

Mentoring with Culture in Mind

Articles

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The Power of Setting Intentions, Using Restorative Practices, Theater, and Art for Healing and Social Justice

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Stories live in every one of us. We often pass by an ocean of stories every day and never hear the moments that ignite us, invite us, entice us toward something greater... our shared humanity.

I recall a profoundly special evening in Milwaukee. I was at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and [Playback Milwaukee Theatre Company](#), was hosting a performance for the entire community. The theme of the show was "Stories from the Block". I was the Conductor, which is like being the "MC" of an event. Conductors hold the space, warm up the audience, as well as the playback players – actors, musicians, and visual artists. They guide and conduct the show, in a manner similar to the way that Harriet Tubman was the conductor of the Underground Railroad. As the conductor, I invited folks to join us on a journey toward creative freedom through story while sharing and engaging in deep listening, respect, the arts, social context, and ritual. There were almost 200 people in the audience. We had finished short forms (a space in which audience members share a short statement from their seats), and we had come to the part of the show where I invited someone from the audience to come join me on the stage, sit with me and share a memory/fuller story... a moment that was on their hearts to share.

A young college student raised her hand and I invited her to the stage. Her courage in walking to the stage was met with warm applause.

As she sat with me, the room gently fell to silence and rapt attention. Everyone offered generous listening as her story unfolded. As I asked questions, the gravity of her story became clear. Just three days earlier, she had witnessed a shooting. Where other neighbors retreated into their houses, she felt compelled to move toward the person who lay bleeding on the sidewalk. She spoke of the stillness that seemed to wrap around her as she approached this young man. She held his hand, looking into his eyes while witnessing his suffering. Another young man came and took his t-shirt and tried to slow the bleeding with pressure until the paramedics arrived and took him away. Though he was alive when she released his hand, she had no idea what happened to him and she carried with her, the look in his eyes and the grip of his hand. She was still wondering about him.



This wonder now lingered within all of us. The playback of her story was profound. It helped us all hold our breath together and breathe into the emptiness of the unknown.

The storyteller left the stage and the audience applauded her gift to us all. The show went on. After the show ended, and a brief circle backstage, the Playback Milwaukee Theatre Company members went out to connect with the lingering audience members.

Students, professors, staff, family, friends, and community members gathered and spoke with each other recounting stories from the evening and moments that moved them. I recall a group of college students mentioning that they shared classes with the young woman who had shared the story of witnessing the shooting. One student said with surprise, "I have a few classes with her. I never knew that she went through that."

We all stood in rapt silence for a moment... then I said, "We never know what stories are walking by us..."

Setting Clear Intentions

Playback is just one intentional space in which to listen generously and creatively be with our stories, our lives, and ourselves ... just the way we are. When done well, Playback Theater is a creative ritual space with just enough invitation, warmth, creativity, and respect for each teller to be willing to share a story.

There are a variety of intentional spaces that can hold the gift of our stories. Restorative Practices, Restorative Justice, and Circle process are wonderful intentional spaces. These spaces push at the boundary of our social normative pressure and call for our shared humanity.

Circle process provides pauses wide enough to hold heartfelt and meaningful stories that carry us to the parts of ourselves that long to be authentically expressed and embraced. We are invited to this place in our lives. When we pause.

Here is what I mean:

When we pause, we stop and focus our attention for a moment. Waiting. In that moment, there is choice. In that moment, infinite possibilities exist. We can now choose to focus our attention. Intention setting is about directing our attention in a very particular way. When we are the leaders responsible for setting a safe, loving, and dynamic learning environment, then it is important that we be the first to pause, reflect, notice, and ask ourselves questions like:



What is happening around us?

What stories are walking by us?

Who do I need to become to create space for those stories to be shared/show-up in ways that are meaningful for all?

We want people to understand the importance of setting intentions as the primary groundwork for creating healing spaces. Before moving into any process for collective healing, intention setting creates the energetic structure for people to navigate through the process.

By setting intentions, you are priming the energy of the room to be able to authentically hold the stories that want to show up wholeheartedly in that space. This activates and attunes the attention in the room to observe and acknowledge the everyday sacredness that will accompany the participants.

In neuroscience, intention setting calms the brain to let it know that the environment is safe. It also prepares the brain to move forward with the process. The amygdala “is the seat of our fear system that is involved in emotional processing. It is designed to react in less than a second at the very hint of a social or physical threat. (Hammond, p. 40).” When creating spaces for people who carry a lot of trauma it becomes particularly important to make sure the amygdala knows that the environment is safe so further information processing can take place. If the brain senses fear, then all opportunity for learning and participating is lost. By setting intentions we can energetically calm and set a tone for the environment where learners are gathering to do the work of healing.

Sample questions to ask yourself to help set intentions and prime the space:

What values am I standing on to create (healing, courage, brave space, etc.)?

Who is at the center? Who is at the margins?

Who am I being as I create this X; how does that inform what will occur with X?

Who am I becoming and how is that aligned with what I am creating for X?

Reference

Hammond, Zaretta. *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Corwin, 2015.

White Fragility

by
Robin DiAngelo

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. This paper explicates the dynamics of White Fragility.

I am a white woman. I am standing beside a black woman. We are facing a group of white people who are seated in front of us. We are in their workplace, and have been hired by their employer to lead them in a dialogue about race. The room is filled with tension and charged with hostility. I have just presented a definition of racism that includes the acknowledgment that whites hold social and institutional power over people of color. A white man is pounding his fist on the table. His face is red and he is furious. As he pounds he yells, "White people have been discriminated against for 25 years! A white person can't get a job anymore!" I look around the room and see 40 employed people, all white. There are no people

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of color in this workplace. Something is happening here, and it isn't based in the racial reality of the workplace. I am feeling unnerved by this man's disconnection with that reality, and his lack of sensitivity to the impact this is having on my co-facilitator, the only person of color in the room. Why is this white man so angry? Why is he being so careless about the impact of his anger? Why are all the other white people either sitting in silent agreement with him or tuning out? We have, after all, only articulated a definition of racism.

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress.¹ Fine (1997) identifies this insulation when she observes "... how Whiteness accrues privilege and status; gets itself surrounded by protective pillows of resources and/or benefits of the doubt; how Whiteness repels gossip and voyeurism and instead demands dignity" (p. 57). Whites are rarely without these "protective pillows," and when they are, it is usually temporary and by choice. This insulated environment of racial privilege builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress.

For many white people, a single required multicultural education course taken in college, or required "cultural competency training" in their workplace, is the only time they may encounter a direct and sustained challenge to their racial understandings. But even in this arena, not all multicultural courses or training programs talk directly about racism, much less address white privilege. It is far more the norm for these courses and programs to use racially coded language such as "urban," "inner city," and "disadvantaged" but to rarely use "white" or "over-advantaged" or "privileged." This racially coded language reproduces racist images and perspectives while it simultaneously reproduces the comfortable illusion that race and its problems are what "they" have, not us. Reasons why the facilitators of these courses and trainings may not directly name the dynamics and beneficiaries of racism range from the lack of a valid analysis of racism by white facilitators, personal and economic survival strategies for facilitators of color, and the overall pressure from management to keep the content comfortable and palatable for whites. However, if and when an educational program does directly address racism and the privileging of whites, common white responses include anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance (all of which reinforce the pressure on facilitators to avoid directly addressing racism). So-called progressive whites may not respond with anger, but may still insulate themselves via claims that they are beyond the need for engaging with the content because they "already had a class on this" or "already know this." These reactions are often seen in anti-racist education endeavors as

1. Although white racial insulation is somewhat mediated by social class (with poor and working class urban whites being generally less racially insulated than suburban or rural whites), the larger social environment insulates and protects whites as a group through institutions, cultural representations, media, school textbooks, movies, advertising, dominant discourses, etc.

forms of resistance to the challenge of internalized dominance (Whitehead & Wittig, 2005; Horton & Scott, 2004; McGowan, 2000, O'Donnell, 1998). These reactions do indeed function as resistance, but it may be useful to also conceptualize them as the result of the reduced psychosocial stamina that racial insulation inculcates. I call this lack of racial stamina "White Fragility."

