CHAPTER 1

STARTING WITH OURSELVES

We Teach Who We Are

The task of resisting our own oppression does not relieve us of the responsibility of acknowledging our complicity in the oppression of others. Our ongoing examination of who we are in our full humanity, embracing all of our identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free us all.

—Beverly Daniel Tatum

[Identity is] an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic make-up, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others

> *and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human.*
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> —Parker J. Palmer

As teachers, we wield tremendous power in our classrooms. Our interactions with students, day after day, pieced together over time, can build community in small and significant ways—or undermine it. Our decisions about curriculum, and whose experiences are represented in the literature we teach and how, send messages to our students about the human experiences that we need to pay attention to—and which we can ignore. Our instructional choices signal to our students whether we value compliance or engagement. Our assessments can guide students to better learning or reduce them to numbers on a test.

Conversations about how we wield this power happen every day. In planning meetings, department rooms, in the brief exchanges we have in the hallways with colleagues—every day, teachers discuss the best ways to reach our students, to make learning truly engaging for all the kids in the room.

Yet underneath all these conversations about what we're teaching and why, there's something deeper that often goes overlooked and unsaid.

It's us.

Teaching is an intensely human activity. The best teachers are those who know that teaching—and students—cannot be standardized. Giving two teachers the same curriculum and asking them to follow it "with fidelity" is an impossible task. Not only are the teachers different individuals, but they're also charged with the care of dozens of individual children. Although I read Palmer's (1997) *The Courage to Teach* as a pre-service teacher many years ago, his words hold true: "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." *We teach who we are*. This is what can make our practice so powerful—even transformative—but also potentially dangerous.

We bring all our identities—and the experiences that informed them—into our teaching. So, we must interrogate the ways in which these experiences have shaped our practices and our relationships with kids. As Dr. Talusan (2022) writes in *The Identity Conscious Educator,*

"The work of an educator—teaching, reading, advising, coaching, and collaborating—is not identity neutral. In fact, identity informs and impacts how you act, how you interact with others, and how you see the world around you" (p. 13). We have our *professional* experiences, such as our formal schooling, professional development, and our time in the classroom, our years of kid-watching and theory-making. We draw upon all these when we make decisions.

But I would argue that it's often our *personal and social* identities and experiences that have the most profound effects on our teaching and that which most often—and most dangerously—go unexamined.

In her essay, "Dangerous Discussions: Voice and Power in My Classroom," educator Wolfe-Rocca (2018) shared what happened in her classroom when she led her class through a discussion about racist graffiti in the boys' bathroom at school. She did not want to avoid the issue, but in her eagerness to discuss the incident with the class, the discussion took a turn for the worse when (predominantly White) students in the class downplayed the racism faced by African American students in the school, including one student in her class. Wolfe-Rocca writes,

> I should have known better. In my desire to make sure this terrifying incident wasn't swept under the rug—as has been the case with too many instances of racism at my school—I am mortified to admit that I dove headlong into this discussion without the care and planning it required. Doubtless, this reckless urgency was a manifestation of my whiteness and it did real harm to Cory and others.

As Wolfe-Rocca reflects, it was the privilege afforded to her as a White woman that caused her to engage in this discussion without first considering how students of color—and here, an African American student—would react to having to navigate a conversation about racism in a room full of White students.

Stop to think about an experience you've had in the classroom that might be similar to the one described here. In what ways do you think your own identities might have affected your interactions with students?

Just as students bring their whole selves into our classrooms, so do we. If we don't take the time to do the hard work of understanding our personal identities with regards to gender, race, social class, ability, and other life experiences, then we fail to truly understand the dynamics at work in our classrooms. Because that's when bias—borne from our identities and experiences—can do real and lasting harm to our students.

UNDERSTANDING HOW BIAS WORKS

Although the word *bias* often carries negative connotations, the truth is that biases are natural, even necessary, and they are neither inherently good nor bad. From a cognitive perspective, biases are simply mental shortcuts that our brain uses to process information. After all, consider how much information we are bombarded with at any given moment. For example, as I sit here and write this sentence, my fingers feel each pat-pat-pat of the keyboard. Through my window, I can hear cars driving down the street, punctuated by birds chirping in the distance. An old episode of *The Good Place* is playing on the TV in the background, and I can hear my twelve-year-old practicing piano downstairs. My foot is starting to fall asleep, and I feel a faint ache in my neck from staring at my laptop. If I gave equal attention to all these stimuli, I wouldn't be able to focus.

But the amazing human brain can process multiple pieces of information at once by prioritizing some information and sending other information to the background. Then my brain regulates all the things I'm doing automatically, like breathing and maintaining my balance so I can sit upright to type. I don't have to think about doing these things, just like I no longer have to think about which route to take when I drive to work each morning. This allows me to focus my attention on whatever podcast or audiobook I'm listening to. And that's how bias works in our brains.

Biases are the automated processes in our brains that inform our decision-making. Instead of having to give equal attention to every single possible choice when making a decision (which would be exhausting), biases help our brains prioritize what factors we should use to make that decision. The problem is that these biases have been shaped by our experiences, and our experiences have been socialized by racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, and so on. That's why slowing down and taking a step back to understand how biases impact our behavior. In other words, instead of taking the same route to work because it's what I've always done, I might make a conscious decision to try a different route. Again, biases are neither inherently good nor bad; we can be biased *for* or *against* anything, just as there are many ways of getting from point A to point B. I can have a bias *for* the underdog in a story, just as I can have a bias *against* romance novels. Instead of abdicating my decisions to these biases, however, I can stop to think more carefully about which decisions are better aligned to my values as someone who seeks to create a more just world.

COMMON TEACHER BIASES

Educating ourselves—asking hard, uncomfortable questions that we might not like the answers to—can be the first step towards

self-awareness and uncovering the biases that affect, and *infect*, our teaching.

Before we continue, I want to pause here and just talk a little bit about how biases impact our thinking processes. As teachers, we know that when we think—especially when we process new information—we construct our understanding based on previous knowledge. That's one reason we might use anticipation guides which ask students to reflect on their experiences. In calling up relevant personal experiences, students might be better able to relate to the literature they are reading. We absorb new information and try to make it "fit" with what we already know—and into our existing schema—even as we build new understanding.

The problem, of course, is that **our existing schema is often limited.** As I wrote earlier, because I was well-versed in a literary diet primarily made up of the Western canon, when I encountered texts that did not fit the schema I had constructed of what "literary" meant, I could more easily dismiss such texts. On the other hand, I think of all the books by Asian and Asian American authors I'd read over the years and shared with White colleagues, whose response to those texts was far less positive than my own as a reader. Was it because these texts lacked literary merit or was it because White readers lacked the schema to read and appreciate these texts?

I will never forget a session I attended at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 2017 where the importance of limited schema was made clear. Jessica Lifshitz, a fifth-grade teacher and Heinemann Fellow, shared an experience she had when she and her wife were on their honeymoon. At breakfast one morning, another female guest stopped to introduce herself and her husband and mistook Jessica and her wife as mother and son rather than a married couple. Why? Here's Lifshitz's explanation:

> I believe that when she saw us, she knew, somehow we were family. Maybe it was the way we stood or the way we spoke or the way we looked at each other. But the kind of family that we were, didn't match any of the schemas she carried with her about family. We didn't look like any of the images of family that she had ever been exposed to and had stored in her mind. So she tried, without realizing it, to match us to the closest schema that she could find. And the closest thing that she could come up with was mother and son.
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> Perhaps, this woman, who probably meant no ill intent, had such a narrow understanding of family and we just did not fit into it. So in a desperate attempt to match us to what she already knew, she ended up erasing who we really were. And

she tried to shove us into her existing schema so that she felt comfortable, so that she experienced what Piaget referred to as equilibrium.

Consider your own existing schema and the ways in which your experiences, like all of ours, have been limited. What impact might this have on your work with students?

All human beings have biases. I am not immune, and neither are experts. In her book *Biased: The Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do*, MacArthur Grant recipient and Stanford University professor Dr. Eberhardt (2019) points out, "We all have ideas about race, even the most open-minded among us. Those ideas have the power to bias our perception, our attention, our memory, and our actions—all despite our conscious awareness or or deliberate intentions." Likewise, Daniel Kahneman, a renowned cognitive scientist in this field, writes about his own biases in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. As teachers, we need to be mindful of the ways in which these affect our own thinking if we are to have any hope of helping our students read and write beyond their own biases.

In the next few pages, I've chosen five cognitive biases and will unpack how these might show up every day in our teaching practices. In my experience, these five biases are those that have the potential to do the greatest harm if unexamined—and on the flip side, addressing these biases can have the greatest benefit for our students, particularly as our practices relate to inclusion and equity. As you read about each of these biases, pause to think about how these biases have manifested themselves in your own practices. Reflect on why and how you might take steps to make instructional decisions more informed of these biases.

Although our focus is on our own individual biases in this chapter, the truth is that any serious efforts to dismantle systemic oppression must actually address the *system* in systemic. No doubt that we must do the hard work of interrogating our own individual biases, but this will not be enough if we fail to recognize the larger system in which those biases are formed. At the end of this chapter, I share some self-reflection exercises that ask you to think about individual identities in the context of a larger systemic framework, as well as how systemic biases play a role in reading and writing curricula, instruction, and schools.

Bias 1: Curse of Knowledge

When I first started teaching, I was assigned five world literature classes, all ninth grade. At the time, the course was focused on reading

literature from different parts of the non-Western world with the purpose of learning about other cultures through their literature. Of the texts in the curriculum, I had read only one title. Everything else in the curriculum was new to me.

