

**Reflective Response (*Through Ebony Eyes* by Gail Thompson)**  
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In her book *Through Ebony Eyes*, Dr. Thompson discusses many serious and sensitive issues that are important for educators and provides great insight for teachers who teach African American students. Thompson writes about how teachers' views and attitudes concerning African American students affect their instruction. She discusses many examples from her experience that highlight the depth and breadth of knowledge that she has on this issue. She includes insightful observations and provides recommendations that are useful, practical, and essential for teachers.

In the first chapter, Thompson presents many theories for African American underachievement and offers examples from her experience to support these theories. The author explains that research on African American underachievement falls into one of two categories. In one category, the research tends to blame the victims (the students and their families) for their underachievement. Thompson cites a recent study conducted on inservice participants shows that 10 percent believed that African American students did not want to succeed academically. In addition, 34 percent believed that the students' families and parents were to blame for their underachievement. The research in the second category blames schooling, including school facilities, curriculum, teachers, and so on. I think it is likely that people of color have encountered more than one of the scenarios discussed in the book at some point in their lives. These theories and these difficulties affect their ability and their "desire" to become academically successful.

In the second chapter of the book, Dr. Thompson describes instructional practices effective for teaching students of color. The focus is on motivational strategies and building a personal relationship and establishing good communication with the students.

In the third chapter, Thompson discusses key points of effective practices for classroom management in addition to research and personal stories that help teachers develop a management system that works for them. Personally, I do not feel comfortable with the strict authoritative system that she describes. However, I appreciate the four key points presented at the beginning of the chapter that all teachers should keep in mind. I especially appreciated the points 1) not to tolerate disrespect or abuse from any student and 2) that all teachers should be able to teach in a nonthreatening environment and all students should be able to learn in a safe and orderly classroom. In her discussion of this idea, Thompson summarizes what a well-managed classroom is in her opinion. I feel I

will strive to manage my classroom this way. I would also like to build my classroom management system the way she did, basing it on my personality, my upbringing, and my experience.

Chapter four on how to reach African American students from challenging backgrounds was very touching. The entire chapter was written with so much emotion that it was enticing to read. The author expressed in detail her own personal stories. One that stood out to me was the assault she witnessed on her mother when she was younger. In her account of this experience, she explains how her experiences affected her behavior as a child and how she dealt with these issues and how it affected her behavior in school. I like how she focused on her teachers' reactions and criticized them. I like how she describes the teacher that positively influenced her life, Mrs. Tassem. It gives pre-service teachers someone to look up to, a role model. Thompson explains in detail what differentiated her from the other teachers and the inspiration that she had on her life. I had a teacher similar to Mrs. Tassem, and I talk about her to everyone who will listen. She was my high school Chemistry teacher, and I often say that, although I forgot Chemistry, I will never forget how much she cared about her students. She was an inspiration in the way she approached her work. She jumped in wholeheartedly with so much sincerity that made everyone feel committed to learning.

In the fifth chapter the author writes about the behaviors of African American students and the controversy over Ebonics versus Standard English. She bluntly deliberates the continued controversy over the use of the 'N' word by African American students. I feel this issue is crucial for an American educator to understand, and I truly appreciate the author's openness in discussing this in her book.

I appreciate the way Thompson discusses how to deal with being accused of racism and linking that with her own experience. I can see this could benefit many new teachers who have insecurities about racial and cultural issues.

## Reference

Thompson, G. L. (2004). *Through ebony eyes: What teachers need to know but are afraid to ask about African-American students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.