



# **Developing Teacher Cultural Consciousness**

*A Framework for  
Inclusive Pedagogy*

**Maggie Norris**

# **Developing Teacher Cultural Consciousness**

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Developing Teacher Cultural Consciousness: A Framework for Inclusive Pedagogy

BY

**MAGGIE NORRIS**

*University of North Texas, USA*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

Copyright © 2025 Maggie Norris.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83608-949-0 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83608-948-3 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83608-950-6 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To all my former students,*

*You are the reason this work exists. Your stories, resilience,  
and brilliance have forever inspired me to strive for a better,  
more just world in education.*

*To my children, Sarah and Nathan,*

*You remind me daily of the boundless potential that lies within every  
learner and the power of love, understanding, and belief in others.*

*And to my parents,*

*For instilling within me the values of empathy and compassion, and  
for teaching me to see and stand with those who live amidst injustice.  
Your lessons are the foundation of this journey.*

*This book is for all of you.*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents

List of Figures and Tables	<i>xi</i>
About the Author	<i>xiii</i>
<b>Introduction</b>	<i>1</i>
Confronting Inequities: Reimagining Education for Equity and Inclusion	<i>1</i>
Author's Positionality	<i>4</i>
The Role of CRT in Education	<i>9</i>
Why Examining the Impact of the Dominant Culture on Education Matters	<i>12</i>
Ethnic Matching	<i>14</i>
An Introduction to the Remainder of the Book	<i>15</i>
<b>Chapter 1 The Need for Intentional Change</b>	<i>19</i>
Lack of Access and Academic Opportunity	<i>22</i>
The Importance of STEM Education in Secondary Schools	<i>22</i>
Opportunities to Prepare for College	<i>27</i>
Our Campus Work to Create More Equitable Access and Academic Opportunity	<i>29</i>
Disproportional Academic Growth and Achievement	<i>30</i>
Discrepancies in Literacy Skill Development	<i>31</i>
Discrepancies in Standardized Testing Performance	<i>32</i>
Discrepancies in High School Graduation Rates and College Enrollment and Completion Rates	<i>34</i>
Discrepancies in Gifted and Talented and Special Education Identification	<i>34</i>
Our Campus Work to Address Disproportional Academic Growth and Achievement	<i>35</i>
Social and Relational Marginalization of Students	<i>36</i>
Disproportionate Disciplinary Actions	<i>36</i>
School Segregation in Its Modern Form	<i>38</i>

Opposition to Integration	38
<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> and Latino/a Students	40
Our Campus Work to Create and Inclusive School Culture and Learning Environment	42
<b>Chapter 2 The Relationship Between Cultural Consciousness and an Equitable Learning</b>	53
The Beginning of My Journey	54
Developing Cultural Consciousness: A Framework	55
The Role of Culture in Learning	57
Levels of Culture	59
A Monocultural Approach to Teaching and Learning	61
Multicultural Education	63
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	66
Benefits of CRP for Black and Latino/a Students	68
The Role of CRP in Curriculum and Instruction	68
The Relationship Between CRP and Cultural Consciousness	70
Questionnaire to Assess Teachers' Level of Cultural Consciousness	74
Section 1: Self-Awareness of Cultural Biases and Beliefs	74
Section 2: Understanding Students' Cultural Contexts	75
Section 3: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	75
Section 4: Professional Development and Collaboration	76
Scoring	76
<b>Chapter 3 Work Within the Self</b>	81
Elements of Self-Reflection	82
Developing Self-Awareness Through Introspection	84
Understanding Personal Cultural Identity	84
Exploring Your Cultural Frame of Reference	85
Examining the Relationship Between Identity and Beliefs About Students	88
Identifying and Addressing Bias	89
Recognition of Implicit Bias	90
Work within the Self in Action	91
A Journey Through Discomfort: Confronting Bias in Education	91
Breaking the Cycle of Inherited Bias	91
Navigating the Challenges of the Work within	92
Breaking Through Defensive Walls	93
The "I Don't See Color" Defense	94
Guidance for Self-Reflection	95
Personal Cultural Inventory	95
Journaling on Biases and Assumptions	95
Critical Incident Analysis	96