Although mainstream definitions of racism are typically some variation of individual "race prejudice", which anyone of any race can have, Whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color (Hilliard, 1992). This unequal distribution benefits whites and disadvantages people of color overall and as a group. Racism is not fluid in the U.S.; it does not flow back and forth, one day benefiting whites and another day (or even era) benefiting people of color. The direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society (Mills, 1999; Feagin, 2006). Whiteness itself refers to the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people over people of color. This definition counters the dominant representation of racism in mainstream education as isolated in discrete behaviors that some individuals may or may not demonstrate, and goes beyond naming specific privileges (McIntosh, 1988). Whites are theorized as actively shaped, affected, defined, and elevated through their racialization and the individual and collective consciousness' formed within it (Frankenberg, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Tatum, 1997). Recognizing that the terms I am using are not "theory neutral 'descriptors' but theory-laden constructs inseparable from systems of injustice" (Allen, 1996, p.95), I use the terms white and Whiteness to describe a social process. Frankenberg (1993) defines Whiteness as multi-dimensional:

Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'Whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p.1)

Frankenberg and other theorists (Fine, 1997; Dyer, 1997; Sleeter, 1993; Van Dijk, 1993) use Whiteness to signify a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced, and which are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination. Whiteness is thus conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people. Whiteness Studies begin with the premise that racism and white privilege exist in both traditional and modern forms, and rather than work to prove its existence, work to reveal it. This article

will explore the dynamics of one aspect of Whiteness and its effects, White Fragility.

Triggers

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. These interruptions can take a variety of forms and come from a range of sources, including:

- Suggesting that a white person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity);
- People of color talking directly about their racial perspectives (challenge to white racial codes);
- People of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regards to race (challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort);
- People of color not being willing to tell their stories or answer questions about their racial experiences (challenge to colonialist relations);
- A fellow white not providing agreement with one's interpretations (challenge to white solidarity);
- Receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (challenge to white liberalism);
- Suggesting that group membership is significant (challenge to individualism);
- An acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (challenge to meritocracy);
- Being presented with a person of color in a position of leadership (challenge to white authority);
- Being presented with information about other racial groups through, for example, movies in which people of color drive the action but are not in stereotypical roles, or multicultural education (challenge to white centrality).

In a white dominant environment, each of these challenges becomes exceptional. In turn, whites are often at a loss for how to respond in constructive ways. Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1993) may be useful here. According to Bourdieu, *habitus* is a socialized subjectivity; a set of dispositions which generate practi-

ces and perceptions. As such, habitus only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment. Based on the previous conditions and experiences that produce it, habitus produces and reproduces thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions. Strategies of response to “disequilibrium” in the habitus are not based on conscious intentionality but rather result from unconscious dispositions towards practice, and depend on the power position the agent occupies in the social structure. White Fragility may be conceptualized as a product of the habitus, a response or “condition” produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of the white structural position.

Omi & Winant posit the U.S. racial order as an “unstable equilibrium,” kept equilibrated by the State, but still unstable due to continual conflicts of interests and challenges to the racial order (pp. 78-9). Using Omi & Winant’s concept of unstable racial equilibrium, white privilege can be thought of as unstable racial equilibrium at the level of habitus. When any of the above triggers (challenges in the habitus) occur, the resulting disequilibrium becomes intolerable. Because White Fragility finds its support in and is a function of white privilege, fragility and privilege result in responses that function to restore equilibrium and return the resources “lost” via the challenge - resistance towards the trigger, shutting down and/or tuning out, indulgence in emotional incapacitation such as guilt or “hurt feelings”, exiting, or a combination of these responses.

Factors that inculcate White Fragility

Segregation

The first factor leading to White Fragility is the segregated lives which most white people live (Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003). Even if whites live in physical proximity to people of color (and this would be exceptional outside of an urban or temporarily mixed class neighborhood), segregation occurs on multiple levels, including representational and informational. Because whites live primarily segregated lives in a white-dominated society, they receive little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity. Growing up in segregated environments (schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, media images and historical perspectives), white interests and perspectives are almost always central. An inability to see or consider significance in the perspectives of people of color results (Collins, 2000).

Further, white people are taught not to feel any loss over the absence of people of color in their lives and in fact, this absence is what defines their schools and neighborhoods as “good;” whites come to understand that a “good school” or “good neighborhood” is coded language for “white” (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003). The quality of white space being in large part measured via the absence of people of color (and Blacks in particular) is a profound message indeed, one that is deeply internalized and reinforced daily through normalized discourses about good

schools and neighborhoods. This dynamic of gain rather than loss via racial segregation may be the most profound aspect of white racial socialization of all. Yet, while discourses about what makes a space good are tacitly understood as racially coded, this coding is explicitly denied by whites.

Universalism & Individualism

Whites are taught to see their perspectives as objective and representative of reality (McIntosh, 1988). The belief in objectivity, coupled with positioning white people as outside of culture (and thus the norm for humanity), allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience. This is evidenced through an unracialized identity or location, which functions as a kind of blindness; an inability to think about Whiteness as an identity or as a “state” of being that would or could have an impact on one’s life. In this position, Whiteness is not recognized or named by white people, and a universal reference point is assumed. White people are just people. Within this construction, whites can represent humanity, while people of color, who are never just people but always most particularly black people, Asian people, etc., can only represent their own racialized experiences (Dyer, 1992).

The discourse of universalism functions similarly to the discourse of individualism but instead of declaring that we all need to see each other as individuals (everyone is different), the person declares that we all need to see each other as human beings (everyone is the same). Of course we are all humans, and I do not critique universalism in general, but when applied to racism, universalism functions to deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white. Further, universalism assumes that whites and people of color have the same realities, the same experiences in the same contexts (i.e. I feel comfortable in this majority white classroom, so you must too), the same responses from others, and assumes that the same doors are open to all. Acknowledging racism as a system of privilege conferred on whites challenges claims to universalism.

At the same time that whites are taught to see their interests and perspectives as universal, they are also taught to value the individual and to see themselves as individuals rather than as part of a racially socialized group. Individualism erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today. It allows whites to view themselves as unique and original, outside of socialization and unaffected by the relentless racial messages in the culture. Individualism also allows whites to distance themselves from the actions of their racial group and demand to be granted the benefit of the doubt, as individuals, in all cases. A corollary to this unracialized identity is the ability to recognize Whiteness as something that is significant and that operates in society, but to not see how it relates to one’s own life. In this form, a white person recognizes Whiteness as real, but as the individual problem of other “bad” white people (DiAngelo, 2010a).

Given the ideology of individualism, whites often respond defensively when linked to other whites as a group or “accused” of collectively benefiting from racism, because as individuals, each white person is “different” from any other white person and expects to be seen as such. This narcissism is not necessarily the result of a consciously held belief that whites are superior to others (although that may play a role), but a result of the white racial insulation ubiquitous in dominant culture (Dawkins, 2004; Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003); a general white inability to see non-white perspectives as significant, except in sporadic and impotent reflexes, which have little or no long-term momentum or political usefulness (Rich, 1979).

Whites invoke these seemingly contradictory discourses—we are either all unique or we are all the same—interchangeably. Both discourses work to deny white privilege and the significance of race. Further, on the cultural level, being an individual or being a human outside of a racial group is a privilege only afforded to white people. In other words, people of color are almost always seen as “having a race” and described in racial terms (“the black man”) but whites rarely are (“the man”), allowing whites to see themselves as objective and non-racialized. In turn, being seen (and seeing ourselves) as individuals outside of race frees whites from the psychic burden of race in a wholly racialized society. Race and racism become their problems, not ours. Challenging these frameworks becomes a kind of unwelcome shock to the system.