Despite not knowing very much, not having much prior knowledge of the material, I had a terrific first year. I still remember many of my students from that year, and although the experience has receded in my memory as a kind of haze, it's a golden-tinted haze, warm and bright. What *is* crystal clear to me, however, is just how smart my students seemed to be. Every day, I walked away from class impressed with all the rich insights students brought to the texts we read. Maybe I was lucky and just had a really great group of kids, or maybe I actually did know more than I thought I did. Either way, I still feel grateful for having had such a positive first-year teaching experience—and for the grace and patience I'm sure my students gifted me on many occasions.

Over the years, however, things changed. I noticed that my students didn't seem to have the same insight into the literature. At the same time, I was becoming a better teacher—or at least a more experienced one—having practiced teaching the same novels over and over again. But my students seemed to know less and less.

Did my students really know less? Maybe—but probably not. This is where the curse of knowledge bias comes in. The **curse of knowledge** is "the tendency to be biased by one's own current knowledge state when trying to appreciate a more naive perspective, [even when] that more naive perspective is one's own earlier perspective" (Birch & Bloom, 2006, p. 382). In other words, as teachers gain more knowledge, as we increase our own expertise over material, we have a harder time seeing the material from the points of view of our students. Our expertise starts to feel like common knowledge that everyone should have and we forget that the information was once new to us, too. Instead, we might feel discouraged as teachers, we might give in to "my students don't know anything!" thinking and blame students for not knowing what we, as teachers, have spent years learning.

The **curse of knowledge** bias occurs when we understand something so well that it becomes hard for us to understand how others can't. This then makes it difficult for us to explain or teach others. Consider a text you've taught for years: Are there any particular texts that individual students struggle with? Or a text particular groups of students struggle with? Why? In what ways has your expertise on this text actually been a barrier to your ability to teach it?

Also, let's remember that knowledge is subjective. While we build expertise in texts—I'm sure there are many American literature teachers

who can probably recite lines from *The Great Gatsby* in their sleep—this knowledge is reinforced by our years teaching. As our knowledge about a certain text becomes more fixed, our goals for student learning may become more prescribed as we decide that students must learn X, Y, or Z when reading a certain text. We design activities and assessments around *our* knowledge, so the cost of time and effort to change our approach to teaching these texts becomes greater if we have to create new materials (this is known as the sunk cost fallacy bias, see page 34). Yet, when students encounter a text for the first time, the full range of possibility, of literary interpretation, is open to them. Instead of honoring this, we find ourselves continually corralling them toward the same ideas and the same perspectives.

▶ Something to try out: Read a text "cold" with your students. Choose a text you've never read before and read, respond, and analyze it side by side with your students. Several years ago, a colleague in another state and I did a brief "mentor text exchange." We mailed each other copies of poems that neither one of us had read before and read them with our students. While I don't recommend not pre-reading material as a regular practice, every once in a while, and with a text suggested by a colleague, it can be a useful way to appreciate the reading process as an experience of shared discovery and meaning-making with the learners in our classroom.

As teachers, being mindful of the curse of knowledge is critical to equitable practices. Because we think of ourselves as the "experts" in the room, we might overvalue our expertise. Instead, however, we should think beyond the binaries of teachers and students, beyond expert and novice. As early childhood educator Aeriale Johnson reminds us:

> [W]hen we put ourselves in the position of learner in a dynamic where we ultimate possess power, we surrender that power to our students in order to learn from them. In the midst of this yielding, we may begin to see brilliance in children we may have previously been unaware of as we allow them to inform what we teach, how we teach it, and in what ways they will demonstrate their understanding (Johnson, 2018, pp. 19–20).

Bias 2: Nostalgia

If you have ever heard your family, your friends, or our colleagues wax poetic about "the good old days," or if you've found yourself longing for the past, you might be experiencing the **nostalgia bias**, also known as "rosy retrospection." According to Dr. Burton (2014), nostalgia is "sentimentality for the past, typically for a particular period or place with positive associations, but sometimes also for the past in general."

Feeling sentimental about the past is normal, and some psychologists argue that nostalgia can be a useful way to allow human beings to

cope with our past traumas, allowing negative feelings to wash away in retrospect rather than become consumed by them. But how might nostalgia negatively impact our teaching?

Similar to the effects of the curse of knowledge, nostalgia can lead us to make incomplete and inaccurate assessments of the past. Who hasn't complained themselves or heard fellow teachers complain that when they first started teaching, students were different, better? When we're feeling nostalgic, we might engage in distorted and idealized versions of the past, and "[i]f overindulged, nostalgia can give rise to a utopia that never existed and can never exist" (Burton, 2014). As educator Gonzales (2016) puts it, "[W]hen we settle for a 'kids today' diagnosis, romanticizing the past and blaming our teaching problems on the collective inferiority of a generation, we only make things worse." Giving in to nostalgia makes our work counterproductive. When we spend too much time comparing our students to the past, we fail to appreciate the students sitting in our classrooms now, who may bring some challenges but who also have tremendous promise and potential. How many times have we been guilty of thinking, *Well, when I was in school, we never did X, Y, or Z*? Maybe not. Or maybe you did back then and don't remember. But what does it matter to the kids sitting in front of you right *now?*

While it's tempting to romanticize the past, consider the ways in which the **nostalgia bias** might prevent us from fully appreciating the strengths that our students today bring to the classroom.

Nostalgia also reinforces a deficit-model of evaluating our students; instead of focusing on what they can do, we spend time and waste energy focusing on what we perceive students lack. Indeed, our own "rosy retrospection" can get in the way of seeing what's in front of our eyes. Furthermore, the potentially harmful effects of nostalgia can be intensified when comparing the present to a past that is significantly different from our personal experience. Consider what might happen if a teacher has students who are demographically different from those they taught earlier in their career or even in their own schooling. **If nostalgia tempts us to idealize the past, what might that mean for us as educators as our student population becomes increasingly diverse?**

In "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice," scholar Django Paris warns of the historic and present danger of such deficit thinking:

> Deficit approaches to teaching and learning, firmly in place prior to and during the 1960s and 1970s, viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimized dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling.

Furthermore, Paris notes:

> The dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices demanded by school fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society (Paris, 2012, p. 93).

Indeed, our own "rosy retrospection" can get in the way of seeing what's in front of our eyes.

We cannot ignore that our tendency toward nostalgia may also have particularly harmful implications for students of color and other marginalized groups. We can see the nostalgia bias clearly when thinking about text selection. No doubt that the stories that we're exposed to during childhood can leave an indelible mark on our hearts and minds. From fairy tales to picture books, these stories tend to stick with us.

However, what happens when our favorite childhood stories turn out to be more complicated than what we remember? For example, racism in beloved childhood favorites like the Dr. Seuss books and Curious George series have been researched and well-documented (Campbell, 2019; G. Smith, 2019). For many educators, novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Little House on the Prairie* still elicit feelings of nostalgia for their childhoods. A public example of this happened in 2022 when author Kate DiCamillo pointed out her affection for the novel *Island of the Blue Dolphins,* which her teacher read to her class as a child, even though scholar Reese (2018b, 2022) a tribally enrolled member of Nambé Pueblo, has pointed out the clear inaccuracies and harmful portrayals of the Aleut people in the novel. Many teachers and authors still defend using these texts because of their own nostalgia.

Bias 3: Anchoring

Even though I've taught for many years, the beginning of the school year is still one of my favorite times of year. True, I might be a bit sad for the end of the summer, but there are few other times that are filled with such anticipation and promise. Any negative energy from the previous year has receded with the warm summer air and sunshine as the clean slate of each September beckons.

And yet can we really say the same for all our students? Does a brand new school year offer each student the same clean slate we wish for ourselves as teachers?

In my first few years of teaching, one of the first things I would do when I got my class lists was show them to other teachers. As a relatively

inexperienced teacher, I admit I wanted to know if I was going to have any students who might be "problems." Sometimes the information I sought was about potential behavior—these problems were the ones that I had least confidence in handling. Other times, the information was about what "level" a student had been recommended for by the previous teacher. I would then make a mental note to myself to keep a closer eye on students who were not recommended for the honors level I taught (in my district, students may override any teacher recommendation with parent permission). In my mind, I was doing my due diligence as a teacher.

Notice the language I used here as a younger teacher: framing students as "problems" to be "handled." How much more effective could I have been as a teacher if I framed situations with new students differently? What if I instead asked myself, *How can I best reach this student or meet their needs? What skill do I need to work on so I can best teach this student*?

Then one day at a district committee meeting, I had a conversation with an eighth grade teacher that challenged me to think differently. It was at least a few weeks, if not months, into the school year, so I already had some sense of the students by then. Still, extra information could be helpful. I showed them my ninth grade class roster as it was likely they had taught many of the students the year before. As their eyes scanned through the names, they commented on the students they knew. To be fair, the vast majority of their comments were positive, but every now and then, the teacher let out their surprise at seeing the name of a student they did not recommend for the honors course. Sometimes it was because the student lacked motivation ("he never turned in his homework") or lacked skills ("she had a hard time writing a thesis statement").

But as I listened to their comments, it was my turn to show surprise. Of the names the teacher pointed out, I had honestly not seen the issues that they shared. In fact, in some cases, it felt like they were describing a completely different student than the one who was sitting in my classroom.

Why does this matter?

In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman (2013) describes experiments he conducted with his colleague, Amos Tversky, and found that people were often disproportionately and unknowingly influenced by a single piece of information (often the first piece of information) given to them in solving a problem, even if that information was unrelated to the problem itself (p. 119). For example, participants were asked Einstein's age when he died. In one scenario, participants were asked

if Einstein was older or younger than 142 years old when he died. In another scenario, they were asked if Einstein was older or younger than thirty-five years old when he died. In the two scenarios, participants were "anchored" to a high number (142) and to a lower number (35). Participants who were anchored to the higher number made guesses that were substantially higher than those who were anchored to the lower number. Thus, this **anchoring bias** occurs when we rely too heavily on one piece of information when processing information or making decisions—and often, unknowingly. (This is also why we tend to be swayed by "sale" prices when we are shown and "anchored" to higher, suggested retail prices.)

How many times, I wonder, have I allowed one piece of information to inform my judgments of students? If a colleague tells me that a student was recommended for the lower level English class, consider how this information might affect my expectations about that student's ability, even before meeting them? How might the data that follows a student from teacher to teacher—whether that data is comprised of test scores or anecdotes—affect our first impressions of a student?

We know first impressions matter, but when we **anchor** our expectations of students based on these first impressions, we may inadvertently limit our understanding of what students can and can't do. Reflect on a student you've had where your first impressions might have been wrong: how did you come to recognize this, and what did you do?

Of course, some information about students is necessary to know ahead of time, especially information related to a student's IEP and all information that is needed to keep a student physically and emotionally safe. But if we're not careful, we may inadvertently be swayed by nonessential (and biased) information that simply isn't fair to use in judging students. We might allow one positive or negative incident with a student to affect how we treat them in class or assess their work.

Bias 4: In-group Bias

I have a confession. It's hard not to have favorite types of students. I've always had a special place in my heart for students who are engaged, on the quiet side, thoughtful writers, and avid readers. These are students who are like me—or at the very least, students who are *most similar to* the type of student *I* was in school.

Psychologists have long documented the **in-group bias** we show for those who are similar to us. This preference for those we see as in our own group likely had some evolutionary purpose by making us more wary of those who might be unfamiliar and pose a threat. And of course, showing a favorable bias toward one's own family would no

doubt help a group to care for one another and survive. But in a classroom, what are the potential dangers of such a bias?

Reflect on the students you have had over the years. Are there some students who stand out more favorably to you than others? In what ways were these students similar to you, either to the person you are now or as the student you were in school? How might this **in-group bias** have affected your relationships with students who were different from you?

When I look back on my own teaching career as well as my current practices, I know I have been guilty of having more positive feelings toward students who mirrored what I saw as ideal classroom behavior—on-task, obedient, polite, willing to engage, responsible, and nonthreatening—and I'm sure I'm not the only teacher, either.

As I look at this list, however, I can't help noticing that the list is ultimately about compliance more than anything else. And because I was a student who was always more than willing to comply, reinforced by my own cultural upbringing in which deference to adults was valued—*and because I credited that compliance with my own success*—I rewarded similar behaviors explicitly and implicitly in my classroom. As education researcher and writer Shalaby (2017) argues in *Troublemakers*, teachers often label students unwilling to comply as "troublemakers," with results that can be harmful, if not traumatic, for young people:

> In one study, researchers found that as many as 46 percent of kindergarten teachers report that more than half their class has trouble following directions; 34 percent report that children struggle to work independently; 20 percent report that kindergartners have poor social skills and are "immature." These figures lead us to question whether the demands of early schooling are reasonable; after all, it seems we should expect immaturity from a five-year-old.
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> Instead, we turn a gaze of pathology on children. At the age of five, if you cannot follow directions and work independently, you are likely to be given a long series of interactions with the school's various mechanisms for identifying, labeling, and remediating deficits. Suddenly and swiftly, children become problems.

▶ How many "troublemakers" are simply students who are least like us?

Although Shalaby's research focuses on early childhood education, let's be clear: The middle school and high school students sitting in our

secondary classrooms are equally affected. In fact, we should remember that every student sitting in our classrooms brings with them a lifetime of experiences with previous teachers, positive and negative. I don't think I have ever explicitly disregarded other students or showed bias *against* them, but because intent is not the same as impact, I must ask myself—how might I have favored students who are similar to me *at the expense of other students*? On his Hidden Brain podcast, psychologist Shankar Vedantam synthesized research on in-group bias, noting the findings scientists Nancy DiTomaso, Mahzarin Banaji, and Anthony Greenwald discovered:

> Discrimination today is less about treating people from other groups badly, DiTomaso writes, and more about giving preferential treatment to people who are part of our "in-groups."
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> The insidious thing about favoritism is that it doesn't feel icky in any way, Banaji says. We feel like a great friend when we give a buddy a foot in the door to a job interview at our workplace. We feel like good parents when we arrange a class trip for our daughter's class to our place of work. We feel like generous people when we give our neighbors extra tickets to a sports game or a show.
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> In each case, however, Banaji, Greenwald and DiTomaso might argue, we strengthen existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage because our friends, neighbors and children's classmates are overwhelmingly likely to share our own racial, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. When we help someone from one of these in-groups, we don't stop to ask: Whom are we not helping? (Vedantam, 2013)

This bears repeating: When we help someone from one of our in-groups, *we don't stop to ask: Whom are we not helping?* According to research published in *Education Week*, the current teaching force in the United States is 80 percent White and non-Hispanic. Meanwhile, students of color make-up 54.8 percent of K-12 students in our schools. Additionally, 77 percent of teachers in the United States are women, while our student population is much more gender diverse (Riser-Kositsky, 2023). The potential for in-group bias based on racial and gender difference alone, especially where equity programs or inclusive practices aren't prioritized, is worrisome. After all, research has shown negative outcomes for Black students, especially when taught by White teachers.

For example, in an extensive longitudinal study of more than eight thousand tenth grade public school students, researchers found that

White teachers had consistently lower expectations for Black school children, particularly Black boys. Among the findings:

- White and other non-Black teachers were twelve percentage points more likely than Black teachers to predict Black students wouldn't finish high school.
- Non-Black teachers were 5 percent more likely to predict their Black male students wouldn't graduate high school than their Black female students.
- White male teachers are 10 to 20 percent more likely to have low expectations for Black female students.
- For Black students, particularly Black boys, having a non-Black teacher in a tenth grade subject made them much less likely to pursue that subject by enrolling in similar classes (Rosen, 2016).

Additional research has also shown that Black students are disciplined at disproportionately higher rates than White students. For example, according to the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014), Black boys are nearly four times more likely to be suspended than White boys (p. 1). According to another study, "Black students as young as age five are routinely suspended and expelled from schools for minor infractions like talking back to teachers or writing on their desks" despite the fact that Black students did not actually "act out" any more than their White peers (Rudd, 2014, p. 1). Consider how this over-disciplining of Black students not only leads to lost learning time in the classroom, but also has a devastating social and emotional cost for students and their relationships with their teachers and peers, a cost that is also shared by students' families. In a painful and necessary blog post, educator Parker (2018) shared the challenges she faced as a Black mother when her son's school system failed to meet his needs. She writes:

> What happened to my sun happens to Black boys in preschool every single day.
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> There is such stigma and shame I experienced as I was so quick to think I was the problem. Instead, we are in a system that, if we do not intervene, will continue to push Black boys out of preschool, denying them experiences, teachers, schools, that have the potential to ground them in powerful educational beginnings. (Parker, 2018)

While most teachers believe themselves to be well-meaning and work hard to reach all students, research studies continue to confirm that implicit biases have a very real and devastating impact on our students. To pretend otherwise is to be complicit in these continued inequities.

Bias 5: Just World Hypothesis

Part of the reason I became a teacher was because of the way my parents raised me. They instilled in me and my brother a deep respect for education. My parents' own education—they both hold degrees from a top university in the Philippines—no doubt played a role in their ability to emigrate to the United States in the 1970s. Together they scrimped and saved, spending nothing more than what was necessary and only buying things if they were on sale (and if my mom had a coupon). My parents moved from one modest home to another, from one school district to a better one. From their experiences, my parents knew that working hard would pay off.

This, of course, is the American Dream—America is the land of opportunity, a place where anyone who is willing to work hard can make it. Although my parents weren't exactly the "tired, hungry, and poor" described in Emma Lazarus's poem, they did arrive in America each with one suitcase in hand. In an alternate universe where I become a politician, this would be the story I would tell—the narrative that you'd hear as a montage of faded childhood pictures plays to an Aaron-Sorkin-inspired soundtrack.

So what does my family story have to do with bias?

As first-generation immigrants who came to the United States for more opportunities, my parents knew that you couldn't take anything for granted, that it was through consistent effort that we could be successful. They believed in my abilities but reminded me that I had an obligation to use them wisely and well. If you work hard, they insisted, you can do anything.

Like many Americans, I grew up believing in the just world hypothesis.

The **just world hypothesis** describes people's tendency to believe that life is inherently fair—that individuals get what they deserve. In the US, it's easy to see how this bias might be particularly strong with the country's "pick yourself by your bootstraps" mentality. While this bias might *feel* like the truth, the problem is that the bias not only downplays the role that luck or chance might play, *but it also ignores the powerful, negative effects of systemic, historic, and contemporary discrimination*. In simple terms, if you're not successful, it's your fault. Because if you worked hard, you'd be successful *because we live in a just world*.

Take, for example, the experiments that Michael Lerner conducted in the 1960s when he discovered this bias.

> In one, he showed people what appeared to be live footage of a woman receiving painful electric shocks for making errors in

> a memory test. (She was actually his accomplice.) Some groups of viewers had the option of ending her ordeal; others didn't. The latter – forced to watch suffering with no chance of relieving it – formed far lower opinions of the woman, seemingly to "bring about a more appropriate fit between her fate and her character". Those opinions were worst when they were told the woman got no financial reward for her pains. The greater the injustice, the more people appeared to need to believe the victim brought it on herself (Burkeman, 2015).

In Lerner's experiment, note that when participants were forced to watch the woman suffer, even when she was helpless and could not reasonably be held responsible for her suffering, the participants resorted to blaming the victim, that somehow she *must* be at fault. As journalist Nicholas Hune-Brown notes:

> When presented with an obvious injustice, we try to resolve it: we end the cruel experiment, cure the patient, free the innocent man from jail. When we are helpless to change things, however, rather than give up our belief in the essential rightness of the universe, we begin to rationalize away the unfairness. The sight of a woman suffering without any hope of compensation was simply incompatible with a just world; in order to reconcile those two facts, observers irrationally decided she must have done something to justify her punishment (Hune-Brown, 2015).

It's not hard to see how the just world hypothesis might play out in education—and also actively *perpetuated* through our actions as educators.

Consider how many times we reinforce this bias in our classrooms: We might tell students to behave well so that they can get extra recess. We might withhold recess from another student who misbehaves. We often tell students that if they study and work hard that they will do well on the test, get a good grade in class, get into a good college, find a good job, and make a good living. Is this not the driving ethos of schooling in the United States?

And yet we know that *injustice exists*. Teaching and learning cannot be reduced to a matter of karma—that what goes around comes around. While it may be true that a student who prepares for a test may get a higher grade, what about the student who might be dealing with issues at home and cannot concentrate enough to study? Or what about the student who has carried a label of "troublemaker" from one teacher to the next and not received the support and skills to even know how to study? Or what about the student who studies and *does* know the material but does not perform well on tests? We end up reinforcing a

kind of victim-blaming with our students, rationalizing that because *we've* done our job as teachers that it must be the *student's* fault if they're not doing well.

Because of the **just world hypothesis**, we tend to assume that justice exists, that "what goes around comes around." Reflect on your own experiences growing up, both in and out of school. In what ways was this message conveyed to you? And what are the potential drawbacks in thinking this way?

Or we might believe in *earned individual success* when the real story is much more complicated. Take my family story, for example. Yes, my parents worked hard and earned much of their success. But they also had several advantages that many immigrants—and especially refugees—do not. They hold *engineering* degrees which were particularly valued at a time when the US began to prioritize the sciences. The Immigration and Nationality Act, passed in 1965, opened up the borders to countries that had been banned for decades. Had my parents been born just ten years earlier and tried to immigrate then, they simply couldn't. My parents were also multilingual, and in addition to their native Filipino dialects, they were fluent in English because English was taught in the Philippine schools. Furthermore, while my mom came with just one suitcase, waiting for her were family members who had emigrated years before and supported her with a place to live as she got started.

So while I may have worked hard and found some success, my success is not mine alone. None of our successes or failures are. I think about refugees today, and throughout history, forced from their home, in search of a better life, and about the obstacles they face that I, with my privilege, cannot even fathom. Where is the "just world" for them?

With so many countless factors affecting a student's learning—and too often *beyond a single student's individual control*—can we really say that all students get what they "deserve"?

What makes disabusing ourselves of the just world hypothesis so difficult is that it also forces us to confront the concept of privilege. The advantages my parents had, the ones they've passed on to me—these are the source of my privilege. In *So You Want to Talk About Race*, author Oluo (2018) unpacks the concept of privilege, which works hand-in-hand with the just world hypothesis:

> [W]e do not want to believe that we do not deserve everything we have, and we do not want to think of ourselves as ignorant of how the world works. The concept of privilege

> violates everything we've been told about the American Dream of hard work paying off and good things happening to good people. We want to know that if we "a" we can expect "b," and that those who never get "b" have never done "a." The concept of privilege makes the world seem less safe. We want to protect our vision of a world that is fair and kind and predictable. That reaction is natural, but it doesn't make the harmful effects of unexamined privilege less real. (p. 63)

In what ways have our own privileges contributed to our belief in the just world hypothesis? As teachers, how do we perpetuate this bias in the ways we talk about the world with our students? How many times does a belief in a just world permeate our analysis of characters and conflict when we read literature?

Related to the just world hypothesis is a logical fallacy known as the **fundamental attribution error**. This fallacy causes us to *attribute* a person's mistake to something *fundamental* about that person's abilities or character *rather than examine the context in which that mistake was made*. For example, if a student turns in a hastily and poorly written essay, the fundamental attribution error might lead a teacher to believe that the student isn't a good writer. However, there could be many reasons why a student turned in a poorly written essay. They might have had three other tests that day, or misunderstood the assignment, or had extenuating circumstances at home, or might be disengaged from the teacher's class—and none of these reasons may have anything to do with the student's actual ability. Just as the just world hypothesis assumes that individuals get what they deserve, the fundamental attribution error assumes that individuals' mistakes are due to their individual abilities versus their circumstances.

TOWARD AN ANTIBIAS STANCE

We've reviewed a few biases, but having knowledge is only the first step. Research has shown that aside from awareness of our implicit biases, we must also be concerned about the effects that these biases have (Devine et al., 2012). And of course, because we are teachers, this concern is a given. No one goes into teaching with the intent to do harm to our students, and if we come to the realization that we might be unintentionally harming our students, the words of Dr. Maya Angelou can guide us: "Do the best you can until you can do better. Then when you know better, do better" (Winfrey, 2011).

Below you'll find some opportunities for self-reflection, which can serve as important steps in acting to reduce the impact that these and other biases might have on our teaching practices. Later in the book, we'll use an antibias approach to our reading and writing practices. But

in the meantime, take the time now to invest in the self-reflection below that is necessary for us as teachers before we turn our lens on students.

Self-Reflection 1: Bias Checkup

Human beings are complicated and full of contradictions—and the human brain processes information in sophisticated ways. Our human intellect has allowed us to put men in space and find cures for once deadly diseases.

Yet we are all susceptible to flaws in our thinking that can have profound effects on the students in our classrooms. While it may be uncomfortable, we need to move from a stance of humility: we must recognize our discomfort, name, and own it. Understanding our biases can help us do that. And in doing so we will be better able to resist them and help our students.

Invitation to Reflect

Take a moment to consider the five biases discussed here and summarized in Figure 1.1, and reflect on the following:

- Which of the biases most resonates with your own experiences when you were a student in school? Why?
- Which of the biases most resonates with your teaching experiences? In what ways?
- Now that you're aware of these biases, what small and concrete steps might you take tomorrow, next week, and over the next several months to help you reduce the negative impact of these biases on your practices and your students?

FIGURE 1.1 SUMMARY OF COMMON TEACHER BIASES

BIAS	WHAT IT IS	HOW IT MIGHT AFFECT CLASSROOM PRACTICES	WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT
Curse of Knowledge	• Occurs when our expertise prevents us from being able to appreciate a more naive or beginning learner perspective	• Unrealistic expectations about what students should know at the beginning of a lesson • Lack of scaffolding or appropriate background instruction	• Change the texts you teach with students so that you cannot compare what your current students bring to the text to prior students' insights. • Position yourself as a learner when reading new texts together.

BIAS	WHAT IT IS	HOW IT MIGHT AFFECT CLASSROOM PRACTICES	WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT
Nostalgia	• Occurs when we romanticize the past • Belief that the past was inherently better than the present	• Incomplete and inaccurate assessments of prior students' knowledge or ability when compared to today • Failure to appreciate current students' abilities and talents • Deficit-based approach to teaching rather than asset-based	• Keep a sample of student work from year to year that represents the full range of ability of students as a measurable, objective record of the past.
Anchoring	• Occurs when we allow initial information to disproportionately affect our judgment	• Judgment of students that too heavily relies on our first impressions • Fixed belief about students' abilities based on initial performance or interactions	• Limit the amount of information you have about students from previous teachers to what is absolutely essential only. • Create learning experiences early in the year that allow students to showcase their strengths (versus assessments that spotlight their weaknesses).
In-Group Bias	• Occurs when we show a preference for those who are similar to us	• Favoritism toward or benefit of the doubt afforded to students who may be similar to us (intentional or not)	• Create and maintain a list of each student's strengths and revisit and update throughout the year. • Reflect on your own weaknesses as a person and identify students who exhibit that weakness as a strength. For example, if you are not artistic, identify and honor students who have this as a strength.
Just World Hypothesis	• Occurs when we believe that world is inherently just and fair; a belief in "what goes around comes around"	• Holding students responsible for factors that are beyond their control	• Reconsider your own personal experiences by taking into account the advantages that you have had. • Reflect on experiences in your own life that you felt were not fair or where the outcome did not seem justified by the circumstances. • Learn more about your students' background to create a more complete picture of their own advantages and disadvantages.

In addition to the five biases discussed in detail in these pages, here are a few more that are worth thinking about and how they might affect our work:

- *Sunk Cost Fallacy*. You might experience the **sunk cost fallacy** when you're watching a terrible movie but refuse to stop watching because you've already invested so much time that you might as well finish. Likewise, even though we know a lesson or unit isn't going well, we might continue anyway because we've already spent too much time on it. Or consider when we invest a lot of our time and energy into creating lessons over the years: it can be hard to let go of those lessons, regardless of how effective or ineffective the lessons have become.
- *Ikea Effect*. According to the **Ikea effect**, we tend to value those things that we build and create ourselves. This, in part, explains the success of companies like Ikea (and the entire Do-It-Yourself industry, for that matter). How might this bias affect the way that we judge (or misjudge) the lesson plans and instructional materials that we design and build ourselves?
- *Confirmation Bias*. Entire books could be written the way that this single bias operates in schools. In short, **confirmation bias** occurs when we only seek evidence that confirms a preexisting opinion or belief we have rather than seek the best evidence, regardless of whether or not it supports that preexisting opinion or belief. In Chapters 5 and 6, we'll spend more time on this bias as it relates to supporting students in reading and analyzing texts. Here, however, consider how confirmation bias may impact the way you look at student data, what student data you collect in the first place, the texts you choose, the way you interpret those texts and then teach their themes to students.

UNPACKING OUR EXPERIENCES

As we've seen, examining our biases can go far in illuminating those places where our practices fall short. But becoming a self-reflective, critical thinker—and a teacher who can model this disposition for our students—goes beyond a checklist of biases. Instead, we must build **a habit of persistent wondering**, digging beneath the surface of our own knee-jerk or gut reactions to discover what in our experiences has shaped our responses to others and the world.

Our experiences and identities exist in a state of mutual reinforcement. The experiences we have shape how we see ourselves, how we identify with and to others and the world. In turn, the identities we present to others also shape our experiences and how the world and others treat us, fairly or unfairly. In unpacking our own identities and experiences, we can see more clearly the ways that they affect our teaching.

Self-Reflection 2: Lessons From School

In the spring of 2018, my colleagues Lorena Germán, Julia Torres, Dr. Kim Parker, and I launched the Twitter chat, #DisruptTexts. Our goal was to inspire conversation about disrupting the traditionally White, male, and Eurocentric canon of literature by approaching these texts through the lens of critical pedagogy and critical race theory, and by suggesting alternative titles as counternarratives or even replacements. Since then, we've been humbled by the tremendous success of the #DisruptTexts movement, with many teachers responding favorably to shifting the conversation about the canon into more diverse territory.

Of course, there's also been pushback.

Often those who defend the canon base their pushback on quality and tradition. The argument goes like this: There are certain literary works considered essential for cultural capital (although we should ask: whose culture?). To be considered "educated," students must read these books. Thus, to *not* teach these books is doing a disservice to our students.

But here's the thing: Most teachers, especially secondary English teachers, were educated in a *system*—a "canon" of texts that included some voices but excluded many more others. I was raised in this "canon" of literature, and I won't pretend that I didn't take pride in mastering these texts. To call into question the validity of the "canon" means that we have to acknowledge our complicity in this exclusion. We defend our own perceived expertise. And when that expertise is challenged, it feels personal.

I speak from my own experience. As an Asian American, Filipina American woman who has always felt the pressure to "fit in" and "prove" myself in many spaces, I saw my expertise in the "canon" as evidence of my intellect—and perhaps as a way to be accepted and respected in a White dominated field. Knowledge about a specific set of texts was a way to have academic power, but I never stopped to question who made up these rules about power in the first place. (Perhaps this was another reason why I also loved canonical texts such as *Jane Eyre* so much.)

Ironically, when my students and I read Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we discussed how schools were often used as one of the most effective tools of colonizer nations. Control what people think, I reminded them, and you can control what they do—and what they can't. What I didn't recognize was my own complicity in such a system. After all, one could argue that the Western Canon is as much a tool of colonization as it is a representation of the greatest thinkers and writers of the Western world. To what extent do our curricular choices today perpetuate this

colonial legacy? To be clear, is it wrong to read the work of White, Western authors? Of course not. Is it wrong if those are the *only* books our students read? Yes.

Invitation to Reflect

In the words of anti-apartheid leader Steve Biko, "the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." Consider your own school experiences:

- What messages about being a "good student" did you receive in school, implicitly and explicitly? Who gave you these messages and how?
- What books and authors did you study in school? What patterns regarding race, gender, culture, ethnicity, and so forth do you notice among these books and authors?
- How was your learning assessed when you were a student? What did these assessments teach you about what "counts" as learning and as knowledge?
- What did your own teachers emphasize when reading books? What types of meaning-making and reader-response were valued? Which were not valued?

Self-Reflection 3: Privilege Checklist

Another example of the way my identities have affected my teaching is through my privilege.

I grew up and live in an affluent, predominantly White, somewhat progressive suburb. I live and work in two of the most "high performing" districts in the state as indicated by many local and national school rankings (for whatever those are worth). At first glance, my community seems like a great place to live: lots of public parks, low rates of violent crime, access to multiple grocery stores and shops. But one reason for this is because of the racial segregation—carefully and explicitly orchestrated through our legal system—that has shaped many metropolitan areas.

I have to acknowledge that. I can say I live where I live because I want what's best for my kids, because my parents live close by and family is important. This is all true—but it is *also* true that I'm complicit in an ongoing system of structural racism. This structural racism has limited the diversity of people around me and my ability to empathize with others. Like my #DisruptTexts colleague and author Lorena Germán, most of my teachers were White women. As Germán makes clear, "Is it bad to have a white woman teacher? No. Is it bad to have all white women teachers over x many years? Yes." Like Germán, I experienced significant and "tangible cultural gaps" in school that informed my

education (V. Brown & Keels, 2021). School and home make up nearly the entirety of a child's world and how these worlds look, feel, and sound—who's part of those worlds and who is not, who has power and who does not—create worldviews that children internalize about themselves and how the world works.

Across all parts of the country, our neighborhoods and schools are more segregated by race now than they were during legal segregation. When I reflect on my own racial literacy in recent years, it's been my relationships with other people of color that have transformed my understanding of racism, especially anti-Black racism.

Why does this matter in my teaching? Because if I don't fully comprehend what impedes my own ability to understand racism as it exists in my own life, how can I teach students about racism with the complexity and knowledge required? How can I teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*? *Huck Finn*? *Gatsby*? Or really—any American literature? How can I teach students about holidays like Thanksgiving or figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. responsibly? How can I offer students "diverse" narratives in my classroom library if I haven't unpacked what I mean or assume about what counts as "diverse"? Or if I don't understand that using the term "diverse" can also reinforce Whiteness as a norm and all books written by non-White authors as *not* the norm, and therefore, "diverse"? As educator Everett (2017) writes, "one must ask diverse for whom or diverse from what? The word diverse as it is currently used centers heteronormative whiteness as the default."

It's the privilege that my personal experiences afford me that also partially explains my shock and grief at the racial slurs that have been hurled at and attacks on elderly Asian people on public transportation, the police that have been called on Black Americans going to the pool or watching birds in a public park, and the "family detention centers" that have been erected to imprison refugees. The truth is that none of the injustices we're seeing today are new, just the latest iterations; everything present has its precedent.

Although I am privileged—or perhaps because I am—and went to traditionally excellent schools, never in my schooling were the full atrocities of racism and other forms of discrimination ever really explained. And of course, racism and more specifically, White Supremacy, doesn't have to make the news or be as explicitly visible as the examples listed above. As Germán also says, "When a lot of people think of white supremacy, they connote white men in hoods on corners screaming racial slurs and doing extreme things, but white supremacy could be used interchangeably for racism" (V. Brown & Keels, 2021).

This lack of knowledge limits my ability to teach fully and truthfully. Instead, I might combat racism with platitudes like "be kind" or simply

encourage kids to "not see color," which only further erases the experiences of people of color. If we refuse to see race, how can we even begin to talk productively about racism? School-aged children in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse, making up more than half of the student population. How can we as teachers address race and racism if we do not first turn the lens on ourselves? If we do not examine our own racial socialization, then how can we fully understand ourselves, much less our students?

Invitation to Reflect

Consider, as I did above, how your own specific privileges may inform your experiences. Privilege can be difficult to wrestle with—we often do not want to see the ways in which we are advantaged. Because of the **negativity bias**, we tend to focus on negative experiences first. Consider, for example, when someone asks you how your day has been. Many of us might recall negative experiences first: the missed call, the traffic on the way home, the line at the store, or any number of things.

Likewise, it may be easier to think of all the ways in which we are disadvantaged first before considering the many more ways we might be advantaged. Privileges, especially when you have always had them, can be hard to see. But acknowledging the way our privilege has worked to our advantage *and to our disadvantage* is critical in understanding our relative positionality to others.

For this self-reflection exercise, I follow educator and author Sara Ahmed's advice to take an inventory of my own privileges as a way to surface the complexities of how I might navigate the world. Drawing from a chapter in Oluo's (2018) *So You Want to Talk About Race*, Sara suggests making a list of all the ways in which you have privilege. For example, my own privileges include the following:

- Upper middle class
- Well-resourced neighborhood
- Married
- Partner works full time
- Cisgender
- Straight
- Fluent English-speaker
- Able-bodied
- Family close-by who often can care for my children (no childcare costs)

- US citizen and passport
- Health insurance and access to good and convenient health care
- Driver's license and own a car
- Reliable internet
- Homeowner
- College educated (Master's degree)

Oluo then argues that because we enjoy those privileges that it is our responsibility to advocate for others to have the same opportunities that these privileges afford. Our privilege, in other words, does not need to come at another person's expense. For example, because I do not have to worry about childcare when I go to educational conferences, I should petition organizations to have affordable childcare options available or to provide greater flexibility in their professional development offerings.

After making your own list, revisit it periodically. As Ahmed has pointed out, it's in our privileges that our biases may be hiding.

Self-Reflection 4: Personal and Social Identities and Connecting with Students

As much as this is a book designed to help our students be more reflective and responsible thinkers, our effectiveness in helping them do so is limited by our own ability to understand *who we are* as teachers and as human beings. As much as this is a book designed to help our students, it's also about helping ourselves. I posit that the better we understand ourselves, the better position we will be in to help our students. If we can model reflective thinking in our classrooms, we can help our students navigate the question *who am I?* As Dr. Lyiscott (2017) reminds us:

> Some of the most deeply problematic issues of inequity within the field of education are sustained by well-meaning people embracing progressive politics without intentional frameworks of self-reflection to guide their praxis in a healthy direction.

Invitation to Reflect

Take a moment to consider your own personal identities and the backgrounds and experiences that inform them. Of these, which have had the most impact on the way you navigate the world? Which are the most significant to your identity as a teacher and your relationship with students? Use the graphic in Figure 1.2 as a guide.

FIGURE 1.2 PERSONAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND IMPACT ON TEACHING STUDENTS

REFLECTING ON MYSELF . . .	CONSIDERING MY STUDENTS . . .	
WHO I AM PERSONALLY WITH REGARDS TO . . .	HOW THIS BACKGROUND MAY BE A BENEFIT TO MY TEACHING PRACTICES	HOW THIS BACKGROUND MAY BE A DRAWBACK IN MY TEACHING PRACTICES
Race		
Gender		
Sexuality		
Socioeconomics		
Religion		
Family Life or Structure		
Ability		
Education		
Geography		
Friend or peer group		
Political affiliation		
Media consumption		

To share from my personal reflection, consider what I have already shared about my own experiences regarding school, race, and socioeconomics and their effect on my teaching. Or consider the influence of my friends and peers. For example, my friends and I have always prioritized academic achievement, both as students and now as parents with our own school-aged children. While we understand that getting good grades isn't everything there is in life—after all, what good are grades if we are not good people?—we made it a priority to study, even at the expense of other hobbies and interests. Our parents were also the type to call up grandparents and aunties about our report cards. While my friends and I don't go this far as parents, I know that we communicate the message to our own kids that academic achievement is a priority. Because many of my close friends are also Asian American and, like me, second-generation children of Asian immigrants, this emphasis on academics is both rooted in cultural beliefs and a response to White dominant culture. As Dr. Sealey-Ruiz (2020) writes, "Individuals who develop racial literacy are able to engage in the necessary personal

reflection about their racial beliefs and practices and teach their students to do the same."

Thus, my personal experience may benefit my students in that I can empathize with families and kids who might prioritize grades over other interests. I know what it is like to navigate the pressure of academic achievement as a student, to feel the anxiety over getting high grades to get into a good college. Over my career, many students, also Asian American and children of immigrant parents, shared these struggles with me. I can empathize with the difficulties and negative impact of that pressure; it's this understanding that I hope I can use to help my students and their families.

On the other hand, because my experience among my friends has been limited, I have less experience with students and families for whom academic achievement may not be as high a priority, for any number of valid reasons. Even though I played sports in school and took piano lessons for many years, I don't know, for example, what it's like to be such a talented athlete or musician that I would dedicate extended time and energy to either endeavor. As a teacher whose personal experiences have always prioritized academics, I might discount—or even dismiss—the investment my students and their families have in other areas. Furthermore, if the proverb is correct and it "takes a village," my village of friends has reinforced the importance of academic achievement among my own children. This may make it harder for me to see how such villages of support are not necessarily in place for all students.

To continue reflecting on your own identities and their impact on your teaching, see Dr. Talusan's (2022) research and the reflection tools she offers in her book, *The Identity Conscious Educator: Building Habits and Skills for a More Inclusive School*.

Self-Reflection 5: Inclusive Literacy Classroom Audit

While it is human to have biases, the problem with biases—especially when unexamined—is that they can prevent us from reaching *all* of our students. If we want our literacy practices to be truly inclusive, we need to regularly "check in" with ourselves and perhaps invite a colleague or your department into this process.

Invitation to Reflect

Consider, for example, using the questions in Figure 1.3 to check in with yourself. The questions build upon the ideas in this chapter and take them a little bit further. As you answer these questions, pay attention to how you feel as you respond. Set aside some quiet time to reflect on your responses—or, better yet, consider inviting a trusted colleague

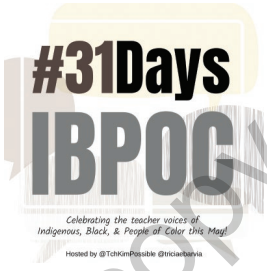
to respond and discuss together. You might also work in small groups at a department or faculty meeting to discuss as well. Making self-reflection a regular part of your work as a professional can be difficult but necessary.

FIGURE 1.3 HOW INCLUSIVE IS YOUR LITERACY CLASSROOM, REALLY?

ANCHOR QUESTION	CONSIDER . . .
How inclusive is the media you consume, personally and professionally?	• What do you read by people of color, LGBTQ+ authors, and writers with disabilities? What books, news articles, publications? • What television programs, films, podcasts, and other multimedia do you consume and who creates that media? Whose voices are privileged? • What professional literature do you read? How often and in what ways do you extend your professional reading to include all voices? • How diverse is your professional learning community?
How inclusive is your curriculum?	• In what ways is your curriculum shaped by your own educational experiences? • Whose voices are centered in the texts you teach? Whose voices are marginalized or missing? • How do you recognize and celebrate the backgrounds of diverse authors already included in your curriculum? • In what ways do you integrate cultural and racial literacy in your instruction? • How often do you conduct an audit of your curriculum? In what ways has your curriculum changed to meet the needs of today's students? To what extent do you regularly examine and revise your curriculum to search for problems or gaps?
How inclusive is your classroom library?	• How does your classroom library mirror your own reading preferences versus those of your students? • Do you know which voices are represented on your bookshelves? Which voices are missing? • In what ways do you include—and how do you find—#ownvoices titles to add to your library? How are these voices integrated versus othered in the way you organize or share titles?
How inclusive are your mentor texts for writing?	• What writing—and whose voices—do you hold up as mentors of excellent writing and for what purpose? • What is your definition of good writing? In what ways does that definition include or exclude particular voices or linguistic varieties?
How inclusive is your language?	• How often do you use gendered versus non-gendered language? • How do you model respectful and asset-based language (versus deficit language) to describe others, both with students and colleagues? • How does your language affirm the identities of others in ways that demonstrate respect for their cultures, identities, and experiences?

ANCHOR QUESTION	CONSIDER . . .
How inclusive are your class discussions?	• How equitable are your class discussions? In what ways do you ensure that all student voices are heard? • How do you scaffold class discussion to encourage "courageous conversations"?
How do you model inclusive thinking for your students?	• How often do you show (think aloud) inclusive thinking when discussing your decisions and responses to texts? • In what ways do you demonstrate intellectual and cultural humility in front of students?
How often do you discuss inclusive practices with your colleagues?	• In what ways—and how often—do you and your colleagues reflect on your practices to ensure that all voices are recognized and respected? • How do you ensure that the voices of educators of color are heard and appreciated? • In what ways do you advocate for inclusive practices beyond your classroom?

Self-Reflection 6: Learning From the Experiences of Educators of Color



▶ "Social justice is humanizing our classroom environments so that all students not only see themselves but also really see others. It is when we see others we are able to not only express empathy but also assertively pursue justice alongside those experiencing oppression. Social justice is a serious pursuit of equity and expressing empathy for others in their paths to seek justice. It's NOT a trivial unit or lesson or checkbox. It's how you conduct your classroom daily. It is also how you live your life. Do you humanize and democratize your classroom space? Do you truly value diversity, equity, and justice in your daily life?" —Shana V. White

Coming face-to-face with our own biases, especially as we realize that these biases may have led us to unintentionally harm students, can be a painful process. This process can be even more painful for teachers who feel unsupported or isolated in doing antibias work in their schools. And if you are an educator who is from a marginalized community—and perhaps from *multiple* marginalized communities—then this process can feel overwhelming.

In May 2019, Dr. Kim Parker and I organized #31DaysIBPOC. For each day during that month, we featured a personal essay of a

different educator at the website, 31daysIBPOC.wordpress.com. It was our hope that we could "write in solidarity about the many ways we define ourselves, our practices, and our lives."

Invitation to Reflect

Scan the QR to read the #31DaysIBPOC blog

For this reflection, scan the QR code to go to the #31DaysIBPOC website and read the stories these educators share. If you are a White teacher, the essays may provide an important perspective or counternarrative that you might not have immediately available to you. To process these essays (individually or in a group), consider using the following questions:

- What information resonated with your own experiences?
- What surprised you? Why did this surprise you? What assumptions did you previously hold that made this surprising?
- What information challenged your perspectives or beliefs? Why, and in what ways?
- How did you feel as you were reading? Can you name those emotions? Where might these emotions be coming from?

Many of the essays included in the #31DaysIBPOC series are written by educators of color who share their own racial identity development stories and how their journeys impact their work with students. These stories should serve as reminders that antibias work must be as much personal as it is professional. We do not leave who we are in our personal lives at the door when we enter our classrooms.

CHALLENGING SOCIETAL BIAS

Up to this point, we've looked at bias starting at the perspective of our individual experiences. Before I close this chapter, it's important to name the ways that bias on a societal bias—*particularly bias that is rooted in White Supremacy culture*—impacts us as people and educators.

Any time any group of people comes together—whether they form informal organizations, institutions, religious congregations, art classes, school communities, clubs, study groups, or sports teams, and many others—they create a *culture*. Culture can be defined as a "social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication" (Institute for

Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative, 2000, p. 32). Although cultures created in different groups vary, a larger *shared* culture (or imposed, depending on your point-of-view) exists on a societal level—"values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication" that are characteristic of *society as a whole*. In the United States, that culture can be described as White dominant or White Supremacy culture.

Self-Reflection 7: White Supremacy Culture

In the late 1990s, scholar Tema Okun, in collaboration with Kenneth Jones, drafted a list of White Supremacy culture characteristics. In a 2023 interview with The Intercept (Grim, 2023), Okun reveals that the original paper was never meant to be posted or shared as widely online and out of context, as it has since the murder of George Floyd in 2016. In this widespread use, the characteristics of White Supremacy culture have been used in productive ways to challenge the harmful impacts of White Supremacy, but it has also been misused and weaponized.

For example, although the characteristics are presented as a list, they are not meant to be used as "a checklist to assess or target someone." As Okun explains, the characteristics are "linked together," and that nobody "uses one characteristic." When used well and as intended, Okun argues, understanding the characteristics of White Supremacy culture can be transformative and liberating: When we can identify the ways that White Supremacy limits and restricts our thinking, we can disrupt that pattern and expand our ability to consider multiple perspectives, possibilities, and solutions. As Okun (2021a) concludes, "The good news is that while white supremacy culture informs us, it does not define us. It is a construct, and anything constructed can be deconstructed and replaced" (p. 5).

In other words, by identifying and disrupting societal biases caused by White Supremacy culture, we can *get free*.

In 2021, Okun revised and updated her work on White Supremacy Culture Characteristics, which can be found on a centralized website (WhiteSupremacyCulture.info) created by Okun. In the update, Okun expounds on central elements not previously developed or named explicitly. Okun explains, "fear is an essential characteristic, as is the assumption of 'qualified' attached to whiteness. Defensiveness [is] broadened to include denial [and] a class lens and issues of intersectionality are important to address" (Okun, 2021b, p. 1). Another key feature of Okun's revised version are the antidotes she shares, practical ways to challenge these characteristics. The Racial Equity Principles outlined on the website are also useful and can support the work throughout this book.

Invitation to Reflect

Okun (2021a) identifies the following characteristics of White Supremacy Culture (pp. 6–28):

- Fear
- Perfectionism
- Qualified
- Either/Or Binary
- Progress is Bigger/More and Quantity over Quality
- Worship of the Written Word
- Individualism and I'm the Only One
- Defensiveness and Denial
- Right to Comfort, Fear of Open Conflict, and Power Hoarding
- Urgency

As Okun reminds us, it's not that any of these characteristics are inherently bad by themselves, but when they operate to control our behavior, when they become the driving force behind our decision-making, and when they prevent us from considering other ways of being, that's where the *supremacy* part of White Supremacy culture harms us.

Read Tema Okun's work, White Supremacy Culture Characteristics

Even if you have already encountered Okun's work, for this reflection, take some time to review her revised and updated paper, which provides expanded context and discussions about the nuances of each characteristic.

And while the characteristics are about Whiteness specifically, people of all racial identities are vulnerable to the harmful effects of White Supremacy culture. As I have already shared, my own racial and cultural identities do not immunize me from internalizing White Supremacy culture, but they do inform the way I respond and why.

After reading and reflecting on Okun's update, perhaps with a colleague or friend, consider the following questions:

- Which characteristics feel most familiar to you? In what ways?
- How do you see multiple characteristics working together in your life?
- Which characteristics do you see most often in school?

Self-Reflection 8: Biases in Our Literacy Practices

Schools often reflect the values and beliefs of the communities they serve. Unfortunately, no community in the United States is immune to White Supremacy culture, and neither are schools. In fact, much of what we consider acceptable school rules, policies, and practices are informed by many of the characteristics of White Supremacy culture. For example, the emphasis on standardized testing and data-driven decision-making often minimizes or completely eclipses other ways of assessing learning. Again, it's not that there isn't a role for quantitative data, even standardized tests, but the problem arises when these tests effectively reign supreme in school decision-making and state and federal law.

Invitation to Reflect

In my experience as an English teacher, I've observed many biases in how we teach reading and writing: what counts as "reading," what counts as "writing," what counts as "academic," how we define rigor, how we measure learning, how we define literacy, what types of narratives we teach and how we teach them. But if we are to take an *antibias approach* to literacy, we must

1. Identify biases in our literacy practices
2. Teach *against* those biases

Figure 1.4 lists some of the biases I have observed across my teaching career. Some of these may resonate with your own experiences as a teacher or as a student. You may have observed other biases as well. Recall that biases are neither inherently good nor bad, but they do inform the critical decisions we make as teachers about whose stories are worth telling, how we respond as readers, and how we encourage students to make sense of their world in their writing. In other words, these biases undergird all of our literacy practices. By identifying and noticing when they inform our decisions, we can then ask ourselves questions such as: *Am I doing what's best for students or what's easiest or most convenient? Does this bias perpetuate one way of learning or being in the world at the exclusion of other equally valuable ways of learning or being in the world?*

As you look at Figure 1.4, what feels familiar? What other "counter practices" would you suggest to interrupt these dominant practices? How do the biases in our literacy practices overlap or relate to Okun's characteristics of White Supremacy culture?

FIGURE 1.4 BIASES IN OUR LITERACY PRACTICES

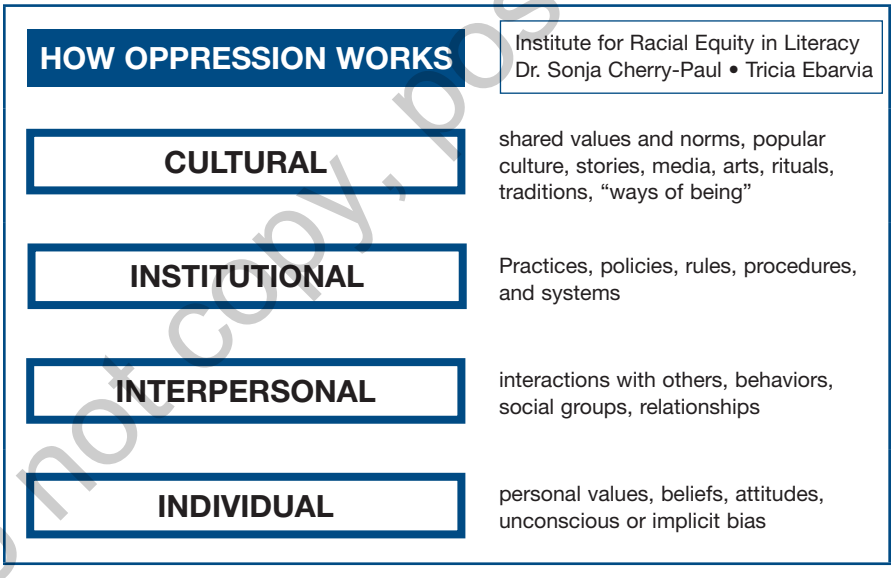
BIAS (DOMINANT PRACTICE)	EXAMPLE	WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO (COUNTER PRACTICE)
Teaching stories of individual heroism over stories of collective action and community	Text selections focus on "hero" stories such as *The Odyssey*. Literary analysis may emphasize a protagonist's individual actions and conflicts.	Teach more stories that focus on communities and the interactions between and among characters v. a single character.
Focusing on individual effort and responsibility over social contexts and circumstances	Literary analysis may prioritize an individual character's actions with less analysis on setting and social-political context.	Ask students to consider how a character's environment (cultural norms, historical context, and systems of oppression) may impact their choices.
Prioritizing content recall over skill application	Assessments may prioritize being able to memorize and recall factual information from texts rather than applying novel reading skills to new texts and contexts.	Ask students to apply the skills they have practiced in one text to a new text.
Prioritizing product over process	Assessments are largely summative rather than formative. Students' grades do not reward progress and improvement, only final products.	Consider other forms of data collection that are ongoing and include qualitative assessment, such as portfolios that reveal growth over time.
Valuing quantity over quality	Writing assignments measured by word or page count versus informed by purpose of task.	Focus on meeting a task versus a minimum number of words, sentences, or paragraphs.
Favoring traditional print media over audio-visual media	Most curricula center the written and print texts such as novels, short stories, poetry.	Teach students how to read and analyze film, podcast, video, graphic novel, art—expand the definition of "text."
Favoring traditional writing forms over other genres and modes	Most writing is focused on literary analysis or formal argument.	Expand students' writing tasks to include more real-world writing application and genres.
Engaging in monologue over dialogue	Most talk in class is one-directional, from teacher to students, or from one student to another mediated by the teacher.	Practice more authentic forms of conversation and provide multiple opportunities for unstructured dialogue.
Valuing certainty over open-endedness	Essays center on thesis statements that point to a single conclusion and all evidence supports that single conclusion.	Provide students more opportunities to read, study, and write essays that entertain multiple perspectives and are rooted in inquiry.
Teaching one way versus many ways	Essay writing may focus on a single form as "correct" (i.e., five-paragraph essays).	Use a diversity of mentor texts to expand students' understanding of writing possibilities.

Self-Reflection 9: From the Individual to the Systemic

As you've read throughout this chapter, you've noticed the theme *our beliefs matter*. What we believe about ourselves and others—and what we believe constitutes a "just" society—matters. Our beliefs (and biases) drive our behaviors. Our behaviors drive our practices. Our practices drive our pedagogy. Our pedagogy drives the curriculum, which becomes policy. Policies drive impact, and our impact determines outcomes. The outcomes we see—academic *and* socio-emotional—are neither accidental nor inevitable, but rather the indirect and direct result of all the beliefs we hold about children and learning.

During the Institute for Racial Equity (IREL) that I co-facilitate with Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul, we ask participants to consider their individual beliefs and actions in the context of various systems of oppression (see Figure 1.5). We draw from Garcia and Van Soest's (2003) work on systems of oppression to help participants think about interconnectedness of four different levels of oppression: the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and the cultural.

FIGURE 1.5 SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION



Adapted from Garcia and Van Soest (2003)

Invitation to Reflect

Review the model of systemic oppression in Figure 1.5 and consider how one or many of the beliefs you have as an individual informs—or is a result of—your experiences at an interpersonal, institutional, or

cultural level. For example, when I think about my experiences at each level:

- My *individual* belief that hard work pays off (just world hypothesis) may affect
- My *interpersonal* relationships if I judge others who are less "successful" as simply not working "hard enough," which may be reflected in
- My classroom (*institutional*) practices when I interpret students' lack of homework completion as a lack of effort, rather than as another deeper issue, which feeds into
- A larger *cultural* belief that some types of people may simply lack the work ethic to be successful.

Another way to use this model for self-reflection is to move in the other direction. For example:

- Because of the *cultural* stereotypes that "Asians are good at math" . . .
- At the *institutional* level in schools, Asian American students may be encouraged to take higher level STEM-related subjects, which leads to
- Racially segregated classrooms that are with disproportionate representation of Asian American students in honors science classes, which means that students' *interpersonal* relationships may also be racially segregated, which informs
- My *individual* belief as a teacher (and person) that all Asians are "good" at only certain subjects.

Try this exercise for yourself, starting at any point, to help you to surface the relationship between our individual and cultural beliefs.

Self-Reflection 10: Breaking the Cycle

Other useful models for thinking about how our socialization impacts our beliefs and behaviors are Dr. Bobbie Harro's Cycles of Socialization and Liberation. Dr. Harro's research (Figure 1.6) outlines the cycle in which we are socialized into certain beliefs and behaviors based on our experiences throughout life—and how these beliefs and behaviors are then reinforced. Dr. Harro's Cycles of Socialization and Liberation consists of various stages, outlined in Figure 1.6, which offers an abbreviated description of the varying stages of each cycle. You can read more about both models by scanning the QR codes on this page as well.

