

# A Journey Towards Equity and Diversity in the Educator Workforce

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## Abstract

In this article, co-written by a self-identified White female professor and a self-identified Black male doctoral student, the authors address the pressing need to train and retain a teacher workforce willing and able to foster equity for students from nondominant racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. They make three arguments. First, the impact of educator work is deeply entwined with student and teacher identities as well as the cultural knowledges, histories, and experiences that students and teachers bring to classrooms. Second, professional knowledge must be interdisciplinary, drawing on a number of social science and humanities disciplines to inform practice and ongoing inquiry in practice. Third, the critical shortage of research on the interaction between individual and collective educator identities and teacher learning must be addressed. The authors conclude with a call to regroup the preparation of all educators, including special educators, to become more explicit and present in discourse about ability, race, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers. Both discourse and curricula need to represent and educate our nation's students about the rich tapestry of diversity that manifests in multiple forms of knowledge, social, political, and intellectual capital. The teacher workforce needs to be prepared and supported to do this work.

## Keywords

equity, diversity, teacher workforce, special education

In this article, we respond to the urgent need to prepare and sustain career educators who are capable of and committed to advancing system-wide equity and access for students with and without dis/abilities from culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Kozleski & Thorius, 2014). Our argument for this mission rests on three pillars: (a) the impact of special and general educator work is deeply entwined with student and teacher identities as well as teachers' and students' cultural knowledges, histories, and experiences; (b) educator knowledge must be interdisciplinary, drawing on a number of social science and humanities disciplines to inform practice and ongoing inquiry-in-practice; and (c) the acute need to examine the

interaction between individual and collective educator identities and teacher learning.

## Framing the Analysis

Members of the White dominant culture in the United States benefit from their knowledge and use of specific cultural, familial, structural, historical, economic, and linguistic funds of knowledge (Giroux, 1997). These

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benefits boost children who have membership in the dominant culture through access, participation, and opportunities to learn to assume leadership roles, which seem to correlate with school success (Lareau, 2011). Although the dimensions of Whiteness as culture within the United States are contested, a number of education scholars have taken up the construct because of its importance in explaining the pernicious persistence of educational outcome gaps based on students' racial and ability identities (e.g., Leonardo & Manning, 2017; Matias & Liou, 2015). In a number of articles, critical race theory (CRT) has served as an important frame to explore and understand how disproportionality in special education persists (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Skiba, Artiles, Kozleski, Losen, & Harry, 2016). Because the odds of having a white female teacher are so high in the United States (about 90% of the elementary teachers are White, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016), we decided to frame this article in terms of Whiteness theory. No one is solely constructed by others or themselves by one facet of their identity. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) reminds us of the multiple forms of marginalization and privilege that converge and layer our human experience and reflexivity to one another. Dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, religion, language, cultural practices, and histories are some of the human factors that lace our identities and our understanding of colleagues, students, and community members. Schools, students, and educators mirror this complex reality. Our analysis focuses on Whiteness knowing that it offers a partial view of our social and political reality.

Because this manuscript deals with raced concepts, we define what we mean when we use terms such as race, Whiteness, Black, Latinx, and African American. Depending on the theoretical stances of researchers, these terms can have very different meanings. We anchor our discourse in the American Anthropological Association Statement on Race and its subsequent RACE project (Smedley, 1998)

that race is socially constructed. This position is supported by the work of the Human Genome Project which found that humans share 99.9% genetic similarity (Fitzgerald, 2014). The construct of race is "dynamic, historically situated, culturally constructed" and represents "symbolic meaning" based on "phenotypic differences such as skin color, hair texture, nose width, lip thickness, and body type" (Ifekwunigwe et al., 2017, p. 422). Although race is not a biological reality, it is an important concept to engage given its consequential role in the United States, a race-based society (Graves, 2015; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Race-based societies share some features that may include (a) the recognition of specified racial groups as biologically distinct and exclusive, and phenotypic characteristics as markers of race status; (b) the ideology at least among some members that races are naturally unequal and must be ranked hierarchically; (c) assumptions that each race has unique cultural behaviors which are linked to the race's biology; (d) presumptions that physical features and behavior are intrinsic and inherited; (e) beliefs that racial differences are deep and fixed; and (f) the use of racial classifications designated in the social and legal system (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Accordingly, membership in a particular racial group has real material and psychological consequences (Graves, 2015).

