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# I Never Promised You a Rose Garden 1

*Andrea remembers the day it happened. "I was sitting in geography class. I was a sophomore. The day had started out really bad. My mother was on my case for my bad grades. My teacher was handing back our tests. When he got to me, he threw the test on the desk. All I saw were the red marks. 'Your kind,' he said, 'don't deserve a desk.' I didn't even hear what else he had to say. I snapped. Just snapped when I heard that 'your kind.' It was the last straw. I didn't say anything when he ignored my raised hand or all the times he pretended I wasn't there. When I snapped, I just glared and said in my meanest voice, 'Mr. Rossi, just what is it about me you can't teach?'"*

## THE CHALLENGE OF 21ST CENTURY DEEPER LEARNING

Andrea's angry question brings into the open the issue central to teaching and learning in an increasing number of today's urban, suburban, and rural classrooms: the nature of what teachers bring with them in dealing with their ever more diverse student populations.

- Teachers in affluent suburban schools may have well-equipped classrooms and laboratories, extensive counseling, and tutorial services in place; one-to-one computers, as well as multiple computer stations in the classroom, plus a computer lab staffed by a technology specialist; full libraries; community support programs; Advanced Placement programs; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) labs; and extensive extracurricular programs, including sports at all levels for boys and girls after school and on Saturdays; and the latest cutting-edge technology at their disposal. Art, music, foreign language,

gifted education, and other specialty classes abound, as do substitute teachers, volunteers, and aides. In addition, these students have ready access to private tutors on a one-to-one basis, as well as private test-prep academies, private sports clubs, and college and career counselors funded by their parents. Most of all, these students are the ones most likely to enjoy the advantages of the advanced-college-degreed “mom” regarded by some researchers as the most significant of achievement motivation factors. These are but a few of the rich resources that contribute to giving affluent suburban students the “achievement advantage” and extend their superior academic performance on high-stakes tests.

- Teachers in less than affluent suburban schools may have similar resource advantages, but not to the extent or quality found in the top-tier schools. For instance, they are less likely to have the same quality and amount of technology, rely on local agencies for after-school programs with teachers and other volunteers to mentor struggling students, and offer a STEM program only to gifted students in middle school. And the lower percentage of mothers with master’s degrees brings less pressure for academic excellence.
- Urban teachers are more likely to spend the most time with noninstructional challenges as they struggle to keep aging walls graffiti-free, work with textbooks bound together with tape, share a computer cart with every classroom on their floor, and labor to keep students safe from wayward bullets and drug-dealing miscreants. More often than not, the urban teacher who cares about making a difference buys her own supplies, counsels troubled children, resolves physical and verbal conflicts, and invents ways to include special-challenge students for whom no other resources are provided. Multiple languages in a classroom, sometimes as many as 30 for 30 students, challenge the most capable differentiation skills. After-school programs are dependent on local agencies and philanthropic organizations that provide help for group tutoring, art, or sports on a weekly or monthly basis, and sometimes just plain child-care time. The urban students’ lack of opportunity to enjoy rich resources contributes to their “achievement disadvantage” and the widening of the achievement gap. Working in an ER trauma center or air traffic control tower may seem like a dreamland compared to teaching and learning inside many urban schools.
- Rural teachers find it difficult to provide an equitable education to the poor, language-learning, and migratory students and students of color who are growing in numbers in their schools. Most difficult has been the upper-grade challenge to offer specialty courses for Advanced Placement and special needs.

## REFORM EFFORTS

The national reform movement “A Nation at Risk,” with its narrow and shortsighted emphasis on low-level reading and mathematics curricula

instruction in American classrooms, initiated the drive for standardized measurement methods to exact accountability from school leaders and teachers. With the arrival of the first results from the Program for International Assessment (PISA) in 2000, the American education community was dismayed by American students' results. This was the first indicator that the low-expectations instruction that was a significant target of A Nation at Risk's approach was a *dismal failure*, especially when its effects on the learning performance of poor, second-language children of color were disaggregated.

With the PISA test results, roars of disbelief and dismay crossed the nation. Starting from the American business community, survey results reinforcing the damage from federal No Child Left Behind interventions, which resulted from A Nation at Risk's policies and practices, signaled the need for dramatic changes. Some took an ostrich approach and bemoaned, "It's not possible. How could the number one nation in the world have students ranked in the middle of the pack with their math and science scores? America has the world's best education system. The PISA tests have to be flawed." Others looked back: "Think about the way it was in the 1950s."

