

# Book Review: *The Flat World and Education* The Importance of Linda Darling-Hammond's Latest Book to Reading Recovery Professionals

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In her latest book, *The Flat World and Education* (2010), Linda Darling-Hammond provides a stark prophecy in the second half of the text title — *How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*. The first four chapters with titles “The Flat World, Educational Inequality, and America's Future,” “The Anatomy of Inequality: How the Opportunity Gap is Constructed,” “New Standards and Old Inequalities: How Testing Narrows and Expands the Opportunity Gap,” and “Inequality on Trial: Does Money Make a Difference?” present startling statistics, convincing data, and detailed analyses to create an alarming yet realistic picture of the future unless we take important measures to ameliorate the “opportunity gap” (p. 67). One of her earliest descriptions is particularly disquieting:

At a time when three-quarters of the fastest growing occupations require postsecondary education, our college participation rates have slipped from 1st in the world to 16th, and only about one-third of our young people receive a college degree. Meanwhile, in many European and some Asian nations, more than half of young people are becoming college graduates. At a time when children of color comprise a majority in most urban districts, and will be a majority in the nation as a whole by 2025, we face pernicious achievement gaps that fuel inequality, shortchanging our young people and our nation. Today in the United States of America, only 1 in 10 low-income kindergartners becomes a college graduate. A greater number join the growing ranks of inmates in what the *New York Times* recently dubbed our “prison nation.” (p. 3)

Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University and a keynote speaker at the 2010 International Reading Recovery Conference, emphasizes the unfruitful paths in education referring to many of the canned instructional programs as “educational snake oils” (p. 196). She also explores misguided educational policies, particularly those involving standardized assessments used for grade retention and graduation, as she documents the daunting problems our country faces in education.

The book, while addressing a variety of issues, follows a logical and interesting path. In chapter 5, “A Tale of Three States: What Happens When States Invest Strategically (or Don't),” Darling-Hammond highlights the successes of Connecticut and North Carolina. She references policymakers in both states for raising standards for teachers and students. When discussing Connecticut's reforms, she specifically mentions Reading Recovery and its implementation in 9 of the 10 districts in the state that showed dramatic improvement in student achievement outcomes. In contrast to these success stories, she also presents the “tale” of California using its failing

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system to illuminate her points about how detrimental inequitable funding mechanisms and lack of state vision are for the education of all children.

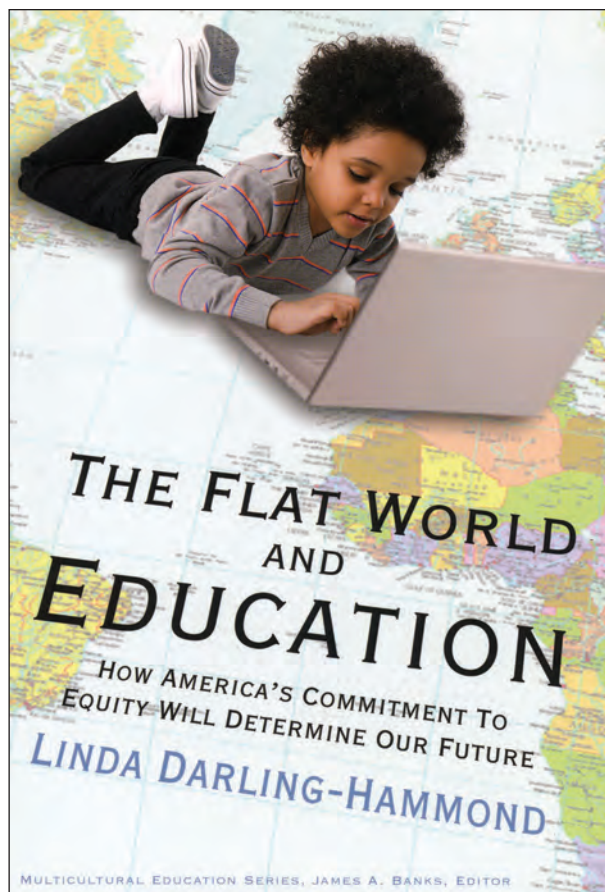
Success stories are also presented in chapter 6, “Steady Work: How Countries Build Successful Systems.” These stories are of nations that have surpassed the United States since the 1970s when the country was seen as the international leader in education. Although the countries described in this chapter—Finland, Korea, and Singapore—are quite different from one another and have their own unique challenges, Darling-Hammond finds common practices that have contributed to their success. The practices include: (a) funding schools adequately and equitably, (b) eliminating examination systems, (c) revising national standards and curriculum, (d) developing national teaching policies, (e) supporting ongoing teacher

learning, and (f) pursuing consistent, long-term reforms (p. 192–193).

