down by the highest court in 1974. Additionally, the author shows how housing patterns in cities like Boston have created a landscape of de-facto segregation that is revealed in more and more segregated schools.

Beverly Daniel Tatum goes into great detail explaining the sobering statistics involved in “*White Flight*” from urban schools (in 1970, 50,000 white students were enrolled in the Boston Public Schools and by 2000, only 9,300 were enrolled) and the impact this has had in diminishing the overall educational experience, particularly for students of color.

The second essay, gives a historical explanation of the misuse of standardized testing and the implications for racism which is “*inherently*” rooted in the eugenics movement. She shares how the notion of intelligence has been used over the years to inhibit and stereotype people of color as being “*less than capable*” of learning. Tatum connects the dots, which we still see today in the ‘*achievement gap*’ among minority students.

Dr. Tatum cites research that suggests that intelligence isn’t a single characteristic but an ability to adapt to different environments. She concludes this section by offering many worthwhile practical suggestions for educators to utilize in order to avoid damaging

stereotypes about teaching and learning. Her examples are “real”, for example, her account of an African American student being accused of cheating in a poetry class, because her writings were superb. The professor refused to believe that the student actually wrote the piece and went to great lengths to prove that she plagiarized her work. Tatum also warns educators, especially professors to avoid over praising “mediocre” work from students of color, as it fails to adequately prepare them for further advancement.

In the third essay, Dr. Tatum offers reality-based insight on interracial friendships. She explains how these relationships succeed when racism is openly and honestly discussed. She gives many examples of the reasons for success or failure of interracial friendships. A striking example, from her own life is offered when she discusses her friend, Andrea and how they dealt with the presence of “homophobia” in the black church.

In the final essay, she includes discussions about reforms at Spelman College, where she currently serves as president. Tatum examines higher education and how it can better serve an increasingly diverse society. Also, in this closing essay she successfully infuses conversations with a focus on how race affects us all. She gives vivid examples of the tools, **A, B, and C** (**A** stands for **Affirming** Identify, **B** stands for **Building** Community and **C** stands for **Cultivating** Leadership) described in an earlier essay and discusses how they may sometime trigger challenging discussions about race and the different issues still surrounding race in America in and out of the classroom.