As business organizations including the prestigious American Management Association (<http://www.amanet.org/training/21st-Century-skills/>) and SRI International (<http://www.sri.com/research-development/21st-century-skills>) joined professional educators' organizations, including the Association of Supervisors and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National Education Association (NEA), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), as well as universities including Harvard, the University of Washington, and Stanford, there grew agreements that actions that would restore higher-order thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration to the curriculum were necessary. With additional studies, it was clear that reinclusion of high-expectations-driven curriculum, instruction, and assessment into every aspect of students' studies was needed (Dede, 2010).

It was these many studies and reports that gave impetus to the national standards, including the Common Core, the Next Generation Science Standards, the National Arts Standards, WIDA's English Language Development Standards, and others. It was not long before charter schools, site-based management, community service agency-school collaboration, public and parental engagement, teacher empowerment, blended learning, personalized learning, school choice, professional development schools, financial rewards for school-based improvement, lengthened school days, state takeovers, and privatization battled for reform attention.

This book, and specifically this third edition, is not about any one of those efforts. We make no judgment about which of these efforts help or don't help underperforming students. Neither is it about the sociology of any students' community, nor the impact of community on student learning. Nor is it about being handcuffed by any set of standards. These are givens that others address better than the material in this book. Rather, this book addresses the great, unforgotten, and often ignored issue of high-quality instruction that

Deeper learning is best advanced by explicit attention in instructional design to rich and rigorous content outcomes enhanced by each student's significant development and transfer of the age-old and long-battered skills of collaboration, communication, critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and self-directed learning.

can best attack the achievement gaps and provide all students with at least some taste of instruction similar to that of their more affluent peers and arrive at what the Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett Foundation, 2015) describes as "deeper learning."

The book is about giving every child, regardless of color, economic status, religion, sex, or age, the opportunity to benefit as a 21st century deeper learner. This

is a student who can trust that day in and day out, his or her instruction will come through teacher-selected, evidence-based, best strategies for raising achievement and from new, evidence-based models of instruction that engage each child in deeper learning tasks for deeper learning outcomes. When this is happening, observers will be able to label the engaged learning that follows as "21st century deeper learning." By definition, this deeper learning is best advanced by explicit attention in instructional design to rich and rigorous content outcomes enhanced by each student's significant development and transfer of the age-old and long-battered skills of collaboration, communication, critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and self-directed learning.

## **MADE, NOT BORN**

Effective teachers and effective learners are made, not born. Some students may seem to be born with more natural ability than others to calculate; others to read, to play music or paint or sculpt, to build a city with Legos or make a robot, to write a new computer program, to interact with others, or to excel in sports. Most, however, learn how to excel through the sweat of their brow, often pushed by the sweat of their mother's brow. If a dad is involved, that helps even more (Ames, 1987/1988; Pinantoan, 2013).

In like manner, some teachers may have been born with more ability to motivate struggling students than others, but most improve how they teach through hard work and advanced study, relying on mind-sets developed over years probably in collaboration with supportive mentors, be they peers or supervisors (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Thus, just as all children can learn to function in school more successfully when they have the appropriate support, the encouragement and push of their parent or parents, and the skills of their teachers, so too all teachers can learn to teach more skillfully, ever adding new tools and new competencies to their repertoire.

Every basketball player is not Michael Jordan, but Michael Jordan didn't become a great player without developing his talents under the watchful eye of his parents and the instruction of his coaches; every person who writes a poem is not a Maya Angelou, but Maya Angelou didn't become a great poet by neglecting her natural talent. Basic ability in children is not a limit, but a starting place. The same is true of teachers.

## HIGH-EXPECTATIONS RESEARCH

This book focuses on research conducted in the last 30 years that shows what teachers can do to add new knowledge and skills to their repertoire of teaching talent so they can help students increase their own talents and achievements. If caught in a school system that has not worked to encourage and champion new knowledge put into practice, it is likely that they are teaching without the benefit of this research. They are trapped in doing what they learned before their current job. If that instruction includes the basic research on high-expectations practice as found in Teacher Expectation Student Achievement (TESA), teachers will have a base knowledge of the power that high-expectations research in daily practice can accomplish. If it doesn't, it is likely that the students are subject to low-expectations instruction for a long time. In the view of the authors, low-expectations instruction is the heart and soul of bad teaching.

### Student Achievement and Teacher Expectations: More Than Words

Most of the research on student achievement asserts that improvement begins with the expectations of the classroom teacher. This book is *not* addressed to teachers in classrooms who believe that there is nothing they can do to improve their students' learning performance. Until they change this belief, it is unlikely that they will change their practice.

Please don't underestimate the seriousness of the belief issue. The fact that such beliefs can permeate schools is not to be minimized. For instance, at a recent meeting of high school mathematics teachers from a large urban system, in a room dominated by a bulletin board imprinted with the motto "We Believe All Can Learn—So Go for It," the responses to the question, "How do we get more than 60 percent of our students to pass the state finals?" illustrate how subtle and deep are the low expectations held by those teachers:

"Get their parents involved. It's the parents' job."

"Get them to do more homework."

"Weed them out sooner."

"You can't teach lazy kids."

"Most belong in special education."

"They can't know how to think."

"It's a dead-end street."

"They don't really care about school."

"They don't care. They don't have school goals."

"They're not like the students we used to have."

"They didn't learn before. You can't change a tiger's stripes."

These comments, delivered by a mixture of African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian teachers, all experienced and skilled in the teaching of mathematics, show frustration and the belief that nothing could be done for the 40 percent who were failing the test. These teachers' low expectations and ironclad vision—that students of the poor, students of color, students with special challenges, or students who speak other languages cannot learn—will continue to hold true. These teachers are examples of what Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) showed to be a self-fulfilling prophecy: no Henry Higgins in this group can turn Eliza Doolittle into a Hungarian princess! These students will not learn because they are not expected to learn, they are “excused” from learning, and they are instructed in ways that guarantee they will stay trapped by the low expectations of teachers who are reinforcing the students' own low expectations.

However, this book is addressed to teachers who *do* believe that all children can learn, or if they don't, at least are willing to change their beliefs. Many of these teachers do have great natural ability to teach all children, including children with diverse backgrounds, children with special challenges, and children with little monetary wealth. These teachers are the Dean Smiths, the Maya Angelous, and the Martin Luther King Jr.s. of the teaching profession. These will be the teachers who know and believe in their own capacity to learn. They understand full well that they can continue to develop their talents to find ways to put the words “All children can learn” into practice. Many perform well without being superstars; but they do want all children to learn. They work in districts with the poorest classroom resources spread thinly among many challenged youngsters; they often have the least opportunity for the professional development that will help them learn about “best practice,” the most recently discovered methods, and alternative instructional strategies. Their motto is “Yes, we do believe all children can learn.” For these teachers who want “to be,” as Hamlet would say, the question is, “How?” Their request is simple: “Just show me how to do it.”

### **No Greater Challenge**

Teaching in the classrooms of this century may be the most difficult challenge in the most difficult profession, but it also provides the greatest opportunity for a teacher to make a difference. Our focus here is on the knowledge that will help those committed to teaching all children who enter their classrooms. At the end, we also provide some suggestions for transferring that knowledge into productive practices.

This book includes many examples of practical, evidence-based strategies for immediate implementation. Some of the approaches to learning described here will require more practice and support over a longer period of time. These are balanced by sample lesson designs that delineate how to couple effective practices with course content and assessment in a lesson or unit design that will have the most impact on students. All of these are described in the context of research that shows how each approach is effective in urban classrooms. However, there is a “caveat,” a “beware”: all the instructional approaches are described with the forewarning that no single approach will help in every classroom, every time. Each practice needs judicious decision making on the teacher's part. The teacher will make the chosen strategy appropriate for the content, the students' needs,

and the situation. As the teachers select the appropriate strategy, they will make it an important part of their repertoire, their toolkit of approaches that they will apply more and more skillfully as they grow in experience. With successful application of the tools will come the proof that indeed all children—including the much-maligned urban children—can learn because their teachers have the tools, the talent, and the commitment to make it happen.

## THE NUMBER ONE CHALLENGE

The development of a classroom teacher is a lifelong journey. An integral part of that journey is understanding the children in the classroom. As today's teachers progress on their journey, it is important that they review the main characteristics of the children they are teaching. Who is that child? What are the truths and what are the myths about that child learning all that he or she needs for career and college success in a global, highly technological, information-saturated world?

- **They are children.** The first thing to know may sound too simple. It is important that we all remember each student is a human child filled with unique thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams, built from many different life experiences. Although it is becoming more difficult to recognize preteens and teenagers as children nowadays, they are still children. In fact, one of the main problems encountered in educating school-age children is the speed with which they are expected to grow up. Urban children especially are having more intense and different life experiences as children than many adults ever had, even as many of these challenges spread to children in suburbia and rural towns. For all, technology that starts at two years old with texting and continues each year with more and more digital devices complicates the quality of their lives. All of these life experiences can—and more than likely will—physically and psychologically age all supersonically faster than was true in past decades.
- **They are labeled.** For good and bad in our times, labels abound. Marketers have given every decade a label (e.g., Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Millennials). A food company promotes labels for education fund-raising. In special education, every challenge has a special label. In schools, the urban child is labeled politely as *inner city*, but not so nicely in other terms. Children of color, poverty, special needs, or in any way different from the mainstream are more likely than most children to be victims of labels that communicate and allow low expectations, and to be bullied. The partial list that follows covers terms that teachers, principals, social workers, parents, and even the children themselves use to excuse low expectations. For these, it is too often the case that the challenge of rigorous learning and the assistance of strong instruction are not possible. “*They can’t*” supports “*we don’t.*” More often than not, the labels are reinforced each day in very subtle ways that are the heart and soul of low expectations. The list is long but not conclusive.

