

CENTERING THE PEDAGOGY OF CARE, EQUITY AND ACCEPTANCE IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES

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WHY ARE WE IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES?

Due to the pervasive rhetoric of hate, a climate of fear and uncertainty reigns within:

- African American communities
- Hispanic (and African) undocumented immigrant communities
- Muslim immigrant communities
- LGBT communities

Due to the pervasive rhetoric of hate, minority children of color, especially those who fall under the categories above do not feel safe in the classroom.

ELECTION OF THE FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT ≠ POST RACIAL AMERICA

My colleague, Dr. Shirley Sommers observes, “We have accepted that we live in a post-racial America, that we are free of racial biases, that we are good people. However, the statistics below belie that we are in a post-racial America and that we do not have cultural biases. Good people can hold cultural biases and commit racist acts!” **I concur with those who believe that Racism is not dead!**

MINORITY-BIAS PERSISTS IN THE US EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Reason # 1: A new report from The Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. States Department of Education reveals:

- **Black preschool** children are **3.6 times** as likely to be suspended as are White preschool students.
- In kindergarten through the 12th grade, Black students are nearly **four times** as likely to be suspended as are White students. Black students also are nearly **twice** as likely to be expelled as are White students.
- Only **1/3** of high schools with high Black and Latino enrollments offer calculus, compared to **56 percent** of those with low numbers of Black and Latino students.
- **Less than 1/2** the high schools with high Black and Latino enrollments offer physics, while **two in three** high schools with low numbers of Black and Latino students offer physics.
- **10% of the teachers in schools** with high numbers of Black and Latino students are in their first year of teaching, compared to only **5 %** in schools with low numbers of Black and Latino students.

Reason #2: A Recent Study of Minority Students' Perceptions of Minority versus White teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016) reveals:

Minority students' perceptions of minority versus white teachers indicate that minority (blacks, Latinos and Asians) students preferred to be taught by teachers who resemble them, citing that Black (and Latino) teachers

- **Hold students to high academic standards and support their efforts**
- **Explain clearly ideas and concepts and provide useful feedback (code switching?)**
- **Help them organize content, among other things.**

These attributes echo the characteristics of the “**warm demander**” teacher (Kleinfield 1975) who, in the words of author Lisa Delpit, "expects a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment."

#3: The K-16 Curriculum Rarely Acknowledges Non-Western (i.e., Africans and Muslims) Contributions to World Knowledge and/or Peace.

Africans		Muslims	
Wole Soyinka (Nigeria, 1986)	Lit	Naguib Mahfouz (Egypt, 1988)	Lit
Nadine Gordimer (Whw, SA, '91)	Lit	Orhan Pamuk (Turkey, 2006)	Lit
Claude Simon (Madagascar, '85)	Lit	Ahmed Zewahil: (Egypt, 1999)	Chem
Albert Camus (Wh Algeria, 1957)	Lit	Aziz Sancar: (Turkey, 2015)	Chem
Aron Klug (Wh South Africa '82)	Ch	Mohammad A. Salam, (Pak, '79)	Phys
Wangari Mathai (Kenya, 2004)	Pce	Muhammad Yunus (Bangl, 2005)	Peace
Leyman Gbowee (W. Liberia '11)	Pce	Tawaki Karman (Yemen, 2011)	Peace
Max Theiler (Wh, SA 1951)	Med	Yasser Arafat (Palestine, 2004)	Peace
Nelson Mandela (SA, '93)		Malala Yusafzai (Pakistan, 2011)	

PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Beware of a Biased Educational System which, knowingly or unknowingly,

- Denies students who practice minority religions a private space to live their spirituality
- Denies students whose sexuality does not fall within the heterosexual norm the right to bathroom privacy
- Reduces the intellectual abilities of non-white foreign-born students to language ineptness
- Is oblivious to the curriculum that foreign-born children have pursued prior to immigrating and the strengths they may have in other academic subjects than English (Math, Physics, science, chemistry)
- Negates cultural practices of students living in immigrant households whose values may differ from those conveyed through the school curriculum

We Need to Confront Our Inner-Selves and Our own Biases . . .

- Honesty requires that we admit that as good people, we may also harbor racial biases; acknowledgement of this duality of mankind will allow us to disrupt the link between internalized prejudice and institutional discrimination.
- We also need to be mindful of our actions. Before suspending a child of color, we need to take a breath, think, and ask ourselves: is the infraction commensurate with the punishment? What if this kid were White (Derman-Sparks)? Is the punishment going to benefit or harm the student? What alternative to suspension should be considered?
- Those of us in teacher education, who work with schools that have high Black and Latino enrollments, do we see the need to advocate for courses such as calculus and physics to be part of the general curriculum? What kind of support are we giving novice teachers to prevent them from wanting to quit? How are we helping immigrant students to thrive?

All of these are critical questions that we need to constantly ask ourselves because “we are good people who also harbor racial biases” while trying to prevent institutional discrimination against students of color.

FINAL WORD

When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in to a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard. (A. Rich, *Invisibility in Academe*)