Peer Reflection and Feedback	96
Examine Curriculum Through a Cultural Lens	96
Engaging in Personal Study on Cultural Responsiveness	96
Cultural Competency Training	97
Reflective Questioning at the End of Each Day	97
Student Feedback on Inclusivity	97
<b>Chapter 4 Challenging Deficit Ideologies</b>	<b>101</b>
Deficit-Based Discourse	104
The Achievement Gap	104
Changing the Narrative	105
Teacher Expectations	107
Challenging Deficit-Ideologies in Action:	
A Growth-Minded Classroom Discussion	109
Curriculum and Instruction	109
Reductionism	110
Academic Tracking	111
Special Education	113
Linguistic Diversity	114
Challenging Deficit-Ideologies in Action: Utilizing	
Asset-Based Linguistic Practices	116
The Notion of a Culture of Poverty	117
School Discipline and Consequences	118
Restorative Discipline in Action: Addressing Vandalism	120
Incident	120
The Restorative Justice Circle	120
Follow-Up	121
Guidance for Challenging Deficit Ideologies	121
Adopt Asset-Based Approaches	121
Engage in Critical Self-Reflection	122
Implement CRP	122
Participate in Equity-Focused Professional Development	122
Advocate for Systemic Change	122
Critically Examine Curriculum, Content, and Instruction	122
<b>Chapter 5 The Impact of Deficit Ideologies on</b>	
<b>Student Identity and Self-Concept</b>	<b>127</b>
Student's Sense of Self	130
Helping Students Develop Positive Self-Esteem	
and Self-Efficacy	131
The Sabotaging Impact of Stereotype Threat	132
Microaggressions	136
The Impact of the SPP on Black and Latino/a Students	137
Elijah Today	140
Guidance for Challenging Stereotype Threat	140

Combating Stereotype Threat	140
Addressing Microaggressions	141
Addressing the SPP	141
Building Positive Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy	141
Further Reading Recommendations	142
<b>Chapter 6 Challenging Systemic and Institutional Inequities</b>	<b>147</b>
Academic Tracking	149
Culturally Responsive Practices	151
Meritocracy	157
Access to Information	161
Restorative Discipline	162
How Teachers Can Use Restorative Practices to Support Black and Latino/a Students	163
The Impact of the PLC on Inequitable Curriculum, Content, and Instruction	166
Defining PLCs and Their Impact on Educational Equity	166
Addressing Disparities in Access to Instructional Opportunities	167
Promoting Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices	168
Creating a Culture of Collective Responsibility and Accountability	169
Christopher Today	169
<b>Chapter 7 A Call to Action</b>	<b>173</b>
It is All About Mindset	174
Advocating for Educational Equity Beyond the Classroom	176
Building Awareness and Educating Stakeholders	176
Leveraging Professional Organizations and Unions	177
Engaging in Policy Advocacy	177
Promoting Equity in School and District Policies	177
Building Coalitions	177
Utilizing Social Media and Public Platforms	178
Staying Informed and Continuing Education	178
Students as Partners	178
Persisting Through Challenges	179
A Final Word	179

# List of Figures and Tables

## Figures

Fig. 1.	Repercussions of Educational Inequities.	21
Fig. 2.	Percentage Distribution of Public High Schools Offering Mathematics, Science, and Computer Science Courses, by Course and Black and Latino/a Enrollment in the 2020–2021 School Year.	24
Fig. 3.	Percentage of Algebra 1 Students Enrolled in Public Schools, by Grade in the 2020–2021 School Year.	25
Fig. 4.	Students Who Passed Grade 8 Algebra 1 in Public Middle Schools in the 2020–2021 School Year.	27
Fig. 5.	Student Enrollment in Dual Enrollment or Dual Credit Programs in Public High Schools by Race/Ethnicity During the 2020–2021 School Year.	28
Fig. 6.	Student Enrollment in AP Mathematics, AP Science, and AP Computer Science Courses in Public High Schools by Race/Ethnicity During the 2020–2021 School Year.	29
Fig. 7.	Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Scale Scores of 12th-Grade Students, by Race/Ethnicity.	31
Fig. 8.	Mean Differences in ACT Scores During the 2016–2017 School Year: White vs Black and Latino/a Students.	33
Fig. 9.	Cultural Consciousness Framework.	55
Fig. 10.	Ladson-Billings’ Competencies of Culturally Conscious Pedagogy.	73
Fig. 11.	Elements of Self-Reflection.	83
Fig. 12.	Students with Disabilities Served Under IDEA in the 2020–2021 School Year.	113
Fig. 13.	The Connection Between Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy.	130