Learn more about Harro's Cycle of Socialization

Learn more about Harro's Cycle of Liberation

Invitation to Reflect

As you study Dr. Harro's model of socialization, consider the ways in which this applies to you: where do you see your personal experiences reflected in this cycle? Then take a look at the second model that Dr. Harro offers to us to consider: the Cycle of Liberation. In this latter model, we can thus try to imagine what it might look like to "get free" and to develop the "liberatory consciousness" (Love) we need to act outside the more damaging effects of our socialization.

FIGURE 1.6 CYCLES OF SOCIALIZATION AND LIBERATION

CYCLE OF SOCIALIZATION (ADAPTED FROM HARRO, 2018)		
STAGE	**DESCRIPTION**	**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**
The Beginning	Although individuals are born without preexisting "biases, stereotypes, prejudices" and so on, the world that we're born into already has such "mechanics in place."	What harmful patterns of thought (biases and prejudices) and systemic injustices (discrimination) existed before you were even born?
First Socialization	We then begin to learn "values, roles, rules" and how to be in the world from our caregivers, the "people we love and trust" (who have themselves already been socialized into certain values, roles, and rules).	What potentially harmful patterns of thought (biases and prejudices) and systemic injustices (discrimination) were you first exposed to as a child? What "values, rules, and roles" did you learn about yourself and others from your earliest caregivers?
Institutional and Cultural Reinforcement	As we experience more of the world, institutions (schools, churches, legal system) and culture (social practices, language, media) "bombard" us with messages. Sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, these messages tell us what to value and believe and how to behave.	What messages did you learn about your own role(s) and responsibility(ies) in the world from schools, churches, and other organizations? What messages did you learn about others? What messages were direct? What messages were indirect?
Enforcements	Throughout our lives, the "values, roles, and rules" we learn from our first caregivers, as well as through our interactions with institutions and cultures, are enforced and reinforced continuously.	How were the dominant messages about yourself and others enforced and reinforced as you grew older? How did the totality of these messages impact you?
Results	As a result of being inundated with messages about how to be in the world, both direct and indirect, we respond in any numbers of ways, including but not limited to "dissonance, silence, anger, dehumanization, guilt, collusion, ignorance" and the "internalization of patterns of power."	As you have embarked on your own journey to be more aware of the potentially harmful ways you have been socialized, how have you responded? What beliefs, feelings, thoughts, or behaviors have surfaced?
Direction for Change	In facing how we are impacted by our socialization, individuals come to a point where they can choose to change, raise their consciousness, interrupt harmful patterns, etc.	Reflect on a moment, encounter, or opportunity that you have had your own consciousness raised around your identity, socialization, and issues of justice. What happened? How?
Action	Given this choice, individuals may change, at least in some ways, or may choose not to change, thus reinforcing the status quo and restarting the cycle with the next generation.	In what ways have you identified and interrupted harmful patterns of thought or behavior? In what ways have you not? Why? What work do you still need to do?

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CYCLE OF LIBERATION (ADAPTED FROM HARRO, 2018)		
STAGE	**DESCRIPTION**	**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**
Waking Up and Getting Ready	As individuals learn more about how systems of oppression work, they can begin to identify and notice where and when these harmful patterns of thought and behavior appear in their own lives.	What harmful patterns of thought and behavior have you recognized in your own experiences and socialization? What made you notice these patterns? What did you have to unlearn and relearn?
Reaching Out	During this intrapersonal stage, individuals begin to raise their consciousness, and they seek out more and new information and learn about how systems of oppression work. They may explore tools for support.	How have you reached out to seek new information and learning? How have you begun to speak out in order to learn more?
Building Community	During this interpersonal shift, individuals begin to reach out to other people, both people similar to themselves, as well as people with different identities or experiences.	How have you formed relationships and connections with those who share similar identities and those who are different? Where did you go, who did you seek, and what was this experience like? What have you learned?
Coalescing	During this stage, and working with others, individuals begin to prepare, plan, and organize to dismantle systems of oppression.	How have you taken what you've learned on your own and with others and channeled that into positive change for greater social and racial justice? Examples may include educating others, lobbying, fundraising, refusal to participate in harmful systems, etc.
Creating Change	During this stage, focus is turned toward the larger systems of power that are responsible for perpetuating oppression. This may include advocating and influencing policy changes, disrupting assumptions, definitions, taking on leadership roles, etc.	In what ways have you advocated, initiated, and effected change at a larger systems level in the communities, organizations, and institutions you participate in? What challenges have you faced and how are you overcoming them?
Maintaining	Because the status quo in society often reverts back to systems based in oppression, during this stage, individuals intentionally reflect on, model, and maintain their commitment to fighting against injustice.	What actions or habits have you changed in your life to make your commitment to dismantling systems of oppression something that is both sustainable and long-term? How do you help others engage in this work?

FINAL THOUGHTS, NEXT STEPS

While much of the book has so far focused on teachers, the remaining chapters will bring you into my classroom where I'll share reading, writing, listening, and thinking strategies that can help our students

build habits of critical self-reflection and nuanced thinking. As you read, I invite you to learn alongside your students, doing the same reading and writing that you ask them to do. Not only will this enable you to be a more effective model for your students as a co-learner, you will likely discover some things about yourself along the way. Figures 1.7 and 1.8 offer suggested resources to help you dig deeper into the topics I've presented so far.

FIGURE 1.7 A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO LEARNING ABOUT BIASES

LEARN MORE

- Learning for Justice, "Test Yourself for Hidden Bias" and Critical Practices for Antibias Education Framework

  In this professional development module online on the Learning for Justice website, learn about how stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and bias can function in classrooms. Follow up this module by examining Learning for Justice's suggestions for classroom practices to combat bias using their framework for antibias education.

- Hidden Brain, "Think Fast with Daniel Kahneman"

  In this weekly podcast, psychologist Shankar Vendantam discusses the intersections of psychology, society, and culture. In this episode, he discusses the brain's two response systems that are at the root of cognitive biases with Nobel Prize winning cognitive scientist, Daniel Kahneman.

- Implicit Association Test (IAT), Harvard University

  The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is a tool developed by Project Implicit researchers at Harvard University. There are several different IATs that measure a variety of types of biases. The tests are free for anyone to take, but require a log-in, which can be obtained directly on the website.

- Awareness of Implicit Biases, Yale University

  Yale University's Center for Teaching and Learning has compiled an extensive set of resources online to identify bias in instruction and offers strategies to combat such biases.

FIGURE 1.8 A BEGINNING READING LIST TO UNLEARN AND RELEARN OURSELVES, OTHERS, AND OUR HISTORY

- *The 1619 Project* by Nikole Hannah Jones
- *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* by Erika Lee
- *An African American and Latinx History of the United States* by Paul Ortiz
- *An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States* by Kyle T. Mays
- *Biased* by Jennifer L. Eberhardt
- *A Black Women's History of the United States* by Daina Ramey Berry, Kali Nicole Gross
- *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* by Ronald Takaki

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- *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen
- *Disability Visibility* edited by Alice Wong
- *Dreams from Many Rivers* by Margarita Engle
- *Everything You Wanted to Know about Indians But Were Afraid to Ask* by Anton Treuer
- *History Teaches Us to Resist* by Mary Frances Berry
- *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi
- *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and *An Indigenous People's History of the United States for Young People* adapted by Debbie Reese and Jean Mendoza
- *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* by Oslem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo
- *Love and Resistance: Out of the Closet Into the Stonewall Era* and *The Stonewall Reader* edited by Jason Baumann
- *A More Beautiful and Terrible History* by Jeanine Theoharis
- *The Myth of the Model Minority* by Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin
- *The Next American Revolution* by Grace Lee Boggs
- *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States* by Felipe Fernández-Armesto
- *Pushout* by Monique Morris
- *A Queer History of the United States* by Michael Bronski
- *Race for Profit* by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor
- *Racial Healing Handbook* by Annaliese Singh
- *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds
- *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* by Ronald Takaki
- *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks
- *The Warmth of Other Suns* and *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson
- *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving
- *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* by Martin Luther King, Jr.
- *White Rage* by Carol Anderson

How can we *get free* through **community?**

Our young people's social media feeds are filled with examples of individual excellence: professional athletes, music artists, Hollywood actors, YouTubers, politicians, tech giants, and countless others. Our national myth-making and narratives are filled with stories of individuals who overcame hardship through the sheer strength of their will and determination.

And yet.

I wonder how we might be better off focusing less on *individual* achievement and more on *community* and *connection*, less *competition* and more *cooperation*, less *me* and more *we*.

Schools are powerful, but not just because of the academic content and skills that students learn, though these are critical. Schools are powerful because every time students walk down our hallways and into our classrooms, students have opportunity after opportunity to experience infinite possible ways of being in the world. They can, for example, experience what it's like to be and be treated as a worker-producer in a capitalist society. They can experience what it's like to compete against peers in the pursuit of excellence, to see their value celebrated and defined by their accomplishments.

But they can also experience what it's like to be valued because they are part of a community, that their presence makes the community better, where dignity and respect are treated as a given and not commodities or privileges to be earned. They can experience what it's like to be seen and cared for by others, not because of what they do but for who they are.

In this chapter, we turn our lens on how *intentional community building* is critical in creating an antibias classroom and more just world. Every time we invite students to feel part of a community, where they feel seen and valued, we protect students against the loneliness and fear that can leave them vulnerable to those who would gladly take advantage. Every time we teach *against* the societal bias that favors rugged individualism at the expense of community, we are not only engaged in *imagining* a better world but actively *creating* one with our students.