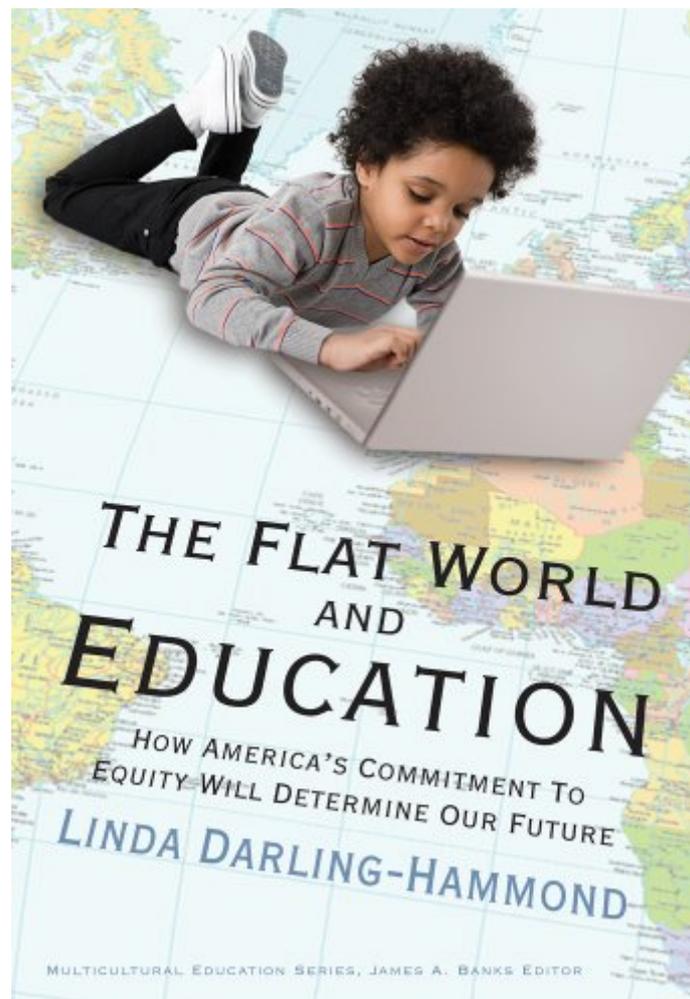


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The Flat World And Education: How America's Commitment To Equity Will Determine Our Future (Multicultural Education Series)



Synopsis

In her award-winning book, Linda Darling-Hammond—renowned researcher, policy advisor, and educational leader—contends that improving America's performance in the global economy is closely tied to closing the minority-majority achievement gap at home. Today in the United States only 1 in 10 low-income kindergarteners goes on to graduate from college. At a time when education matters more than ever, the U.S. high school graduation rate has dropped from first in the world to the bottom half of rankings for comparable nations. While such sobering facts inform her new book, the author focuses on the successes of effective school systems in the U.S. and abroad in order to develop a clear and coherent set of policies that can be used to create high-quality and equitable schools. Drawing on her broad experience, Darling-Hammond examines the roots of our modern education system and shows how the skills required for our 21st-century global economy cannot be learned in traditional education systems, which have been in place since the early 1900s. She identifies an "opportunity gap" that has evolved as new kinds of learning have become necessary—a gap where low-income students, students of color, and English language learners often do not have the same access as others to qualified teachers, high-quality curriculum, and well-resourced classrooms. After setting the stage on current conditions in the United States, Darling-Hammond offers a coherent approach for effective reform that focuses on creating successful systems, inducting and supporting quality teachers, designing effective schools, establishing strong professional practice, and providing equitable and sufficient resources. *The Flat World and Education* lays out what the United States needs to do in order to build a system of high-achieving and equitable schools that ensures every child the right to learn. Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, a chief education advisor to President Obama, Co-Director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, and Founding Director of the School Redesign Network at Stanford.

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Customer Reviews

This is Linda Darling-Hammond's magnum opus, and it is a magnum opus--complex, thorough, well-written, complete, and thoughtful. Her thesis is that until we in the U.S. do the following, our country will produce hollowed-out children who cannot compete in the global economy: (1) Make a serious, long-term commitment to educational equity by funding all districts equally; (2) Use "thinking curricula" that require students to work together on projects of intellectual import, rather than on meaningless "seatwork"; (3) Professionalize the teaching profession by increasing its status, pay, training, professional development, and requirements for entry, especially in the sciences, mathematics, foreign languages, and so forth; (4) Use a 15- to 20-year timeline for improvement; (5) Stop the yo-yo curriculum innovations that swing U.S. curricula all over the block in unproductive "innovational" oscillations; (6) Stop punitive de-funding or punitive control of "failing schools" through Annual Yearly Progress reports, which have the unintended consequence of over-valuing the results of standardized testing. Darling-Hammond gives both positive and negative examples of educational innovation. On the positive side in the globe: Singapore, South Korea, and Finland. In the U.S. Connecticut, North Carolina. These are extremely well-written case studies of how to improve education well. On the negative side: The U.S. as a whole, and California in particular, which gutted the #1 public school system in the world over the last 30 years. In regard to educational equity, Darling-Hammond is particularly passionate, especially since the poor districts are also the immigrant districts are also the most-needy districts and the least well-funded districts.

My review? In a word: disappointing. I had hoped that Dr. Darling-Hammond would have dispelled the fog surrounding the current national debate on education reform. Instead she only perpetuates

many of the same old false assumptions and romantic beliefs dominating policy analysis today - only this time re-packaging them in progressive vestments rather than in the typical "free market" three-piece suit. Here are a few observations. She spends the first part of the book trying to make the usual case about the dire state of student achievement in the United States. Like so many other recent reformers, she indicts public education relying largely on results from international assessments such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), but fails to provide the necessary interpretive cautions concerning the sampling and other methodological weaknesses of these assessments. The fact that many students in our country receive an outstanding public education is glossed over completely thus justifying the need for universal reform through a complete condemnation of the status quo. LDH avoids any discussion of cognitive ability and its connection to student achievement, further promoting the romantic fiction that all students can achieve the same performance standards within the same time frame. This omission ignores a critical reality which must be fully explored in the education reform debate - but is never even broached. The middle section of the book focuses on trying to learn lessons from other countries with reputedly higher student achievement. None of the relevant cautions about such comparisons are cited, while sweeping, unfounded generalizations carry the day.

Linda Darling-Hammond's (LDH) book, *The Flat World and Education* is both a joy and a heartbreak. We learn in detail how the United States' education system has come to be in the state that it is, and we are overjoyed to see that she details a road map to improvement. But our hearts break when we realize that if we do not help those see this road - those who have the power to make real changes in our educational system, then her roadmap will likely not be followed. I begin where Linda Darling-Hammond ends this book, with a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. "I said to my children, 'I'm going to work and do everything that I can do to see that you get a good education. I don't ever want you to forget that there are millions of God's Children who will not and cannot get a good education, and I don't want you feeling that you are better than they are. For you will never be what you ought to be until they are what they ought to be.'" It is appropriate to begin with this because throughout her book, there is the consistent message that educators know what needs to be done to improve education and that we have the power to make positive changes. The first third of the book outlines the history of our educational system and notes that the U.S. is falling behind other countries as they make significant investments in education reform, including removing rigid centralized structures and increasing investments in teacher education and development. These reforms are long-term in nature versus the US' quick-fix mentality evidenced by "Race to the Top."

In addition, LHD focuses on "opportunity gap" by chronicling how inequities in resources and teacher quality impact low-socioeconomic schools.

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