Although the book's first six chapters convey the serious challenges to our education system and a sense of pessimism for the future, Darling-Hammond does not leave us there. In the remaining chapters of her book she outlines a series of action plans related to policy and systemic change with numerous examples of schools that have beaten the odds and, most relevant to this journal's readers, the critical role that strong professional practice and professional development can make. Thus, the second half of the book becomes a road map for systemic change, and it is this topic that we address in the remainder of this review. Specifically, we have chosen to highlight the last three chapters of the book, as they seem most relevant to Reading Recovery advocates and stakeholders. For those who work in schools and districts as change agents, the book offers much evidence for why Reading Recovery and its exemplary professional development model are more necessary than ever.

In chapter 7, "Doing What Matters Most: Developing Competent Teaching," Darling-Hammond contrasts the dreary picture painted earlier in the book with solutions that offer substantive change. The change includes tackling the problem of teacher quality. Darling-Hammond likens this problem to Swiss cheese stating that structures in place for supporting teacher education have holes — some small, some gaping, but holes nonetheless. These holes are caused by the "American tradition of under-investing in preparation" (p. 196). Further illuminating the holes, Darling-Hammond provides a global comparison to nations that have overhauled their teacher education programs including government-funded initial teacher preparation, ongoing professional support and learning opportunities, and competitive salaries. In the United States, conversely, teachers often go in debt to enter a field that provides little monetary incentive, professional collaboration, or opportunity beyond brief isolated workshops that generally "trigger little change in practice" but, according to Darling-Hammond, "are the most common learning opportunity for U.S. teachers" (p. 204). Given the issues examined in this chapter, it is no wonder that attraction to the field of education is challenging.

So how does Darling-Hammond propose change? She suggests that to attract and retain teachers there must be a national initiative to transform teacher preparation, by inducting professionals that are equipped to handle the challenges of 21st Century learning. In promoting



teacher preparation, Darling-Hammond urges us to consider the extensive changes made in the medical field. She describes how federal strategies such as the building of teaching hospitals and enticements to those filling positions in fields with shortages have helped America lead the way in medical care and advancement and how a similar commitment in education could produce comparable results.

Darling-Hammond not only gives detailed descriptions of how to prepare effective teachers but also highlights the reality when they are not. When teachers are under-prepared, she asserts that standards are consequently lowered in the classroom. This lack of preparation affects the teacher's content knowledge as well as the understanding of how to manage an effective classroom. Darling-Hammond purports that underprepared teachers are overwhelmed by classroom organization and management, which distracts attention to what matters most — "complex teaching that is needed to develop higher order skills" (p. 209). Darling-Hammond writes about the worksheets seen in many classrooms that "dumb down" the curriculum but help teachers feel as if they are maintaining control. She cites Eric Cooper and John Sherk

(1989) and their ideas on “how such instruction focused on the discrete ‘skill’ bits featured on multiple-choice tests impedes students’ progress toward literacy” (p. 209).

Darling-Hammond’s discussion in chapter 7 of “drill and kill” and the teaching of skill bits is easily connected with Clay’s (2001) insight on isolated skills focused instruction: “An extensive repertoire of item knowledge learned and practiced in isolation, and a single technique of sounding out the phonemes in words is a skimpy preparation for understanding the messages in texts” (p. 94). The poorly prepared teachers to which Darling-Hammond refers will find it difficult to provide literacy experiences for children to develop a complex processing system. These teachers do not understand that “to look only at letters and words, or how comprehension questions are answered, is to ignore the problems faced by the reader to sequentially ‘solve the parts within the wholes’ to get the precise message (Clay, 2001, p. 79).

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Darling-Hammond references Reading Recovery throughout her book. In one example, she highlights urban districts that have in her words “radically improved the quality of urban teaching” (p. 229). She states that a superintendent in a comprehensive approach to redesign provided “Reading Recovery training for an ever-widening circle of teachers creating the first foundations of the teacher development initiative. This effort was used to improve teachers’ knowledge about how to teach reading to their entire classrooms of students, in addition to providing one-on-one tutoring to students with special reading needs” (p. 231). From this reference and from many of Darling-Hammond’s recommendations, we suggest that the needed changes she presents are exemplified within Reading Recovery. Additionally, the changes Darling-Hammond outlines as they relate to Reading Recovery may empower stakeholders and Reading Recovery leaders in their advocacy efforts.