## Tables

Table 1.	Percentage of Students Enrolled in Public High School Mathematics, Science, and Computer Science Courses, by Race/Ethnicity and Course in the 2020–2021 School Year.	24
Table 2.	Profile and Vision of a Staff Ally.	44

*xii List of Figures and Tables*

Table A3.	AP Exam Scores of 3+ from 2022 Exam Administration, by Ethnicity and Race.	49
Table A4.	College Board SAT Suite of Assessments: 2023 Score and Benchmark Data, by Ethnicity and Race.	51
Table 5.	Characteristics of Multicultural Education and Culturally Responsive Education.	65
Table 6.	Deficit-Based vs Asset-Based Language in Education.	106
Table 7.	Examples of Commonly Encountered Microaggressions.	136

## About the Author

**Dr Maggie Norris** serves as the Associate Principal at Byron Nelson High School in Trophy Club, Texas, an Adjunct Professor at the University of North Texas, and an OnRamps Ambassador for the University of Texas. She holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, a Master of Arts in Educational Administration, a Master of Arts in Reading Education, and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature. Her diverse roles and extensive academic background reflect a deep commitment to educational leadership, literacy, and innovative teaching practices, with a strong focus on promoting educational equity and fostering inclusive learning environments for all students.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Introduction

## Abstract

The current education system faces profound challenges, but the failure to provide equitable, meaningful learning opportunities to all students is perhaps the most pressing. Chronic underfunding in public schools limits access to quality resources, experienced teachers, and extracurricular activities, significantly impacting students' potential. Meanwhile, an alarming trend among some policymakers undermines public trust in education, with a policy focus on standardized testing over critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills. This misalignment between educational policy and students' needs contributes to systemic inequities, disproportionately affecting students of color. The cultural tensions surrounding critical race theory (CRT) further complicate this landscape, as public discourse often misrepresents CRT's purpose. Contrary to misconceptions, CRT does not assign blame to individuals based on race but instead explores how current systemic structures impact equity. This introduction aims to demystify CRT, advocate for inclusive practices, introduce the reader to the positionality of the author, and promote productive conversations about race and inequality in education in preparation for educators to engage in the work to develop and foster cultural consciousness. By fostering understanding and collaboration among educators and communities, we can create classrooms where all students feel valued, empowered, and capable of reaching their full potential, challenging systemic inequities within and beyond educational institutions.

*Keywords:* Cultural consciousness; critical race theory; monocultural approach; cultural responsiveness; inclusivity; educational inequities

## Confronting Inequities: Reimagining Education for Equity and Inclusion

So much about our current education system is broken, but our failure to provide all students with rich learning opportunities that demonstrate the genuine belief

---

**Developing Teacher Cultural Consciousness: A Framework for Inclusive Pedagogy, 1–18**

Copyright © 2025 by Maggie Norris

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited

doi:[10.1108/978-1-83608-948-320251002](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83608-948-320251002)

## 2 *Developing Teacher Cultural Consciousness*

that all students are capable of learning and growing is by far the most critical of all the issues we face as educators. I realize this is a bold assertion, and my intention is not to diminish the stark reality that public schools across the country are grappling with a multitude of challenges, many of which stem from a systemic lack of effective policies that genuinely support both students and educators, forcing teachers and administrators to operate in a perpetual state of crisis.

For example, many public schools are forced to manage the impact of chronic underfunding of public education, which, at the surface level, creates inequities in access to materials and technologies, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of access to extracurricular activities, all of which diminish the quality of education that our students receive. More critically, though, a lack of funding impacts the quality of the learning opportunities we provide our students to ensure they thrive and meet their true academic potential, and the ability to invest in highly qualified, passionate teachers, which has subsequently played a large role in the current teacher shortage – the largest we have ever experienced in the United States. With many talented educators leaving the profession due to burnout, low pay, and a lack of support, schools are often left to fill positions with less experienced or unqualified individuals, further compromising the quality of education offered to students.