We use the term "Whiteness" to describe the socially constructed privileges and benefits that accompany the prevailing assumptions about normative culture, the distribution of power, and language in the United States. Moreover, we use "Black" to describe any person of African descent. This includes American descendants of enslaved Africans brought to the United States (also known as African Americans), people of African descent who migrated to the United States from the Caribbean, and individuals from Africa who self-identify as African or are identified by others as African but are not of other ancestry (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005). We recognize there are issues with classifying such a diverse set of people under a single umbrella term. Doing so can unintentionally

reinforce the harmful notion that all people with African ancestral origins are monolithic when, in reality, there is a wide range of cultures, beliefs, and health status, for example, among African descent groups (Agyemang et al., 2005). We use Black to emphasize the shared experience among members of African descent groups of being treated adversely in America due to the color of their skin (Johnson, 2016) and the collective cultural contributions of members of what Gilroy (1993) called the Black Atlantic. The Black Atlantic, which spanned at least two centuries and drew from Caribbean, African, British, and American cultures, produced a cultural legacy that transcends color lines and contributes to the renaissance of American music, theater, and English literature.

*The Wages of Whiteness* (Roediger, 1991) explored the concept of Whiteness to describe the process through which immigrants acquired social acceptance and its collateral benefits of privilege, power, and access to wealth accumulation. Deconstructing Whiteness offers a way to problematize a cultural context in which children from marginalized groups begin school behind their peers. Rather than a deep analysis of inadequacy and underperformance, a focus on the domination of Whiteness and its normalized assumptions of what counts offers an important vantage point to examine the structure, assumptions, pedagogies, and assessment of what P-12 learners need and for what purpose. We know now that children from marginalized groups continue to be handicapped by lack of access to teachers who understand their students' knowledge bases and can shape their students' development in ways that increase access to the tools and knowledge funds that are the birthright of others (Moss, Pullin, Gee, Haertel, & Young, 2008). This is not solely a civil rights issue; it is also a human rights issue.

### *The Authors' Positionality*

Although most readers of this article will likely have come from families who immigrated to the United States, our status within the United States is predicated on which

immigration wave our families rode into the New World, whether our ancestors were slaves, chattel, indentured, or free men or women, as well as the color of our skin. Many of our ancestors, including the first author's, were identified as White, some of us became White (Roediger, 1991), and others became People of Color (POC) and have remained so, classified in our raced census data base as Black, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and, more recently, biracial. The second author identifies as a Black man. We write together discovering new truths through this process as well as proposing a collective effort to shift the cultural, pedagogical, and intellectual underpinnings of the national effort to educate each and every child in the United States. Our experiences, education, and practice as educators are deeply influenced by the raced experiences that we had throughout our lives. We return to an explicit discussion of our raced positionality in the discussion and acknowledge that these lifelong threads of our identities influence how we understand and trouble educator development in this manuscript. We underscore that the choices that we make about identities and labels reflect our own perspectives about naming race, sexuality, and ability when no categories reflect universal agreement on terminology, identity, cultural practices, and preferences.

### *The Pervasive Exercise of White Cultural Capital in Education*

Ancient discourses contributed to the social, political, and economic subordination of indigenous, Latinx (this term recognizes the political resistance within the Latinx communities concerning census terminology), and African American peoples. Resurfaced as the dominant ideology within the United States during the immigration tides of the late 19th and early 20th century (Paredes Scribner & Fernández, 2017), those same discourses undercut our collective need to ensure that our rapidly changing population receives the best possible education. In many communities, the collective discourse continues to question

whose English is the real English? Whose histories, mores, and geographies are legitimized in schooling? Moreover, because special education is (a) a subset of the education community, (b) increasingly becoming a dimension of all teachers' practice, and (c) a contested space in terms of the degree to which under- and overrepresentation of Students of Color (SOC) in special education occur locally (Skiba et al., 2016), we examine equity and diversity as constructs that travel across the blurred boundaries between general and special education.

As governments and other institutions reified racial categories in law, policy, and regulation, socially constructed notions of race became paired with various forms of intellectual, artistic, and physical abilities. Yet, many factors beyond individual talents and abilities propel adult well-being. Structural, systemic, historical, cultural, and economic factors advantage some individuals and groups to benefit disproportionately from opportunities to participate, and be challenged (but not discouraged), and experience the satisfaction of achievement. The cumulative effect of multiple experiences of success, attributed to effort and ability, offers a substantial scaffold for adult accomplishment and well-being in careers and personal life. An absence of any one of the factors, because of membership in a marginalized group, may not be enough to tilt the equity scale but in combination can adversely affect progress through school and may contribute to achievement gaps and graduation failures (Moss et al., 2008).