In chapter 8, “Organizing for Success: From Inequality to Quality,” Darling-Hammond further addresses the need for redesigning education. In particular, she focuses on urban secondary settings because historically they are the most unsuccessful and detrimental to low-income and minority students. While the chapter examines inner-city high schools, the criteria identified by Darling-Hammond as making secondary schools successful apply to elementary schools as well. In fact, it is easy to see many parallels with Reading Recovery. Several of her points are also reminiscent of the Wilson and Daviss (1994) *Redesigning Education* text, in which the authors note the need for creating new infrastructures for education and cite Reading Recovery’s innovations as an example.

Darling-Hammond highlights the “structures of personalization” (p. 246) as a crucial facet in redesigning education. These structures include many features like advisory systems and reduced pupil loads. Such advisory systems could be likened to literacy teams that have long been recommended by Reading Recovery professionals as a means of providing ongoing support to children. Ultimately, the features identified in this section aim at personalizing education and developing relationships with students. Again, this notion is clearly represented in Reading Recovery, as the relationship fostered during the lesson sets the standard for considering the role of emotion and cognition in creating a supportive environment for the struggling reader (Lyons, 2003).

Another structure in the redesign process that schools were noted for was “intellectually challenging and relevant instruction” (p. 250). Darling-Hammond emphasizes high expectations and the importance of meeting students at the point of their individual need to accelerate learning. On a daily basis, Reading Recovery teachers raise the bar for students often labeled slow, delayed, or unable to learn. Through challenging and relevant instruction, Reading Recovery teachers help students achieve accelerated progress reaching average literacy levels in just 12–20 weeks.

Also in place at successful schools is the structure of professional learning and collaboration. Darling-Hammond discusses the importance of embedded professional development and the need to focus professional learning on improving instruction. The successful schools studied showed they “allocated considerable time for teachers to collaborate, design curriculum and instruction, and learn from one another” (p. 261). Initial training and continu-

ous professional learning sessions with trained Reading Recovery teachers aim for the same outcomes. The lessons viewed by Reading Recovery teachers at the glass provide a forum for collaborative discussions in which the thinking of others lifts and transforms one's own thinking. The shared observations of these lessons allow teachers to engage in generative reflection on their own teaching and understanding in light of the groups' observations and conversations. Darling-Hammond's regard for Reading Recovery is clear within this text, and it is noteworthy that the structures she identifies as successful to urban secondary schools also contribute to the success of Reading Recovery.

In the final chapter, "Policy for Quality and Equality: Toward Genuine School Reform," Darling-Hammond proposes a paradigm shift for educational policy. She states that this policy should be developed with "twin commitments to support meaningful learning on the part of students, teachers, and schools and to equalize access to educational opportunity making it possible for all students to profit from more productive schools" (p. 279). She goes on to outline how new policy with these aims at the helm would allow a system built on five key elements to emerge: meaningful learning goals; intelligent, reciprocal accountability systems; equitable and adequate resources; strong professional standards and supports; and schools organized for teaching and learning. These elements would contribute to a system that would prepare all of America's children for the demands of the 21st Century.

Darling-Hammond's book is dense with statistics about education, but she elucidates them by plotting a course for change and providing suggestions for policymakers. The book's target audience is wide and certainly includes Reading Recovery professionals. Even in the final paragraphs, her words resonate with Reading Recovery advocates as she challenges educators to look at the cost savings that are realized when we invest in the high-quality education of students and teachers. She cites the now staggering figure of \$200 billion in lost revenue and social costs, and the \$50 billion in costs associated with incarceration related to illiteracy. She also contrasts investment in high-quality education with the billions spent on remediation, retention, and inappropriate special education referrals. This is an argument known all too well in Reading Recovery as we continually defend its perceived expense and make the case that the benefits far outweigh the costs. Like Darling-Hammond, Reading Recovery professionals call for the same

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investment in teacher preparation and quality instruction. It is this investment that promises the best hope for breaking the cycle of failure and helping America regain its educational standing. Given her plea for action and educational change, Darling-Hammond's book should be on everyone's must-read list.

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