The disavowal of race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society at large, is necessary to support current structures of capitalism and domination, for without it, the correlation between the distribution of social resources and unearned white privilege would be evident (Flax, 1998). The existence of structural inequality undermines the claim that privilege is simply a reflection of hard work and virtue. Therefore, inequality must be hidden or justified as resulting from lack of effort (Mills, 1997; Ryan, 2001). Individualism accomplishes both of these tasks. At the same time, the individual presented as outside these relations cannot exist without its disavowed other. Thus, an essential dichotomy is formed between specifically raced others and the unracialized individual. Whites have deep investments in race, for the abstract depends on the particular (Flax, 1998); they need raced others as the backdrop against which they may rise (Morrison, 1992). Exposing this dichotomy destabilizes white identity.

Entitlement to racial comfort

In the dominant position, whites are almost always racially comfortable and thus have developed unchallenged expectations to remain so (DiAngelo, 2006b). Whites have not had to build tolerance for racial discomfort and thus when racial discomfort arises, whites typically respond as if something is “wrong,” and blame the person or event that triggered the discomfort (usually a person of color).

This blame results in a socially-sanctioned array of counter-moves against the perceived source of the discomfort, including: penalization; retaliation; isolation; ostracization; and refusal to continue engagement. White insistence on racial comfort ensures that racism will not be faced. This insistence also functions to punish those who break white codes of comfort. Whites often confuse comfort with safety and state that we don't feel safe when what we really mean is that we don't feel comfortable. This trivializes our history of brutality towards people of color and perverts the reality of that history. Because we don't think complexly about racism, we don't ask ourselves what safety means from a position of societal dominance, or the impact on people of color, given our history, for whites to complain about our safety when we are merely *talking* about racism.

Racial Arrogance

Ideological racism includes strongly positive images of the white self as well as strongly negative images of racial "others" (Feagin, 2000, p. 33). This self-image engenders a self-perpetuating sense of entitlement because many whites believe their financial and professional successes are the result of their own efforts while ignoring the fact of white privilege. Because most whites have not been trained to think complexly about racism in schools (Derman-Sparks, Ramsey & Olsen Edwards, 2006; Sleeter, 1993) or mainstream discourse, and because it benefits white dominance not to do so, we have a very limited understanding of racism. Yet dominance leads to racial arrogance, and in this racial arrogance, whites have no compunction about debating the knowledge of people who have thought complexly about race. Whites generally feel free to dismiss these informed perspectives rather than have the humility to acknowledge that they are unfamiliar, reflect on them further, or seek more information. This intelligence and expertise are often trivialized and countered with simplistic platitudes (i.e. "People just need to...").

Because of white social, economic and political power within a white dominant culture, whites are positioned to legitimize people of color's assertions of racism. Yet whites are the least likely to see, understand, or be invested in validating those assertions and being honest about their consequences, which leads whites to claim that they disagree with perspectives that challenge their worldview, when in fact, they don't understand the perspective. Thus, they confuse not understanding with not agreeing. This racial arrogance, coupled with the need for racial comfort, also has whites insisting that people of color explain white racism in the "right" way. The right way is generally politely and rationally, without any show of emotional upset. When explained in a way that white people can see and understand, racism's validity may be granted (references to dynamics of racism that white people do not understand are usually rejected out of hand). However, whites are usually more receptive to validating white racism if that racism is constructed as residing in individual white people other than themselves.

Racial Belonging

White people enjoy a deeply internalized, largely unconscious sense of racial belonging in U.S. society (DiAngelo, 2006b; McIntosh, 1988). This racial belonging is instilled via the whiteness embedded in the culture at large. Everywhere we look, we see our own racial image reflected back to us – in our heroes and heroines, in standards of beauty, in our role-models and teachers, in our textbooks and historical memory, in the media, in religious iconography including the image of god himself, etc. In virtually any situation or image deemed valuable in dominant society, whites belong. Indeed, it is rare for most whites to experience a sense of not belonging, and such experiences are usually very temporary, easily avoidable situations. Racial belonging becomes deeply internalized and taken for granted. In dominant society, interruption of racial belonging is rare and thus destabilizing and frightening to whites.

Whites consistently choose and enjoy racial segregation. Living, working, and playing in racial segregation is unremarkable as long as it is not named or made explicitly intentional. For example, in many anti-racist endeavors, a common exercise is to separate into caucus groups by race in order to discuss issues specific to your racial group, and without the pressure or stress of other groups' presence. Generally, people of color appreciate this opportunity for racial fellowship, but white people typically become very uncomfortable, agitated and upset – even though this temporary separation is in the service of addressing racism. Responses include a disorienting sense of themselves as not just people, but most particularly white people; a curious sense of loss about this contrived and temporary separation which they don't feel about the real and on-going segregation in their daily lives; and anxiety about not knowing what is going on in the groups of color. The irony, again, is that most whites live in racial segregation every day, and in fact, are the group most likely to intentionally choose that segregation (albeit obscured in racially coded language such as seeking “good schools” and “good neighborhoods”). This segregation is unremarkable until it is named as deliberate – i.e. “We are now going to separate by race for a short exercise.” I posit that it is the intentionality that is so disquieting – as long as we don't mean to separate, as long as it “just happens” that we live segregated lives, we can maintain a (fragile) identity of racial innocence.

Psychic freedom

Because race is constructed as residing in people of color, whites don't bear the social burden of race. We move easily through our society without a sense of ourselves as racialized subjects (Dyer, 1997). We see race as operating when people of color are present, but all-white spaces as “pure” spaces – untainted by race *vis á vis* the absence of the carriers of race (and thereby the racial polluters) – people of color. This perspective is perfectly captured in a familiar white statement, “I was lucky. I grew up in an all-white neighborhood so I didn't learn anything about ra-

cism.” In this discursive move, whiteness gains its meaning through its purported lack of encounter with non-whiteness (Nakayama & Martin, 1999). Because racial segregation is deemed socially valuable while simultaneously unracial and unremarkable, we rarely, if ever, have to think about race and racism, and receive no penalty for not thinking about it. In fact, whites are more likely to be penalized (primarily by other whites) for bringing race up in a social justice context than for ignoring it (however, it is acceptable to bring race up indirectly and in ways that reinforce racist attitudes, i.e. warning other whites to stay away from certain neighborhoods, etc.). This frees whites from carrying the psychic burden of race. Race is for people of color to think about – it is what happens to “them” – they can bring it up if it is an issue for them (although if they do, we can dismiss it as a personal problem, the “race card”, or the reason for their problems). This allows whites to devote much more psychological energy to other issues, and prevents us from developing the stamina to sustain attention on an issue as charged and uncomfortable as race.

Constant messages that we are more valuable – through representation in everything

Living in a white dominant context, we receive constant messages that we are better and more important than people of color. These messages operate on multiple levels and are conveyed in a range of ways. For example: our centrality in history textbooks, historical representations and perspectives; our centrality in media and advertising (for example, a recent Vogue magazine cover boldly stated, “The World’s Next Top Models” and every woman on the front cover was white); our teachers, role-models, heroes and heroines; everyday discourse on “good” neighborhoods and schools and who is in them; popular TV shows centered around friendship circles that are all white; religious iconography that depicts god, Adam and Eve, and other key figures as white, commentary on new stories about how shocking any crime is that occurs in white suburbs; and, the lack of a sense of loss about the absence of people of color in most white people’s lives. While one may explicitly reject the notion that one is inherently better than another, one cannot avoid internalizing the message of white superiority, as it is ubiquitous in mainstream culture (Tatum, 1997; Doane, 1997).

What does White Fragility look like?

A large body of research about children and race demonstrates that children start to construct ideas about race very early; a sense of white superiority and knowledge of racial power codes appears to develop as early as pre-school (Clark, 1963; Derman-Sparks, Ramsey, & Olsen Edwards, 2006). Marty (1999) states,

As in other Western nations, white children born in the United States inherit the moral predicament of living in a white supremacist society. Raised to experience

their racially based advantages as fair and normal, white children receive little if any instruction regarding the predicament they face, let alone any guidance in how to resolve it. Therefore, they experience or learn about racial tension without understanding Euro-Americans' historical responsibility for it and knowing virtually nothing about their contemporary roles in perpetuating it (p. 51).

At the same time that it is ubiquitous, white superiority also remains unnamed and explicitly denied by most whites. If white children become adults who explicitly oppose racism, as do many, they often organize their identity around a denial of the racially based privileges they hold that reinforce racist disadvantage for others. What is particularly problematic about this contradiction is that white moral objection to racism increases white resistance to acknowledging complicity with it. In a white supremacist context, white identity in large part rests upon a foundation of (superficial) racial toleration and acceptance. Whites who position themselves as liberal often opt to protect what they perceive as their moral reputations, rather than recognize or change their participation in systems of inequity and domination. In so responding, whites invoke the power to choose when, how, and how much to address or challenge racism. Thus, pointing out white advantage will often trigger patterns of confusion, defensiveness and righteous indignation. When confronted with a challenge to white racial codes, many white liberals use the speech of self-defense (Van Dijk, 1992). This discourse enables defenders to protect their moral character against what they perceive as accusation and attack while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability. Focusing on restoring their moral standing through these tactics, whites are able to avoid the question of white privilege (Marty, 1999, Van Dijk, 1992).

Those who lead whites in discussions of race may find the discourse of self-defense familiar. Via this discourse, whites position themselves as victimized, slammed, blamed, attacked, and being used as "punching bag[s]" (DiAngelo, 2006c). Whites who describe interactions in this way are responding to the articulation of counter narratives; nothing physically out of the ordinary has ever occurred in any inter-racial discussion that I am aware of. These self-defense claims work on multiple levels to: position the speakers as morally superior while obscuring the true power of their social locations; blame others with less social power for their discomfort; falsely position that discomfort as dangerous; and reinscribe racist imagery. This discourse of victimization also enables whites to avoid responsibility for the racial power and privilege they wield. By positioning themselves as victims of anti-racist efforts, they cannot be the beneficiaries of white privilege. Claiming that *they* have been treated unfairly via a challenge to their position or an expectation that they listen to the perspectives and experiences of people of color, they are able to demand that more social resources (such as time and attention) be channeled in their direction to help them cope with this mistreatment.

A cogent example of White Fragility occurred recently during a workplace anti-racism training I co-facilitated with an inter-racial team. One of the white

participants left the session and went back to her desk, upset at receiving (what appeared to the training team as) sensitive and diplomatic feedback on how some of her statements had impacted several people of color in the room. At break, several other white participants approached us (the trainers) and reported that they had talked to the woman at her desk, and she was very upset that her statements had been challenged. They wanted to alert us to the fact that she literally “might be having a heart-attack.” Upon questioning from us, they clarified that they meant this *literally*. These co-workers were sincere in their fear that the young woman might actually physically die as a result of the feedback. Of course, when news of the woman’s potentially fatal condition reached the rest of the participant group, all attention was immediately focused back onto her and away from the impact she had had on the people of color. As Vodde (2001) states, “If privilege is defined as a legitimization of one’s entitlement to resources, it can also be defined as permission to escape or avoid any challenges to this entitlement” (p. 3).

The language of violence that many whites use to describe anti-racist endeavors is not without significance, as it is another example of the way that White Fragility distorts and perverts reality. By employing terms that connote physical abuse, whites tap into the classic discourse of people of color (particularly African Americans) as dangerous and violent. This discourse perverts the actual direction of danger that exists between whites and others. The history of brutal, extensive, institutionalized and ongoing violence perpetrated by whites against people of color—slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization and medical experimentation to mention a few—becomes profoundly trivialized when whites claim they don’t feel safe or are under attack when in the rare situation of merely talking about race with people of color. The use of this discourse illustrates how fragile and ill-equipped most white people are to confront racial tensions, and their subsequent projection of this tension onto people of color (Morrison, 1992). Goldberg (1993) argues that the questions surrounding racial discourse should not focus so much on how true stereotypes are, but how the truth claims they offer are a part of a larger worldview that authorizes and normalizes forms of domination and control. Further, it is relevant to ask: Under what conditions are those truth-claims clung to most tenaciously?

Bonilla-Silva (2006) documents a manifestation of White Fragility in his study of color-blind white racism. He states, “Because the new racial climate in America forbids the open expression of racially based feelings, views, and positions, when whites discuss issues that make them uncomfortable, they become almost incomprehensible – I, I, I, I don’t mean, you know, but...-” (p. 68). Probing forbidden racial issues results in verbal incoherence - digressions, long pauses, repetition, and self-corrections. He suggests that this incoherent talk is a function of talking about race in a world that insists race does not matter. This incoherence is one demonstration that many white people are unprepared to engage, even on a preliminary level, in an exploration of their racial perspectives that could lead to a shift in their understanding of racism. This lack of preparedness results in the

maintenance of white power because the ability to determine which narratives are authorized and which are suppressed is the foundation of cultural domination (Banks, 1996; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1990). Further, this lack of preparedness has further implications, for if whites cannot engage with an exploration of alternate racial perspectives, they can only reinscribe white perspectives as universal.

However, an assertion that whites do not engage with dynamics of racial discourse is somewhat misleading. White people do notice the racial locations of racial others and discuss this freely among themselves, albeit often in coded ways. Their refusal to directly acknowledge this race talk results in a kind of split consciousness that leads to the incoherence Bonilla-Silva documents above (Feagin, 2000; Flax, 1998; hooks, 1992; Morrison, 1992). This denial also guarantees that the racial misinformation that circulates in the culture and frames their perspectives will be left unexamined. The continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement in a culture infused with racial disparity limits the ability to form authentic connections across racial lines, and results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

Conclusion

White people often believe that multicultural / anti-racist education is only necessary for those who interact with “minorities” or in “diverse” environments. However, the dynamics discussed here suggest that it is critical that all white people build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race. When whites posit race as non-operative because there are few, if any, people of color in their immediate environments, Whiteness is reinscribed ever more deeply (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). When whites only notice “raced others,” we reinscribe Whiteness by continuing to posit Whiteness as universal and non-Whiteness as other. Further, if we can’t listen to or comprehend the perspectives of people of color, we cannot bridge cross-racial divides. A continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

While anti-racist efforts ultimately seek to transform institutionalized racism, anti-racist education may be most effective by starting at the micro level. The goal is to generate the development of perspectives and skills that enable all people, regardless of racial location, to be active initiators of change. Since all individuals who live within a racist system are enmeshed in its relations, this means that all are responsible for either perpetuating or transforming that system. However, although all individuals play a role in keeping the system active, the responsibility for change is not equally shared. White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; hooks, 1995; Wise, 2003). Conversations about Whiteness might best happen within the context of a larger conversation about racism. It is useful to start at the micro level of analysis, and move to the macro, from the individual out to the

interpersonal, societal and institutional. Starting with the individual and moving outward to the ultimate framework for racism – Whiteness – allows for the pacing that is necessary for many white people for approaching the challenging study of race. In this way, a discourse on Whiteness becomes part of a process rather than an event (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

Many white people have never been given direct or complex information about racism before, and often cannot explicitly see, feel, or understand it (Trepagnier, 2006; Weber, 2001). People of color are generally much more aware of racism on a personal level, but due to the wider society's silence and denial of it, often do not have a macro-level framework from which to analyze their experiences (Sue, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Further, dominant society "assigns" different roles to different groups of color (Smith, 2005), and a critical consciousness about racism varies not only between individuals within groups, but also between groups. For example, many African Americans relate having been "prepared" by parents to live in a racist society, while many Asian heritage people say that racism was never directly discussed in their homes (hooks, 1989; Lee, 1996). A macro-level analysis may offer a framework to understand different interpretations and performances across and between racial groups. In this way, all parties benefit and efforts are not solely focused on whites (which works to re-center Whiteness).

Talking directly about white power and privilege, in addition to providing much needed information and shared definitions, is also in itself a powerful interruption of common (and oppressive) discursive patterns around race. At the same time, white people often need to reflect upon racial information and be allowed to make connections between the information and their own lives. Educators can encourage and support white participants in making their engagement a point of analysis. White Fragility doesn't always manifest in overt ways; silence and withdrawal are also functions of fragility. Who speaks, who doesn't speak, when, for how long, and with what emotional valence are all keys to understanding the relational patterns that hold oppression in place (Gee, 1999; Powell, 1997). Viewing white anger, defensiveness, silence, and withdrawal in response to issues of race through the framework of White Fragility may help frame the problem as an issue of stamina-building, and thereby guide our interventions accordingly.