### *The Cultural Reproduction Role of the Teacher Workforce*

Although a number of social service sectors need to engage collaboratively in ensuring that each child has opportunity to grow, develop, and learn on an equitable playing field, the teacher workforce has an undeniably powerful influence on adult outcomes. Fifty-three million children will attend public school in the United States in 2025 (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Everyone will learn in classrooms led by educators.

Educators have a collective influence on what their students will learn and the degree to which they will be buoyed or shackled by what happens in classrooms. How educators conceptualize their work, how they examine their practices, and the ways in which they grapple with these fundamental challenges places equity in schooling at the heart of what we mean by education (Pugach & Peck, 2016). In this article, we focused on improving the probability that children and youth will be lifted by their school experiences to live, in the words of Turnbull and Turnbull (2017), "enviable lives."

Recently, released policy papers acknowledge the importance of changing the color of the teaching force. Four ideas underpin these publications. The first is the positive and sustaining impact of Teachers of Color (TOC) on the learning outcomes of SOC (Dee, 2004; Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). The second is the need to redress the systematic exclusion of TOCs following the Brown decision to end segregated schools in the United States (V. S. Walker, 2015). V. S. Walker (2015) offered a well-documented history of institutionalized efforts to limit the migration of TOC from segregated to integrated schools. These institutionalized efforts remain with us and continue to create barriers for TOC to enter and sustain their teaching careers. The third is the importance of TOC for all students who need to learn from and alongside POC to develop culturally sustaining understanding of difference and the opportunities difference brings for solving the complex problems of the 21st century (Carver-Thomas, 2018). The fourth is that Whiteness as a dominant social and cultural hierarchy is in the process of being renegotiated and reshaped in a country with rapidly shifting demographics. What will replace it will be determined by expanding awareness, understanding, and resistance to the existing social order and conditions.

### *A Critical Juncture*

The journey ahead demands rapid change. Almost a third of the teaching force is over the

age of 50, with anticipated retirements coming in the next 10 years. The demand for new teachers is increasing (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Nationally, the teacher attrition rate is about 8% of the teaching force (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). However, these rates are distributed disproportionately across states, localities, and within school districts, fluctuating based on neighborhood socioeconomic status. While increasing numbers of novices will enter the field in some localities, in others, where populations are declining, teacher hires will also decline. Attracting teachers will be vital to the workforce, particularly in special education as the special education pool appears to be particularly vulnerable. Their turnover rates are greater than almost all other teacher categories, 46% higher than other elementary school teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Sustaining the benefit realized from improving student outcomes requires teacher retention.

We need to keep the new teachers who are entering the field. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) suggested that stemming teacher attrition will help to stave off a critical shortage in teachers. They proposed that if teacher retention increases, the teacher shortage will resolve within 5 to 6 years. To do so will require serious attention to the issues that teachers identify as they leave the profession: (a) incomplete or inadequate preparation for the profession, (b) working conditions that include both compensation and effective school leadership, (c) school size, and (d) teachers prepared and engaged in serving SOC.

Keeping the teachers that we have is important; changing the color of the educator workforce is equally essential. Consider that more than half of the population of students with dis/abilities are SOC (Billingsley, Bettini, & Williams, 2019). Data from the 2016 to 2017 school year from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) indicates that more than 62% of students with dis/abilities are educated in general education classrooms for 80% or more of the school day (McFarland et al., 2019). Yet, recent data from the

National Center on Educational Statistics (NCES) show that more than 80% of teachers are White (Grissom, Kern, & Rodriguez, 2015). Given the increasing number of studies that indicate that having TOC positively impacts the academic performance of SOC, the underrepresentation of TOC in the workforce suggests that SOC may be adversely impacted by the teacher workforce demographics (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Additional complexity clouds the learning chances of students. Special education teachers are the most likely to switch schools or leave teaching (Kozleski, Ariles, McCray, & Lacy, 2014). Special educator turnover appears to follow three tracks: (a) migration from one school to another, (b) transfer from special to general education assignments, and (c) exodus from teaching. Solving the equity issues requires rapid shifts in how the teaching force understands its work and the tools that they use to conduct practice (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015; Pugach & Peck, 2016).

This article explores what we can do now to shift the trajectories of our workforce and its impact on schooling and school children. We highlight the impact of identity on learning, curriculum, and the current sorting mechanisms of the U.S. public school enterprise. We then emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary preparation and ongoing learning for the educator workforce. Finally, we underscore the value of an inquiry-based profession in which knowledge building in research practice partnerships revitalizes our educational institutions, the practice of teaching, and the outcomes for students who enter school in 2019 and graduate in 2031.

## **Educator Impact Entwined With Identities, Cultural Knowledges, and Histories**

Recent research suggests that there are a great number of academic and social benefits when students from nondominant racial/ethnic groups are paired with teachers who look like them. Egalite, Kisida, & Winters (2015) found that matching Black and White students with same-race teachers had a positive impact on

reading achievement; improved math outcomes occurred when Black, White, and Asian/Pacific Island students were matched with same-race teachers. When teachers share student race identities, learners have opportunities to engage with authority figures who likely share, understand, and value their cultural–historical heritages and lived realities. Gershenson and colleagues (2017) found that Black students assigned to Black teachers at least once in grades three through five were less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to aspire to attend college. Across the K-12 spectrum, Black students experienced reduced rates of suspension and expulsion and fewer office referrals for the subjectively determined “willful defiance” offense when exposed to Black teachers (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Students benefited from teachers who shared their racial/ethnic physical characteristics, underscoring the importance of identity, mind-set, and aspiration in learning (Fox, 2016). American descendants of slavery, in particular, have long recognized that their individual life chances are tied to the success of their whole race (Dawson, 1994). A linked fate derives from their shared experience of racial oppression and class exploitation (Simien, 2005). When Black teachers educated Black children in segregated southern schools, they committed to racially uplifting their community (V. S. Walker, 2000). Teachers held high expectations for students, taught them to navigate a racist world, provided extracurricular activities, reinforced community values, and emphasized the need for family involvement in school (V. S. Walker, 2000).

The history and experience of being both racialized and marginalized is one of the most significant and enduring cultural–historical factors that distinguishes TOC and SOC from their White counterparts in American public schools. When unaddressed, cultural fissures between and among the teaching force and the current student population have grave implications for teachers and students from non-dominant cultures. Recent research on the schooling experiences of White teachers and TOC reveal the complex ways in which race

and racism manifest in local contexts. Recurring themes include the following: (a) White teachers’ use of colorblind ideology, (b) TOC encounters with racism, and (c) pushback or little support from colleagues when TOC attempt to implement culturally responsive teaching.

Stoll (2014) investigated the attitudes of Chicago teachers toward race and schooling as well as how teachers managed race within their buildings. He selected teachers from three demographically distinct elementary schools that included a school whose student body was majority Black and another in which White students were the majority. Teachers were diverse in terms of race, gender, age, and curricular program (i.e., general education, dual language, and special education). Stoll reported three ways in which many teachers, especially White teachers, constructed colorblind classrooms. First, teachers minimized the existence of racism within their schools and communities. Second, they attributed inequities such as the distribution of income, access to housing, and medical and child care to cultural deficiencies in nondominant groups. Third, they rationalized opposition to policies designed to tackle racial inequality, such as affirmative action, by minimizing the role of policy in achieving equality.

Modica (2015) examined how both White teachers and White students in a mixed-raced, northeastern high school responded to the task of exploring racism through literature. The author found that White students verbalized feelings of resentment and “reverse racism” and felt anxiety over using racial descriptors (i.e., whether to call another student Black or African American) out of fear of being labeled racist. For example, one White male described feeling victimized as a White person because he believed it was more difficult to be cool as a White student than as a Black student. Another White male student explained that he believed the word “Black” was a racial slur and equated it to “cracker,” a racial epithet used to demean White people. Like the White students, White teachers also felt anxious about discussing race and, as a result,

deliberately quashed any situation considered “racially charged” without grappling with the underlying racial power dynamics (p. 409). The White teachers’ unwillingness to engage deeply with the topics of race and racism served to maintain the inequitable systems that perpetuated social hierarchies and marginalizations (Stoll, 2014).

Deckman (2017) analyzed 51 classroom management stories produced by novice secondary teachers in a professional development course that centered race, class, and gender equity in urban schools. Seven racially diverse participants taught special education, English, math, and/or science. Deckman found that the teachers shared stories largely about “managing race” or “race-ing management.” In managing race narratives, teachers described race or racial difference as either the cause of classroom conflict or a transgression of colorblind ideology. In contrast, the teachers’ race(ing) management stories recognized “racial difference as a cause of conflict because of ignorance and racism, with systemic racism identified as a factor” (p. 19).

A set of studies offered a robust body of evidence demonstrating that TOC experienced racism in a variety of ways in school. