

STAR TEACHERS OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY

Second Edition



**Martin Haberman,
Maureen D. Gillette, and Djanna A. Hill**

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ROUTLEDGE

STAR TEACHERS OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY

In his groundbreaking work, Martin Haberman identified key dispositions of “star” teachers that help them work successfully with students in poverty. More than two decades later, Maureen D. Gillette and Djanna A. Hill build on Haberman’s seminal work, considering contemporary issues such as social justice, technology, and the political environment, and moving beyond the classroom to focus on teachers as leaders and advocates for all students. Given the high-stakes nature of ensuring that students in high-poverty urban and rural areas receive an excellent education, this new edition provides concrete suggestions for what readers can do to implement culturally relevant pedagogy and to forge a path to becoming a star teacher. Co-published with Kappa Delta Pi, *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty* offers teachers research-based strategies for action so that they can practice socially just and culturally relevant teaching toward the success of every student.

New to the second edition:

- Updated statistics on school demographics, poverty, and teacher turnover in urban and rural areas.
- Added discussion that demonstrates the interrelated nature of poverty, health, safety, trauma, and power, and the cumulative effects of these factors on learning.
- Examination of the role of federal and state government in education and the necessity for teachers to be leaders beyond the classroom.
- Vignettes for experiential learning and analysis, and end-of-chapter questions and resources for further exploration.

Martin Haberman, author of this book’s first edition, was renowned for his research and training on selecting teachers who will be effective with children in poverty.

Maureen D. Gillette is Dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University. Her research, writing, and program direction focus on preparing effective teachers for urban schools.

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KAPPA DELTA PI
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This book is dedicated to Martin Haberman and his legacy—all of the teachers whose lives he changed with his work and the students who benefitted from those teachers.

On a personal note, we dedicate our work on this edition to two very special young people who are just beginning their educational journey—Jabari and Ayla. You two are our motivation, and you keep us grounded when we attempt to take ourselves too seriously. We love you and we hope that you always have star teachers.

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We are grateful to Martin Haberman for writing a book that has impacted so many teachers and principals. His ideas have stood the test of time, and we hope that we have reflected on and enhanced his work in a way that would make him proud.

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PREFACE

Reflections on Martin Haberman's *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty*

Maureen D. Gillette and Djanna A. Hill

It is an honor for us to revisit Martin Haberman's book, *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty*, and to provide a 2017 perspective on his research. It is also daunting. We have used Haberman's original book with prospective and practicing teachers since it was originally published. Haberman's writing evokes strong reactions from practicing teachers. Some get very angry, feeling defensive about the possibility that they may find themselves in Haberman's "quitter" category. Others feel inspired, taking Haberman's words as a challenge to analyze themselves and work to become "star" teachers. One teacher we know was so moved by Haberman's original text that he got a copy for every teacher in his building and convinced the leaders of his urban school district to buy the book for every teacher in the district!

Preservice teachers have had the same type of extreme reactions. Haberman's book causes our students to think long and hard about the profession for which they are preparing. Sometimes Haberman is harsh, questioning whether everyone in the current pool of prospective and practicing teachers is capable of becoming a "star" teacher. He even suggests that if you are not a "star," the urban classroom might not be the place for you. Our prospective teachers ponder the important question, Can the characteristics of a "star" teacher be learned? For some, the book reinforces an already strong commitment to students who have been historically underserved by today's schools. For others, it provides many moments of soul-searching about their chosen career.

Because Haberman's original text is so provocative, we chose to leave the 1995 edition exactly the way he wrote it. We believe that his words and style of writing are of utmost importance even 22 years later. The chapters, therefore, alternate between Haberman's original and our new text. We want you to read each original section of the book, and then read our response and reflections from a 2017 perspective.

By many accounts, children who live in our nation's most challenged communities are worse off than when Haberman wrote his original book. His urgent call for developing a cadre of "star" teachers who have the dispositions and skills to work in schools situated in our nation's most challenged communities has not been completely answered. We want Haberman's original words to provoke you in all of the ways his writing has always provoked his readers. In revisiting this text, we want to provide you with critical information about the dire situation for many urban and rural students today, especially for students from historically marginalized groups.

We also want to offer you hope. We have the privilege of working with "star" teachers on a regular basis. Based on some of the outstanding work that we see going on by dedicated teachers and principals, we also can provide you with some strategies for action so that you can be part of the solution to the educational inequities that we continue to see today. Haberman's call is more important now than ever. Please join us in reflecting on his work.

We begin with Haberman's original Introduction, followed by a new Introduction that sets the stage for thinking about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for success given the state of U.S. society, schools, and students today. We ask you to consider whether you are ready, willing, and able to be the teacher today's students need. We hope that the answer is a resounding, yes!

Introductions

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HABERMAN'S ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION

Martin Haberman

Life's greatest gift is the opportunity to throw oneself into a job that puts meaning and hope into the lives of other people. Seizing this opportunity is the surest way to put meaning and hope into one's own life.

Martin Haberman

Dear Readers:

What you are about to read should help you answer the question, "Would I be able to do this?" "This" refers to teaching children in poverty from diverse cultural backgrounds in one of the 120 largest school districts in the United States, collectively serving approximately 12 million children and youth.

Five to eight percent of the teachers at each of these school districts are "star teachers"—teachers who, by all common criteria, are outstandingly successful: their students score higher on standardized tests; parents and children think they are great; principals rate them highly; other teachers regard them as outstanding; central office supervisors consider them successful; cooperating universities regard them as superior; and they evaluate themselves as outstanding teachers (Haberman, 1993). By interviewing and observing urban teachers all over the United States since 1959, I have become familiar with the substantial knowledge base these stars share. By contrasting the functions performed by star teachers with the behaviors of teachers who quit or fail in the same school systems, two kinds of teacher functions have been identified: things that both stars and failures do; and things that distinguish the practices of stars from those of quitters and failures. This volume is devoted to explicating the distinctive functions performed by stars, and the ideology that undergirds their behavior. To a lesser

degree there is some description of distinctive things stars *never* do that quitters or failures *sometimes* do.

I hope that readers will consider the positive functions performed by star teachers in terms of their own proclivities and dispositions. Only an individual reader will have sufficient self-knowledge to face himself or herself honestly and determine his or her likelihood of success in this form of teaching.

For the children and youth in poverty from diverse cultural backgrounds who attend urban schools, having effective teachers is a matter of life and death. These children have no life options for achieving decent lives other than by experiencing success in school. For them, the stakes involved in schooling are extremely high. Teaching in these situations is not a job, or even a career. Dealing as it does with psychological as well as physical life and death, teaching in these situations is an extraordinary life experience—a volatile, highly charged, emotionally draining, physically exhausting experience for even the most competent, experienced teacher. For beginners, to whom this volume is primarily addressed, the pressures, intensity, and emotional commitments are beyond belief and almost beyond description. The least accurate language would describe the first year of teaching in an urban school system as a manageable or even reasonable “job.” Because it generates extremely high levels of emotional intensity, it is more akin to being an air traffic controller than being a “schoolteacher.” A set of indescribable experiences? Yes. A “job”? No. Before you even consider the functions of star teachers and ask, “Can I do this?” you must first ask yourself whether you can function “on the edge” with children and youth consumed by the tension that comes (and never fully abates) from having unmet basic human needs for physical safety, adequate nutrition, decent health care, freedom from pain, and the nurturance of secure adults who provide care and love.

Completing a traditional program of teacher education as preparation for working in this emotional cauldron is like preparing to swim the English Channel by doing laps in the university pool. Swimming is not swimming. Having a warm shower, a clean towel, a private locker, your own lane, and a heated, guarded, chlorinated pool has nothing whatever to do with the grueling realities of eight-foot swells of freezing water for 22 miles without being certain of your direction, and persisting alone knowing that most “reasonable” people would never submit themselves to such a challenge. After all, “Why risk your health and life for no reason?” This question makes sense to quitters and failures. Stars know the reason.

“Teaching is not teaching” and “kids are not kids.” Completing your first year as a fully responsible teacher in an urban school has nothing to do with having been “successful” in a college preparation program. Even if you student-taught in an urban school, you were never accountable to the parents and principal for students’ learning and behavior. You were, in a very real sense, observing from a protected, safe motor launch while somebody else tried to swim the channel.

You have yet to feel the emotional drain of interacting with the children, parents, teachers, principal, and staff as the responsible, accountable teacher.

This volume describes a form of teaching in which intense feelings are ever present, undergirding the teacher's every action. The warning that it takes great commitment, greater courage, and even more persistence understates the case.

Having said all that, it is important to emphasize that literally thousands of star teachers do "it" every day. Their students learn a great deal, act with respect toward themselves and others, and are in the process of becoming happy, successful, contributing citizens. These star teachers learned on the job—some with mentors, others entirely on their own. There is every reason to believe that even greater numbers of potential teachers—some now in other walks of life as well as in universities—can be selected and coached to do as well as these star teachers.

Reference

- Haberman, M. (1993). Predicting the success of urban teachers (The Milwaukee trials). *Action in Teacher Education*, 15(3), 1–5.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

Maureen D. Gillette and Djanna A. Hill

Martin Haberman wrote a highly popular and highly controversial book in 1995. We loved it! We chose to leave Martin's original 1995 text exactly the way he wrote it because we believe that his words and style of writing are of utmost importance 22 years later. Haberman's original research indicated that teachers with certain dispositions would be more effective for urban schools than those without all or most of those dispositions, as they are key aspects of star teaching: persistence, organization and planning, ability to survive in a bureaucracy, fallibility, perspectives on what makes students and teachers successful, ability to connect with all students (particularly "at-risk" students), outlooks on student learning, and the ability to put theory into practice. We could not agree more. The purpose of this book is to revisit Haberman's original ideas and to look at those teacher skills and dispositions that are necessary today in order to be an effective teacher for the students who need the very best teachers because they have many factors working against them.

Are Haberman's Notions About "Star" Teachers Still Relevant Today?

We wish that educational outcomes for students in urban schools were different today than they were when Haberman wrote this book. We wish that revisiting the original work would be a joyful discussion of the life circumstances and educational opportunities for children who live in neighborhoods characterized by what the federal government (cited in Tough, 2012) termed "deep poverty"—poverty that manifests itself through housing instability, food insecurity, threats to physical and emotional well-being, a lack of jobs, and a lack of access to strong health care systems. We wish that we could provide prospective and practicing