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Introduction

Believe it or not, the seeds of this book were planted in me way back in Miss Alexander's first grade class at Lafayette Elementary School in San Francisco. The school was located in the Richmond district in the city, a community made up mostly of middle class White families, first- and second-generation Japanese and Russian immigrant families. I was one of about a dozen African American children in a student population of just over 200 students, including my brother and sister. My family alone made up a third of the Black students in the school. I always felt I didn't belong there, figuratively and literally.

In reality, I lived on the other side of town in public housing known as "the pink projects" in the predominantly Black Hunter's Point community. My mother, a single teen parent who had three children by the time she was 22 years old, knew that the only way out of the projects for us was through education. When it was time for us to go to school, she visited the neighborhood school in Hunter's Point and found run-down facilities and low expectations for the children. So, she took matters into her own hands. She used her parents' address to enroll us in Lafayette Elementary across town. My grandparents, both hardworking but illiterate, had come to California at the tail end of the Great Black Migration in 1940. The Great Migration was the movement of two million African Americans out of the rural South to urban states in the Northeast, Midwest, and West between 1919 and 1940 to escape the oppression of Jim Crow in the South and take advantage of economic opportunities up North. My grandfather worked as a longshoreman at the Port of Oakland and my grandmother worked as a maid cleaning houses for upper class White families in Pacific Heights and Nob Hill in San Francisco. They bought their home in the Richmond neighborhood 1 year before I was born. They were the first and only Black family on the block for over 20 years.

Everyday, we took the hour-long ride on public transportation to school by ourselves. Mom had to go to work. Our daily trip included getting up early to take one bus out of Hunter's Point and transferring to another in order to get to school on time, with my brother, a third grader,

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in charge of me and my sister, a kindergartener. The principal and teachers turned a blind eye to the fact that we lived outside the attendance zone for Lafayette as long as we “behaved” ourselves. (I would test that implicit agreement many times before graduating in the sixth grade.)

Back home on the playground in the projects, it slowly became clear to me that my brother, sister, and I were getting a different kind of education at Lafayette than the kids in the projects who went to the local school. I have vivid memories of cuddling up one-on-one with Miss Alexander in the reading corner as I read to her. By second grade, I had learned to read well and fell in love with books while the neighborhood kids were struggling with reading. In the fourth grade with Miss Martini, we were doing project-based learning before it was even called project-based learning. On the other hand, back in the neighborhood, my playmates were doing fill-in-the-blank worksheets. At Lafayette, we had Model United Nations in fifth and sixth grade where we learned history, geography, economics, and social studies in integrated ways.

When I was in the fifth grade, Lafayette Elementary School was integrated. It was one of the first 12 schools in San Francisco to integrate under a court-ordered desegregation decree. By this time, my family and I had moved from the projects in Hunter’s Point to public housing in the Fillmore/Western Addition neighborhood in San Francisco. All of a sudden at Lafayette, there were other students of color from my neighborhood. But I noticed a big difference in the classroom. They struggled with analytical tasks and many were in remedial reading groups. The difference I came to realize was I had been taught to use my mind well, process information effectively, and do analytical reading. From the first grade, students at Lafayette Elementary were being prepared to take on increasingly more rigorous content as we moved toward sixth grade. We were taught to be independent, self-directed learners. That was not the case for the new kids that showed up. I was witnessing the achievement gap firsthand. Despite coming to a school that had high quality teachers and instruction, the gaps in their knowledge and skill by fifth grade were too great for them to be independent learners without intense focus and support.

After many decades of attention, the achievement gaps I witnessed as an elementary school student are still with us. The things I witnessed and experienced as a student of color then aren’t significantly different from what many students of color experience in schools today. Despite 30 plus years of education reform, the words of education researcher, Charles Payne, are truer than ever: There’s been “so much reform and so little change” (2008).

Many educators have been looking to culturally responsive teaching as a way to close our achievement gaps given the intense focus on rigor in

the classroom with the arrival of the Common Core State Standards. But for some, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is simply an engagement strategy designed to motivate racially and culturally diverse students. It seems simplistic to think that students who feel marginalized, academically abandoned, or invisible in the classroom would reengage simply because we mention tribal kings of Africa or Aztec empires of Mexico in the curriculum or use “call and response” chants to get students pumped up. For some, it is seen as a “bag of tricks” with magical properties that don’t allow us to really know how it works. Because it seems so mysterious, many teachers don’t bring the same rigor, consistency, and serious implementation to it as they do with other instructional practices.

More than a motivational tool, culturally responsive teaching is a serious and powerful tool for accelerating student learning. The more we learn from neuroscience, the clearer it becomes as to why and how it works. That’s what this book is about: the connection between brain-based learning and rigorous culturally responsive teaching. Based on my 18 years as an educator and student of neuroscience, I believe culturally responsive teaching has the power to close achievement gaps. When practiced correctly and consistently, it can get underperforming students of color who are caught on the wrong side of the achievement gap ready for rigorous learning by building their brainpower. Dr. Edmund Gordon and his colleagues with the National Study Group for the Affirmative Development of Academic Ability housed at Teachers College at Columbia University in their 2004 task force report, “All Students Reaching the Top” highlighted what a growing body of research around closing the achievement has found: Building brain power is the missing link to closing the achievement gap for underperforming culturally and linguistically diverse students.

THE MARRIAGE OF NEUROSCIENCE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Every year, neuroscientists learn more and more about how the brain learns. For instance, we are learning about the importance of the brain’s executive functions in directing learning, problem solving, and self-regulation. Honestly, I wish I had this information when I was in my teacher education program. Any references to the brain and learning were limited to my one semester of Ed Psych. Instead, we spent most of our time learning about the learning theories of Piaget, Skinner, and Thorndike but not their application to everyday teaching. We talked about stages of development but never actually talked in detail about the brain as a natural learning apparatus. During my time as a

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preservice teacher, we spent even less time talking about culturally responsive teaching, although we touched on educational equity and the achievement gap briefly.

Brain-based learning strategies from neuroscience and culturally responsive teaching have always been presented as two separate, unrelated branches of educational practice. Yet teacher educators Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings each describe culturally responsive pedagogy as encompassing the social-emotional, relational, and cognitive aspects of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Cognition and higher order thinking have always been at the center of culturally responsive teaching, which makes it a natural partner for neuroscience in the classroom. This book sets out to explicitly highlight the natural intersection between so-called “brain-based learning” and culturally responsive teaching. I believe one of the biggest benefits of looking at these two approaches together is that we can better recognize what impact certain culturally responsive practices have on student learning. Neuroscience also offers a way to understand and organize our culturally responsive teaching practice.

MAKING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING ACCESSIBLE

The question I hear from many teachers is: *How can we make culturally responsive teaching more accessible as a practice?* The first step in learning to use culturally responsive practices is understanding what those practices are and how they fit into our understanding of cognitive science.

Because there's so much confusion over what culturally responsive teaching is and how it works, I started assembling strategies from culturally responsive pedagogy, brain-based learning, and equity and braiding them together into a framework that made it easier to understand and apply in the classroom. I began testing parts of it in the programs I designed as a curriculum developer and facilitated as a professional developer. The first opportunity came as the director of The Equity Initiative at the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), an Annenberg-funded school reform initiative, and then as an independent reading tutor trainer with Community Solutions Network. As part of a team of talented coaches who designed an inquiry-based approach to instructional coaching, I was able to bring some of these approaches and frames to the Partnership for Learning program at the National Equity Project and apply them to instructional coaching. As the chief designer of the professional development seminar, *Teaching with a Cultural Eye*, I got another chance to refine the frame and share it with teachers and school leaders.

I offer it here as a way to help educators understand how to operationalize culturally responsive teaching, especially in service of our most vulnerable and underserved students.

