



**Accelerating the Learning of All Students: Cultivating Culture Change in Schools, Classrooms, and Individuals.** Finnán, Christine, and Julie D. Swanson. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000. 190 pp.

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This book starts with a relatively simple premise: What if we did for "at-risk," low-achieving, and diverse students what we now do for gifted students? The authors use the term *accelerated learning* for this approach. While the term suggests changing the pace of instruction, the authors invest considerable effort to make clear that this approach goes beyond tinkering with the rate of instruction alone-it includes the quality and nature of instruction as well.

The "big claims" made in the book include the following: (1) Accelerated learning (as the authors define it) produces deep, powerful, and lasting learning with gifted students; (2) this same approach works with students considered at-risk or students with learning disabilities; (3) school practices reflect and are supported by assumptions and beliefs which are cultural in nature; (4) these assumptions and beliefs can be negative, leading to poor outcomes for students, or positive and empowering, leading to positive outcomes; (5) for change in practice to occur, underlying assumptions and cultural beliefs must be examined both historically and in the present context; and (6) for meaningful and lasting change to occur, the culture of schools and classrooms must be changed.

The layout of the book is not complex, and it is easy to read. While written for a knowledgeable audience and making reference to relevant research, it is not full of academic jargon, nor is it written as a technical research document. After defining acceleration in the first chapter, the authors describe in the next three chapters the principle of acceleration for gifted and talented students, for low achieving students, and for all students. Chapters five through eight move on to the issue of cultivating culture change at various levels for all students, from the school to the classroom to the individual.

The central strength of the book, and the facet most likely to resonate with *AEQ* readers, is the authors' cultural view of teaching and learning processes. As is the case with many publications on this topic, this book does not trivialize what it takes to achieve meaningful change, and as noted, the authors begin with the cultural basis of school change. To the authors' credit, they do not take a superficial or global view of culture, as do many writers who equate culture with ethnic or racial background. Rather, Finnán and



Swanson examine how culture is historically situated, constantly created, and re-created, how it impacts assumptions about educationally relevant issues, and how it impacts and is expressed in everyday practices.

Another strength is that the authors do not promote a single approach as the "best" solution, but, rather, they provide a set of principles and examples of particular approaches from the literature, which have worked in different contexts. This is a very welcome change from approaches that propose identical or nearly identical practices or programs as universally applicable. The quest for universal solutions, without reference to features of local contexts, cultural practices, and traditions, is likely responsible for the elusive goal of "scaling up" approaches that have been found to be successful and effective in a specific location.

The reader who is looking for a set of "recipes" for quick adoption in the classroom may walk away from this book unsatisfied. However, the literature on school change clearly tells us that "recipes" are not the solution. *Accelerating the Learning of All Students* provides a useful roadmap for investigating the culture of a classroom, school, or district, and a useful set of issues and questions to guide self-examination and self-reflection in bringing about cultures of change. It would be useful in a variety of courses related to educational processes and educational change, as a tool for reflection and self-examination of institutions interested in reform for improving learning, and as a meaningful acquisition for readers' personal libraries.

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