black	from an urban area	an orphan
brown	from a suburban area	an adoptee
yellow	learning disabled	a truant
red	visually impaired	the child of middle-aged parents
white	orthopedically handicapped	HIV positive
redneck	speech impaired	not immunized
mixed	emotionally disordered	a dropout
Title 1	attention-deficit/hyperactivity disordered	born after September 18
bilingual	autistic	not ready for kindergarten
monolingual	hearing impaired	a Head Start recipient
English language learner	lesbian	a food stamp recipient
a free lunch student	gay	a welfare recipient (Aid to Families With Dependent Children, AFDC)
a reduced lunch student	dyslexic	a WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program participant
a neighborhood walker	medically fragile	a public housing resident
a latchkey kid	asthmatic	a Section 8 resident
an oldest child	hyperactive	physically abused
a youngest child	overactive	sexually abused
an illegal resident	inactive	a head trauma victim
an immigrant	backward	wheelchair bound
fatherless	basic	paralyzed
motherless	a nonreader	afflicted with Down syndrome
homeless	illiterate	behaviorally disturbed
federally connected	an underachiever	emotionally disturbed
a left-brain learner	a gifted underachiever	obese
a right-brain learner	a migrant	
a refugee	a transient	
an evacuee	"at risk"	
of low SES (socioeconomic status)	a jailbird	
of high SES	a ward of the state	
from a rural area		

educationally deficient	Muslim	Italian
	Sikhist	Sudanese
educationally handicapped	Hindu	Guatemalan
Latino	Syrian	Ukrainian
African	Mexican	a SNAP food stamp recipient

### A Double Whammy: The Single-Parent Label

In some schools, single-parent children get smacked twice. The custodial parents most likely are their mothers, who may not have finished elementary school, and definitely not high school; are trapped in low-pay, dead-end jobs; or are fighting to survive on welfare. Many live in urban neighborhoods or in rural areas. And their children's teachers make superficial judgments about them that translate to doubly low expectations:

"How can you expect Mario to do better? His father is in the state pen."

"Her mother didn't even finish the eighth grade. Where does she think she's going?"

"Antonio's mother never comes to school. She doesn't care."

"Her mom's hooked on drugs. She'll probably have twins next."

The double whammy presents a tough challenge. Even if the single mother is holding two jobs and scrapping to feed her children, the research supports the teachers' contention that the child has a hard row to hoe. There are examples of such mothers who persist as hard as any master's-degree mom in suburbia, if not harder, and help their children overcome the tough odds.

**They may resist.** Sometimes passively and sometimes actively these students feel compelled to act on the low expectations they feel, which important others—sometimes peers, sometimes parents, and sometimes teachers or principals—reinforce by word and deed. These students may even do more than live out the self-fulfilling prophecy: they work hard to maintain the image; they resist every attempt to change or to help them become better learners.

### The Scourge of Low Expectations

The low-expectations male child is the individual most likely to end up in prison. How does this occur? Consider two examples that trace part of the responsibility to low-expectation practices in a school:

**Abdul.** Abdul played his way through middle school. With 22 days of truancy in Grade 5, a failure in Physical Education, and minimum reading skills, he had

barely passing grades in his academics. Abdul ended up with a basic high school schedule for ninth grade: Practical Math, Basic English, Data Entry, Wood Shop, and General Science. After the first week of classes, Abdul told his sister that he was done with school (Abdul's mother was dead; his father lived out of state). Upset, the sister dragged Abdul into the counselor's office. After hearing the sister's complaints about Abdul's schedule and noting recorded remarks from teachers such as "You are in Data Entry so you can get a job where you can succeed," "This is your fifth time through this basic math—I hope you get it this time," and "Stupid is as stupid does—this class is for the most stupid," the counselor commented, "Look, he's obviously not able to do this minimum work—if he could, he'd be in class now. We're doing the best we can. But he has to be ready to do the work."

At this point, Abdul's sister pulled a copy of Abdul's test record from her pocket. Under "IQ," she pointed to the number 147. The counselor, stunned only for a moment, said, "This can't be Abdul's. No kid in this school ever got that score."

Abdul left school the next month. Three years later, he was in prison. The ability he was thought not to have appeared in his street activities. Within a month of going full-time to the streets, he became a gang's accountant—organizing the books for the 450-member gang that specialized in crack sales totaling millions of dollars per year. Back in the faculty lounge, his former Basic English teacher commented, "Not a surprise to me. He was too stupid to know right from wrong. They could burn down that whole neighborhood and nobody would be worse for wear."

**José.** José's experience was no better. A gifted athlete who played on the all-city, all-star team in the sixth grade, he was turned down for admission to the junior high Spanish class. When he asked why, the principal responded, "Your people are good soccer players. It's in your blood, but you'll never cut it in a college-level language class." Five years later, José received a 20-year sentence. His crime? José had become a forger, earning several hundred thousand dollars for his gang each year.

### **The High-Expectations Pathway**

This book will not provide all the answers to moving every student along the pathway to higher achievement. Like Robert Frost's traveler in a yellow wood, there are many roads from which to choose. Making the choices will present many challenges, even as teachers strengthen their belief in the abilities of all students to become better, more successful learners. That is probably not a surprise to effective teachers who have known since the early days of their profession that teaching, especially of those who come to class full of low expectations, would never be a walk through a rose garden.

Part of the answers to what will work best with children who feel low expectations must come from the ways teachers and their school leaders apply the information in this book in a systematic way. Part will come from new research on what works to help children become better learners so that they are in charge

of their own educational destiny. And part will come from the other reforms that an increasing number of districts, independent schools, and charter management organizations are adopting. What must never be forgotten, however, is the essential truth that the most gain will come from the quality of mediated instruction that targets high achievement for all students regardless of their age, race, socioeconomic status, or any other stereotypical characteristic. In short, high expectations are the right for all in each and every classroom. The walk will not be easy. There is no promise that there will be time to smell the roses in the garden. There is only the promise of the dream that someday all children will receive a rich, rigorous, and relevant high-expectations learning experience in every classroom.

### **Renewing High Expectations**

Few of those who selected the world's toughest job, classroom teaching, as their career ever dreamt it would be little more than an easy stroll through a rose garden. Even as the numbers of candidates entering the teaching force each year dwindle, those already in the profession have learned over and over that they are not in any garden. State and federal legislation, no matter how well intended, has increased their workload while diminishing resources and mandating specific ways of interacting with children. New laws have increased paperwork and decreased teachers' ability to respond to individual needs. Cuts in funds have reduced committed teachers' ability to prepare all students with high-expectations instruction. This has resulted in false prophets from outside the school walls turning the public against those most committed to the children. Criticisms shatter teachers' confidence and ask teacher candidates, "Why would anyone select this profession?" Yes, we all know that no one ever promised us that teaching was a simple stroll through a garden just to smell the roses.

With this book, we have called on our multiple years of experience as teachers, principals, central office administrators, and professional developers to produce a third edition intended to help you and your colleagues to restore the vision taken from you, the vision that brought you into the profession of teaching, the vision that all children can and will learn with the best of high-expectations instruction. That includes being able to focus on the deeper learning outcomes that at best were thought only the providence of a select few students. As the evidence has shown, artificial ceilings are the best way to restrict students from learning what they need to do well in today's and tomorrow's high-tech, global economy. When all students have access to the high-expectations results that come from deeper learning, not only do those students benefit, but so does our entire society.

This book does not promise a new rose garden. The authors are well aware that the fields in which today's teachers practice are full of thistles and thorns. Instead, the book provides up-to-date and practical advice for implementing best-evidence practices that will help you and all other readers ensure that all children learn to their fullest potential with the best-known high-expectations practices.

This third edition is cognizant of the many mandates, some helpful and some not, that surround, pressure, sometimes weigh down, and often distract today's teachers from their essential job. To do this, we present a full toolkit of resources, some easy and some difficult to put into practice. Each resource will allow you and other teachers to put the school research into your classroom at times and places which most benefit your students.

Like carpenters who relied for years on handheld wrenches, hammers, and screwdrivers but now are more efficient and effective with power drills, hammers, and other high-speed electric tools, or like dentists who transformed the once multihour and painful root canal into a quick, painless, and quickly recovered-from experience by calling on new laser dental tools and updated procedures, teachers can select new, more powerful tools to attend to their students' most challenging deeper learning needs. We cannot promise you that the work will be easier. Teaching is not a stroll in a rose garden. The most effective teaching that challenges students to become the best learners each can be is one of the most difficult jobs in our society. It can also be the most rewarding not in dollars but in personal satisfaction.

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