MY INTENTION OF THIS BOOK

Language is powerful. When you are able to name a thing, it moves out of the realm of mystery into concreteness. For too long, culturally responsive teaching has been relegated to this realm of magic and mystery, knowledge that only a select few possess. When we are able to recognize and name a student's learning moves and not mistake culturally different ways of learning and making meaning for intellectual deficits, we are better able to match those moves with a powerful teaching response. My intention in this book is to expand teachers' vocabulary for talking about culturally responsive teaching, especially for underperforming culturally and linguistically diverse students. For too long, the conversation has been dominated by the idea of the "culture of poverty" as an organizing social and intellectual frame for teaching marginalized culturally and linguistically diverse students. In these pages, I offer new concepts and frames for thinking about culturally responsive teaching as an extension of brain-based learning. Turning concepts into practices takes focus, feedback, and reflection. My hope is that soon this book in your hands will be highlighted, underlined and dog-eared as you use it to build your background knowledge and culturally responsive toolkit. May it lead you into many rich conversations with your colleagues about leveraging the natural learning systems of culturally diverse students in our ongoing efforts to close the achievement gap.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND WHAT IT ISN'T

This book isn't a how-to guide on developing culturally responsive lesson plans in every subject area. The Ready for Rigor frame is not a prescriptive program outlining how to do culturally responsive teaching. Instead, I want you to think of culturally responsive teaching as a mindset, a way of thinking about and organizing instruction to allow for great flexibility in teaching. The Ready for Rigor frame simply attempts to organize the principles and tools that should be staples in the toolkit of every culturally responsive teacher. It focuses on helping teachers understand the brain-based principles that govern culturally responsive teaching so that we can stimulate underperforming students' cognitive

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development and grow self-directed learners. Too few education researchers, with the exception of Edmund Gordon, Yvette Jackson, Carol Lee, Augusta Mann, A. Wade Boykins, Rosa Hernandez-Sheets, Aida Walqui, Pedro Noguera, and the late Asa Hilliard, have explicitly focused on building underserved students' cognitive resources as a strategy to closing the achievement gap. Boykin and Noguera (2011) said it best, "when such assets are not yet part of a student's repertoire, educators must directly provide for their acquisition and use . . ." (p. 114). The Ready for Rigor frame attempts to provide some insight into how we can help students acquire and use their natural, culturally-grounded cognitive resources. In addition, it illuminates the connection between culture, schooling, and the larger dynamics of race, class, and language in society that shape the educational experiences and outcomes of many students of color and English learners.

NAMING OUR STUDENTS: A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

Traditionally, in education we talk about the achievement gap in terms of Black and White—African American students and White students. Since the influx of immigrant families over the past few decades, we have started to include Latino students in the group of students negatively impacted by the achievement gap, many of whom are English learners. In this book, I often name African American and Latino students when talking about cultural responsiveness in the classroom. Please note that I use African American and Latino students as proxies for the larger group of diverse students of color in our classrooms, especially those groups that have traditionally been unacknowledged, such as Pacific Islander and First Nation students. It is important that we also include in our definition of students of South Asian and Asian descent when talking about the achievement gap. Too often, we identify these two groups as high achievers who don't need culturally responsive teaching. In reality, we have many students from Hmong, Vietnamese, and Cambodian backgrounds who are struggling to be heard and supported in school.

You will see that I use the terms *students of color* and *culturally and linguistically diverse students* interchangeably throughout the book. I want you to keep in mind that English learners are always included when I refer to students of color, even though there are unique issues around language that all educators need to be familiar with and address specifically.

TEACHER EXAMPLES

I have tried to provide some short anecdotes of teachers' attempts to change their practice to incorporate the approaches outlined in the book in their teaching practice. They are composites of the teachers who have invited me into their classrooms in past years. I have changed their names and identifying characteristics.

WHO IS THE BOOK FOR?

I write this book for three main audiences:

Classroom teachers. Most teachers across the country have gone through workshops and seminars on culturally responsive pedagogy, equity, or brain-based learning. This book provides teachers with an understanding of how all three are related and interdependent along with practical strategies for turning new conceptual understanding into on-the-ground teaching practices. It is designed to support teachers' continued growth and development as culturally responsive educators. It's written so an individual teacher can use it to build her teaching practice or it can be used as a study guide within a professional learning community.

Instructional coaches. More and more school districts are supporting teacher development with ongoing instructional coaching. This book is also for instructional coaches who are charged with supporting teachers around culturally responsive teaching. Instructional coaches when they come with an equity lens set up "creative tension" between the teacher's vision of a culturally supportive classroom and current reality. When armed with the right tools and information, they act as "instructional sherpas," guiding a teacher on his own professional capacity building journey. Hopefully, this book will provide coaches with some new language for talking about culturally responsive teaching that focuses on cognitive development rather than on simple engagement strategies.

Instructional leaders. Principals and teacher-leaders play a critical role in creating a school culture that allows for the care and nurturing of culturally responsive learning practices and spaces, both for students and teachers. This book hopefully will provide a conceptual frame that informs and supports their instructional leadership.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Ready for Rigor is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding culturally responsive teaching. It approaches culturally responsive teaching as an adaptive endeavor rather than a technical fix, which means that the quality of relationships between teacher and students are just as important as the technical strategies used to get students to perform at higher levels. The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, we focus on the first area of the Ready for Rigor frame, Awareness. In Chapter 1, we look at the promise of culturally responsive teaching in supporting our most vulnerable students. I explain the relationship between helping students of color who are dependent learners and culturally responsive teaching. We also look at the role neuroscience can play in helping us understand how to implement it more successfully. In this chapter, I introduce the Ready for Rigor framework that helps organize culturally responsive teaching and guides us through the other chapters in the book. Chapter 2 looks at the role culture plays in culturally responsive teaching and offers a unique way to think about it. Chapter 3 reviews the connection between culture, brain structures, and building brainpower. In Chapter 4, we return to looking at personal “inside-out” work culturally responsive teachers must do to prepare themselves to be effective. Part II focuses on Learning Partnerships and covers Chapters 5 through 7. Chapter 5 outlines the foundational role effective student-teacher relationships play in culturally responsive teaching. Chapter 6 explores the special stance and skills teachers need in order to leverage relationships and culture to help dependent learners cultivate the right mindset as they move toward independence. In Chapter 7, we look at the strategies that build academic mindset in culturally congruent ways. Part III focuses on Building Intellectual Capacity and covers Chapters 8 through 9. Chapter 8 focuses on information processing and building students’ intellectual capacity through cognitive routines. Chapter 9 looks at the importance of creating a socially and intellectually safe classroom community that encourages students to take more cognitive risks. Finally, in the Epilogue, we think together about how we lead for equity outside the classroom as culturally responsive educators. Each chapter ends with these common parts:

- **Chapter Summary**—a set of big ideas from the chapter
- **Invitation to Inquiry**—a set of questions for reflection and further investigation
- **Going Deeper**—a set of resources for learning more and building background knowledge

SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE BOOK

- ***Read with intention and purpose.*** Ask yourself a guiding question as you read: *How do I want to grow as a culturally responsive educator? What do I want to know more about or what questions or concerns do I have?*
- ***Read the book with a highlighter and a notebook.*** As you read, mine the content for the nuggets of information and insight that resonate with you. Pull out those that build on what you already know. Make explicit connections to schoolwide or professional learning community (PLC) initiatives or other approaches for improving outcomes for low performing students. Summarize in your own words so that you help your brain assimilate the new information.
- ***Customize tools and strategies.*** Think through how you might tailor strategies and tools to fit your grade level, school context, or your own personality and style.
- ***Take bite-sized action.*** Begin with one or two strategies for building relationships and one or two for building intellectual capacity. If you are just beginning to explore culturally responsive teaching, don't allow yourself to get overwhelmed by believing you have to do it all. If you are a veteran of CRT, focus on one or two areas you'd like to strengthen in your practice.
- ***Practice action research.*** Based on your guiding question, observe your current practice or student learning behaviors to establish a baseline. Put your bite-sized actions in motion. Collect data regularly. Create space and time to analyze and interpret it against the Ready for Rigor frame. Then reflect and adjust your practices.
- ***Invite others to join you on the journey.*** Form an inquiry group or book circle as a way to foster collaboration and accountability around your action research.

PART I

Building Awareness and Knowledge

1 Climbing Out of the Gap

Supporting Dependent Learners to Become Independent Thinkers

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

The chronic achievement gap in most American schools has created an epidemic of dependent learners unprepared to do the higher order thinking, creative problem solving and analytical reading and writing called for in the new Common Core State Standards. One of the goals of education is not simply to fill students with facts and information but to help them learn how to learn. Classroom studies document the fact that underserved English learners, poor students, and students of color routinely receive less instruction in higher order skills development than other students (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Oakes, 2005). Their curriculum is less challenging and more repetitive. Their instruction is more focused on skills low on Bloom's taxonomy. This type of instruction denies students the opportunity to engage in what neuroscientists call **productive struggle** that actually grows our

brainpower (Means & Knapp, 1991; Ritchhart, 2002). As a result, a disproportionate number of culturally and linguistically diverse students are dependent learners.

Here is the problem. On his own, a dependent learner is not able to do complex, school-oriented learning tasks such as synthesizing and analyzing informational text without continuous support. Let's not misunderstand the point—dependent doesn't mean deficit. As children enter school, we expect that they are dependent learners. One of our key jobs in the early school years is to help students become independent learners. We expect students to be well on their way to becoming independent learners by third grade, but we still find a good number of students who struggle with rigorous content well into high school, mostly students of color.

The closest we usually come to talking about this situation is the popular “Read by Third Grade” campaigns. We say children are *learning to read* up until third grade then shift to *reading to learn*. The same is true with cognition. In the early grades, we teach children habits of mind and help them build cognitive processes and structures so that as they move through school they are able to do complex thinking and independent learning.

For culturally and linguistically diverse students, their opportunities to develop habits of mind and cognitive capacities are limited or non-existent because of educational inequity. The result is their cognitive growth is stunted, leaving them dependent learners, unable to work to their full potential. In the *New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander (2012) suggests that this dependency is the first leg of the “school-to-prison pipeline” for many students of color. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the school-to-prison is a set of seemingly unconnected school policies and teacher instructional decisions that over time result in students of color not receiving adequate literacy and content instruction while being disproportionately disciplined for nonspecific, subjective offenses such as “defiance.” Students of color, especially African American and Latino boys, end up spending valuable instructional time in the office rather than in the classroom. Consequently, they fall further and further behind in reading achievement just as reading is becoming the primary tool they will need for taking in new content. Student frustration and shame at being labeled “a slow reader” and having low comprehension leads to more off-task behavior, which the teacher responds to by sending the student out of the classroom. Over time, many students of color are pushed out of school because they cannot keep up academically because of poor reading skills and a lack of social-emotional support to deal with their increasing frustration.

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Figure 1.1

Many culturally and linguistically diverse students are “dependent learners” who don’t get adequate support to facilitate their cognitive growth. Consequently, they are not able to activate their own neuroplasticity.

The Dependent Learner	The Independent Learner
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is dependent on the teacher to carry most of the cognitive load of a task always• Is unsure of how to tackle a new task• Cannot complete a task without scaffolds• Will sit passively and wait if stuck until teacher intervenes• Doesn’t retain information well or “doesn’t get it”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relies on the teacher to carry some of the cognitive load temporarily• Utilizes strategies and processes for tackling a new task• Regularly attempts new tasks without scaffolds• Has cognitive strategies for getting unstuck• Has learned how to retrieve information from long-term memory

Dependent Learner Characteristics vs. Independent Learner

In recent years, there’s been a lot of talk about the reasons behind the low performance of many students of color, English learners, and poor students. Rather than examine school policies and teacher practices, some attribute it to a “culture of poverty” or different community values toward education. The reality is that they struggle not because of their race, language, or poverty. They struggle because we don’t offer them sufficient opportunities in the classroom to develop the cognitive skills and habits of mind that would prepare them to take on more advanced academic tasks (Jackson, 2011; Boykin and Noguera, 2011). That’s the achievement gap in action. The reasons they are not offered more opportunities for rigor are rooted in the education system’s legacy of “separate and unequal” (Kozol, 2006; Oakes, 2005).

School practices that emphasize lecture and rote memorization are part of what Martin Haberman (1991) calls a “pedagogy of poverty” that sets students up to leave high school with outdated skills and shallow knowledge. They are able to regurgitate facts and concepts but have difficulty applying this knowledge in new and practical ways. To be able to direct their own lives and define success for themselves, they must be able to think critically and creatively.

As educators, we have to recognize that we help maintain the achievement gap when we don’t teach advance cognitive skills to students we label as “disadvantaged” because of their language, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Many children start school with small learning gaps, but as they progress through school, the gap between African American and

Latino and White students grows because we don't teach them how to be independent learners. Based on these labels, we usually do the following (Mean & Knapp, 1991):

- Underestimate what disadvantaged students are intellectually capable of doing
- As a result, we postpone more challenging and interesting work until we believe they have mastered “the basics”
- By focusing only on low-level basics, we deprive students of a meaningful or motivating context for learning and practicing higher order thinking processes

Just increasing standards and instructional rigor won't reverse this epidemic. Dependent learners cannot become independent learners by sheer willpower. It is not just a matter of grit or **mindset**. Grit and mindset are necessary but not sufficient by themselves. We have to help dependent students develop new cognitive skills and habits of mind that will actually increase their brainpower. Students with increased brainpower can accelerate their own learning, meaning they know how to learn new content and improve their weak skills on their own.

While the achievement gap has created the epidemic of dependent learners, **culturally responsive teaching** (CRT) is one of our most powerful tools for helping students find their way out of the gap. A systematic approach to culturally responsive teaching is the perfect catalyst to stimulate the brain's neuroplasticity so that it grows new brain cells that help students think in more sophisticated ways.

I define culturally responsive teaching simply as . . .

An educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective **information processing**. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that culturally responsive education can strengthen student connectedness with school and enhance learning (Kalyanpur, 2012; Tatum, 2009).

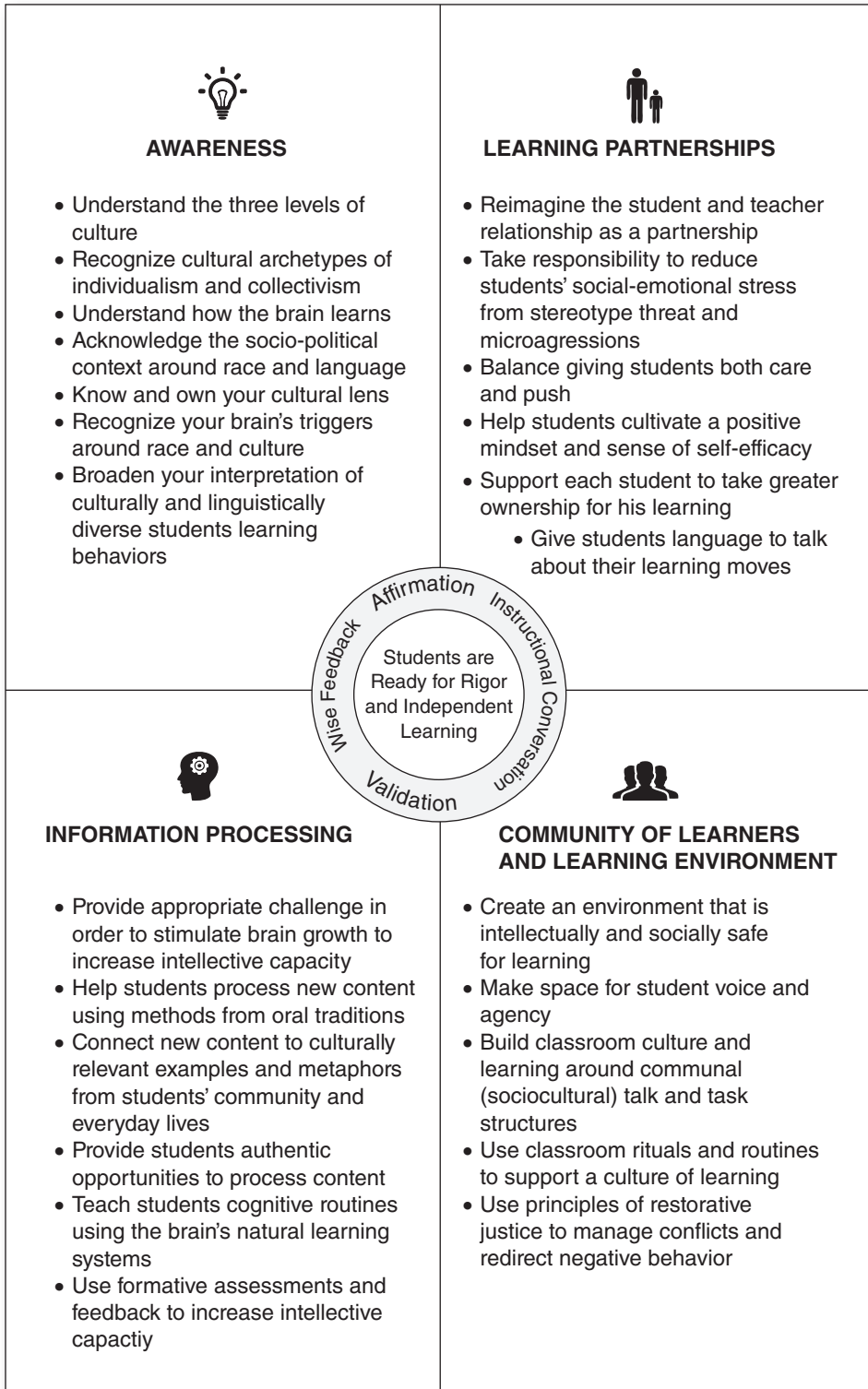
There has been a lot written about cultural responsiveness as part of the current reform agenda. As a teacher educator, I see teacher

education programs pushing to include cultural responsiveness in their list of competencies for beginning teachers. Many states require teachers to have some type of cross-cultural, language, and academic development (CLAD) certification. Teacher induction programs that support new teachers in their first years in the classroom try to cover the topic in their beginning teacher mentoring programs. Most school districts only offer teachers one-shot professional development “trainings” with little or no continued support. Too often, culturally responsive teaching is promoted as a way to reduce behavior problems or motivate students, while downplaying or ignoring its ability to support rigorous cognitive development.

THE MARRIAGE OF NEUROPLASTICITY AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

I can't tell you the number of times someone has asked me for the culturally responsive “cheat sheet” for working with African American, Latino, or even Middle Eastern students. A good number of teachers who have asked me about cultural responsiveness think of it as a “bag of tricks.” Far from being a bag of tricks, culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogical approach firmly rooted in learning theory and cognitive science. When used effectively, culturally responsive pedagogy has the ability to help students build **intellective capacity**, also called *fluid intelligence* (Ritchhart, 2002) and *intellective competence* (Gordon, 2001; National Study Group for the Affirmative Development of Academic Ability, 2004). Intellective capacity is the increased power the brain creates to process complex information more effectively. Neuroscience tells us that culture plays a critical role in this process. That's why it is so important for culturally responsive teachers to be well-versed in brain science and cultural understanding.

Beyond knowing the brain science, the biggest challenge I see teachers struggling with is how to operationalize culturally responsive pedagogical principles into culturally responsive teaching practices. It means understanding the basic concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy (Hernandez-Sheets, 2009; Nieto, 2009; Villegas and Lucas, 2002) and then learning the instructional moves associated with them. The Ready for Rigor framework is designed to help teachers do just that with the aid of neuroscience to deepen your understanding (Figure 1.2). This simple framework organizes key areas of teacher capacity building that set the stage for helping students move from being dependent learners to self-directed, independent learners.

Figure 1.2 Ready for Rigor Framework

THE FOUR PRACTICE AREAS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Learning to put culturally responsive teaching into operation is like learning to rub your head and pat your stomach at the same time. This move feels a bit awkward at first because you have to get your hands to perform two different movements in unison. The trick is to get each movement going independently then synchronizing them into one rhythmic motion. Learning to operationalize culturally responsive teaching is much like rubbing your head and patting your stomach at the same time. The practices are only effective when done together. In unison they create a synergistic effect. The Ready for Rigor framework lays out four separate practice areas that are interdependent. When the tools and strategies of each area are blended together, they create the social, emotional and cognitive conditions that allow students to more actively engage and take ownership of their learning process.

The framework is divided into four core areas. The individual components are connected through the principles of brain-based learning:

Practice Area I: Awareness

Successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—especially students from historically marginalized groups—involves more than just applying specialized teaching techniques. It means placing instruction within the larger sociopolitical context. In this first practice area, we explore the development of our sociopolitical lens. Every culturally responsive teacher develops a sociopolitical consciousness, an understanding that we live in a racialized society that gives unearned privilege to some while others experience unearned disadvantage because of race, gender, class, or language. They are aware of the role that schools play in both perpetuating and challenging those inequities. They are also aware of the impact of their own cultural lens on interpreting and evaluating students' individual or collective behavior that might lead to low expectations or undervaluing the knowledge and skills they bring to school. Mastering this practice area helps teachers

- Locate and acknowledge their own sociopolitical position
- Sharpen and tune their cultural lens
- Learn to manage their own social-emotional response to student diversity

Practice Area II: Learning Partnerships

The second practice area focuses on building trust with students across differences so that the teacher is able to create a social-emotional partnership for deeper learning. Culturally responsive teachers take advantage of the fact that our brains are wired for connection. As they move through the work in this area, teachers build capacity to

- Establish an authentic connection with students that builds mutual trust and respect
- Leverage the trust bond to help students rise to higher expectations
- Give feedback in emotionally intelligent ways so students are able to take it in and act on it
- Hold students to high standards while offering them new intellectual challenges

Practice Area III: Information Processing

The third practice area focuses on knowing how to strengthen and expand students' intellectual capacity so that they can engage in deeper, more complex learning. The culturally responsive teacher is the conduit that helps students process what they are learning. They mediate student learning based on what they know about how the brain learns and students' cultural models. This practice area outlines the process, strategies, tactics, and tools for engaging students in high-leverage social and instructional activities that over time build higher order thinking skills. Moving through this area, teachers learn how to

- Understand how culture impacts the brain's information processing
- Orchestrate learning so it builds student's brain power in culturally congruent ways
- Use brain-based information processing strategies common to oral cultures

Practice Area IV: Community Building

In the fourth practice area, we focus on creating an environment that feels socially and intellectually safe for dependent learners to stretch themselves and take risks. Too often, we think of the physical set up of our classroom as being culturally "neutral" when in reality it is often an extension of the teacher's worldview or the dominant culture. The culturally responsive teacher tries to create an environment that communicates

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care, support, and belonging in ways that students recognize. As they move through this practice area, teachers understand how to

- Integrate universal cultural elements and themes into the classroom
- Use cultural practices and orientations to create a socially and intellectually safe space
- Set up rituals and routines that reinforce self-directed learning and academic identity

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The achievement gap has denied underserved students of color and English learners opportunities to develop the cognitive skills and processes that help them become independent learners.
- Culturally responsive teaching is a powerful tool to help dependent learners develop the cognitive skills for higher order thinking.
- Culturally responsive teaching uses the brain principles from neuroscience to mediate learning effectively.
- The Ready for Rigor framework helps us operationalize culturally responsive teaching.

INVITATION TO INQUIRY

- How is your school addressing the needs of low-performing students of color?
- How do you support struggling students to become independent learners?
- How have you and your colleagues operationalized the principles of culturally responsive teaching?

GOING DEEPER

To deepen your knowledge, here are some books, reports, and articles I would recommend:

- *All Students Reaching the Top: Strategies for Closing Academic Achievement Gaps* by the National Study Group for the Affirmative Development of Academic Ability.
- *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* by Linda Darling-Hammond.