Moreover, there is a concerning trend among some lawmakers and government leaders who are actively seeking to dismantle public education as we know it. Legislative efforts frequently prioritize policies that reflect a critical disconnect with what we know about how students learn and what skills they need to succeed in an increasingly complex world. For example, standardized testing often takes precedence over more meaningful assessments of student learning, leading to a narrow focus on rote memorization rather than critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This misalignment between policy and pedagogy not only hampers our students' growth but also perpetuates inequities in the educational system.

The irresponsible rhetoric used by some legislators that falsely proclaims the ineffectiveness of public schools contributes significantly to the erosion of public trust in education. When leaders publicly disparage the work being done in classrooms, they undermine the dedication and passion of educators who strive every day to foster a positive and engaging learning environment for their students. This negative discourse has damaged relationships between schools and families, causing parents to question and doubt the capabilities of teachers and the effectiveness of the education their children are receiving, ultimately creating a cycle of mistrust and disengagement that ultimately harms students.

The most urgent of these issues, however, are the systemic inequities that actively discriminate against our Black and Latino/a students, and it is imperative that we confront these systemic issues with a sense of urgency and purpose. As educators, we must advocate for policies that prioritize equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their background or life circumstances. We need to champion funding models that ensure resources are allocated fairly and effectively, supporting all schools in their efforts to provide rich, meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, we must engage in open dialogue with our communities, addressing concerns and building partnerships that reinforce

trust and collaboration. By demonstrating a commitment to the belief that all students are capable of learning and growing, we can work together to create an educational landscape that empowers every child to reach their full potential. Ultimately, the success of our education system hinges on our collective resolve to advocate for necessary changes and to foster an environment where all students feel valued, supported, and inspired to learn. However, I believe that there are also steps we can take outside of advocating for systemic change – change we can affect inside the walls of our classrooms and schools that can make a critical and lasting impact on the educational experiences of our Black and Latino/a students.

The urgency of addressing these issues was magnified after the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, which brought conversations about racial injustice to the forefront across multiple sectors. Schools, as foundational spaces for developing future generations, became focal points for these discussions. However, this focus has also provoked resistance, sparking what some have called a cultural war around the teaching of systemic racism and the role of CRT in education. Critics have pushed a false narrative, positioning CRT as an ideology that unfairly blames all White people for societal inequalities, while simultaneously victimizing people of color. In reality, CRT is an analytical framework that examines how laws, policies, and systems can reinforce inequality, not a doctrine of blame. As [Duncan \(2005\)](#) so eloquently explains,

CRT privileges the voices of those who bear the brunt of inequalities in society and relies heavily on storytelling, as opposed to analytic means, as the methodology to represent them [...] I regard the stories of people of color as necessary to disrupt allochronic discourses [i.e. those that deny that the observed and the observed exist simultaneously]. In particular, they provide potent counterpoints to challenge the existing narratives that help us shape how we understand the post-Civil Rights schooling experiences and outcomes of students of color. (p. 74)

Critics of CRT argue that by focusing on racial inequities, the framework may overshadow or even disregard struggles and challenges White individuals have and continue to experience. However, just as CRT is not designed to assign blame to White people for societal inequities, it is not intended to invalidate or diminish the personal struggles of any individual, regardless of race. Instead, CRT seeks to explore and critically examine the ways in which race intersects with systemic structures, policies, and historical contexts that contribute to inequities. This framework aims to highlight patterns of disadvantage and advantage that have been shaped over time, providing a lens to understand how these dynamics impact different racial groups. By doing so, CRT aspires to foster a more nuanced understanding of societal structures and to encourage meaningful conversations about equity, justice, and inclusivity for all.

As educators, we have a responsibility to navigate this cultural divide and advocate for truth and equity in education. This work and even the acknowledgement of advantages afforded to some racial groups over others are not intended to strip

#### 4 *Developing Teacher Cultural Consciousness*

such advantages from any recipient, but rather to examine how we can afford the same advantages to students who have been consistently underserved and undervalued in our education system. By addressing inequities through practices informed by critical perspectives, we can help create more inclusive, empowering classrooms where all students can succeed. This book aims to demystify the concepts and strategies that will enable educators to engage with issues of race and inequality productively, bypassing divisive rhetoric in favor of tangible change. With a focus on equity, this journey invites teachers to harness their influence in the classroom, turning it into a force for justice and opportunity that extends beyond the confines of policy debates and into the lived experiences of every student.

This book also seeks to support teachers as they develop and foster their cultural consciousness with the intent to better serve and support Black and Latino/a students. Through this growth, teachers can become more authentically culturally responsive, enhancing both academic engagement and meaningful connections with Black and Latino/a students. The purpose of this introduction is to establish a foundation of the lens used to write this book: CRT and the examination of the impact of the dominant culture on education in the United States. Both of these concepts are viewed as controversial by some; however, my goal is to use the following discussion to clarify misconceptions about CRT and foster open, constructive conversations about how the dominant culture influences our institutions and public policies. The goal of this approach is to encourage a neutral or even positive understanding of these important issues. Before we dive into this important discussion, I'd like to first discuss my own social position and how it has influenced both my perspective on the issue of educational inequities and my own work to develop and foster cultural consciousness.

#### **Author's Positionality**

I feel that it's critical at this point to disclose facets of my positionality that bear great weight on this work, namely that I am a White woman, which both frames and limits my perspective on issues of academic inequities. In advocating for equitable educational opportunities for Black and Latino/a students, I recognize that my own Whiteness means I have not and will never fully experience the systemic racism and discrimination, in any capacity, that affects marginalized communities. Rather, my understanding is shaped not by personal experience with racial oppression but by observation, research, and empathy. As I examine these issues, I do so as an ally, deeply invested in using my position to address inequities, even though I cannot personally know the lived experiences of my Black and Latino/a colleagues and students.

My own K-12 educational journey was relatively unchallenging – not because of any systemic barriers, but rather because of my own disinterest and disengagement. As a high school student, I did not always embrace the value and importance of education, and outside of my home, I did not consistently receive a great deal of encouragement to become an active participant in my learning journey. There was no emphasis on preparing students for meaningful, rigorous futures beyond high school – no parent or student meetings to discuss college readiness, and certainly no opportunities to develop practical skills for those pursuing career pathways

other than college. Many of my teachers simply delivered the instruction, and it was solely up to me to make the choice to engage with the learning or not, and truthfully, I just did not see the importance of the work at the time. Nevertheless, I was automatically given the benefit of the doubt, even when I failed to work at my level of potential, and always assumed to be “a bright student.” This unearned assumption of my potential reflected my privilege. Although my teachers and counselors seemed indifferent to me, not once did I experience unfair treatment, nor was I ever perceived as “incapable” or “at risk” because of my race. This privilege was largely invisible to me at the time, and it has taken years of professional experience, personal growth, and reflection to understand how deeply inequities are ingrained in our educational structures and how those structures unfairly impact our Black and Latino/a students. As an educator, I have personally witnessed how my Black and Latino/a students have to work against a system that often fails to reflect, respect, or even recognize their cultures, languages, or unique experiences, and although I directly benefited from this very system, I cannot in good consciousness move forward without addressing the issues I now see so clearly.

Growing up, my parents instilled in me a lens of empathy and inclusivity, teaching me to advocate for those who are marginalized. A defining memory that shaped my awareness of inequity occurred one Christmas Eve when I was eight years old. My mother and I had just finished last-minute grocery shopping when we saw a Black man in the parking lot stopped by police, handcuffed, and arrested for attempting to steal bread and milk. He appealed to the officers, explaining that he had recently lost his job and was simply trying to feed his family. I remember his desperation, his pleas for understanding, yet, neither the officers nor the store manager considered his circumstances; his voice, his apologies, and his efforts to explain himself were ignored. My mother attempted to intervene, offering to pay for the items and even implored the store manager to drop the charges. When both offers were denied, my mother explained to me on the way home that while theft wasn't right, the real injustice lay in the conditions that made the man see theft as his only option. From my young perspective, I struggled to understand why anyone would be denied something so basic and essential as bread and milk, and then punished for trying to provide for his family – especially at Christmas.

Other incidents that profoundly shaped my perspective occurred during my high school years, moments that were both painful to witness and eye-opening. My high school was incredibly diverse, with White students making up a small minority of the overall student population. Despite this, White culture remained the dominant force within the school. Most of the high-performing students, as well as those holding leadership roles in student council and other student organizations, were White, and among many of these students was a prevailing belief that Black and Latino/a students were dangerous, incapable of academic success, and people to be avoided.

There were several explicit incidents that highlighted the racial tensions within our school. During a school assembly, a White student made a derogatory comment about a Black classmate's appearance. The remark caused visible discomfort among students, and eventually led to several fights on campus, yet no one, including the staff, stepped in to address the comment or the student who made the

comment. In another instance, graffiti with racist slurs targeting Latino/a students appeared on a bathroom stall, inciting fear and anger among those it targeted.

One of the most personal incidents I witnessed involved a Latino/a friend who was casually speaking Spanish to another student. A White classmate interrupted, telling her to “speak English.” The comment was dismissive, laced with hostility, and left my friend visibly frustrated but unsure of how to respond. On another occasion, a White student asked one of my Black male friends, “Do you even know who your father is?” This deeply offensive and cruel question, rooted in harmful stereotypes, visibly upset my friend, who then demonstrated his anger through violence, and as a result, was suspended from school for a week.

Incidents like these, though not constant, exposed the deeper divisions within our school community. They created an environment where many Black and Latino/a students felt disconnected and undervalued. Prejudice and discrimination from peers reinforced the sense that they didn’t truly belong. What troubled me most was how these incidents were often dismissed or minimized, treated as isolated occurrences rather than as part of a larger, systemic problem. This indifference left me deeply unsettled and forced me to confront the uncomfortable reality of the racial prejudice embedded in our school culture, a culture that, through silence and inaction, allowed such behaviors to persist.

During those years, I also began to notice academic inequities, though I didn’t fully grasp their significance until much later. It was evident even then, though, that there was a clear divide between the academic opportunities and support available to me, and other students who looked like me, and those available to most of my Black and Latino/a friends, many of whom were systematically placed in lower-level or remedial courses. As I mentioned earlier, my school did not place a strong emphasis on providing access to information about preparing for post-secondary opportunities. This lack of guidance was even more pronounced for my Black and Latino/a friends, who were often left without crucial support on essential college preparatory steps, such as registering for the preliminary SAT (PSAT) or SAT. I also recall how the idea of advanced placement courses seemed reserved for only a select few, mostly White students, and how school administrators and counselors acted as gatekeepers, doling out information and opportunities as if they were limited resources, and only to those they deemed worthy. At the time, I knew without questions that I could get away with being inconsistent in the efforts I put into school, but some of my Black and Latino/a friends were written off all together, with several of them not making it across the stage at graduation. I would like to say that this was simply a product of poor school leadership or educational policy, but memories of how certain teachers treated Black and Latino/a students, often in a manner that could only be described as demoralizing, tells a different story.

Even then, it was evident that many of our teachers did not value our Black and Latino/a students, particularly those who didn’t fit the conventional mold of what a “good student” should be, a mold that many teachers used to determine academic and cognitive ability. Both their words and actions sent a stark message: They did not truly subscribe to the belief that all students, regardless of background, were capable of learning and growing. I have kept in touch with some of my friends who had to endure their doubt and low expectations; it had a real and lasting impact.

It wasn't just a matter of missing out on opportunities, it was about internalizing the belief that we weren't worthy of being pushed, supported, or believed in.

As I grew older, these experiences became a lens through which I began to understand broader societal injustices. They prompted me to seek a deeper understanding of the systemic inequalities that shape our communities. Through honest, often painful conversations with my Black and Latino/a friends, I learned more about the realities they faced in school – stories of racism and discrimination that ranged from everyday microaggressions to outright acts of prejudice. These personal accounts revealed the profound and lasting impact of societal bias on their lives, showing me just how deeply racism affected not only their academic experiences but also their sense of belonging and self-worth.

The more I listened, the more I began to recognize the pervasive nature of these inequalities, and how they were woven not just into the very fabric of our society, but in the very fabric of our educational system. At the same time, I started reading texts and engaging with authors who had a much clearer, more critical understanding of race and racism. Writers and scholars like Cornel West, Alex Haley, Richard Wright, Harper Lee, and bell hooks helped me connect the dots between the personal stories of my friends and the larger, structural forces at play. Their work allowed me to grasp the complexities of race in a way that I had previously overlooked, helping me see not just the individual acts of discrimination, but the systemic and historical context in which they occurred. It was through these conversations and readings that I began to understand the full scope of racial inequities, and how deeply ingrained they are in every aspect of our society, from education to employment to the criminal justice system. This journey was not merely academic; it was deeply personal and transformative. I found myself reflecting on my own upbringing and lived experiences, confronting the biases that had been ingrained within me, despite my parents' efforts to help me see the world through a diverse and inclusive lens. For example, during a period of time, I mistakenly believed that adopting a "colorblind" perspective was the pinnacle of racial understanding. I thought that by not seeing race, I was promoting equality and treating everyone the same. However, I came to recognize that this ideology, while well-intentioned, ultimately erases the very real challenges, barriers, and biases that individuals face based on their racial and ethnic identities.

Through this process of reflection, I began to understand the privileges that come with my Whiteness, or being a part of the dominant culture in this country, privileges that often shield me from the systemic inequities faced by Black and Latino/a communities. I realized that my experiences were not universal and that my lack of exposure to racial discrimination allowed me to navigate the world in ways that many others could not. Coming to terms with this reality has been both enlightening and challenging. I strive to ensure that my efforts in educational advocacy are grounded in genuine understanding and empathy rather than a misguided "White savior" mentality, which can inadvertently perpetuate the very systems of oppression I seek to dismantle.

Instead, I approach my advocacy with a commitment to creating a fair, just, and inclusive system for all students. This means actively listening to and amplifying the voices of those who have been historically marginalized, engaging in continuous

learning about racial dynamics, and working collaboratively to challenge inequitable practices within education. I recognize that true allyship requires not just acknowledging privilege but using it as a platform for change, advocating for policies and practices that promote equity, and fostering environments where all students can thrive. This ongoing journey toward understanding and advocacy is not merely a personal mission; it is a collective responsibility to ensure that every student, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to succeed and be heard.

My years as an educator have profoundly shaped my understanding of the impact of the dominant culture within schools. As a high school English teacher, I observed how Black and Latino/a students often struggled to find themselves reflected in a curriculum that was overwhelmingly White, middle-class, and distant from their lived experiences. Literary texts and writing prompts often assumed cultural knowledge and experiences that reflected the majority culture, failing to connect with the personal contexts of many students. Beyond curriculum, I watched as my Black and Latino/a students sought a sense of belonging within a predominantly White school led by predominantly White teachers. This lack of representation, understanding, and culturally relevant pedagogy created barriers to engagement and success that were unfairly attributed to the students themselves rather than to the system that excluded them.

Now, as an administrator, I view these inequities on an even broader scale. Walking into advanced math or science classes, I primarily see White students, while in on-level or remedial courses, the student body is much more diverse. I notice this division and see how students in these different settings experience school in dramatically different ways. In these on-level classes, I often see students who seem to be “going through the motions,” lacking purpose and engagement. I hear remarks from educators, at times unintentionally but nonetheless damaging, that reveal a belief that certain students – often Black and Latino/a – are “less capable” or “not suited” for academic challenge. This deficit view reflects a systemic failure and serves as a barrier to the very students our schools should uplift.

I believe strongly that every school should work to foster an inclusive learning environment that values the cultural capital and life experiences each student brings. It is our responsibility as leaders to help teachers make meaningful connections between curriculum and students’ cultural contexts. These beliefs shape my work, influencing how I understand and respond to the inequities I see. My hope is that the insights and recommendations in this text contribute to the development of educational practices that honor, respect, and engage all students, and guide readers through the work of developing cultural consciousness that ultimately will help build a more equitable learning environment for every student we serve. My hope is that this book will help to equip teachers to effectively engage with students whose experiences and backgrounds differ from their own.

Before we explore the role of CRT in education, I want to emphasize a few important points:

- As a White woman who made an intentional choice to build cultural awareness, I have engaged deeply with the reflections and practices I discuss in this book. This work can be challenging at times; confronting hidden biases and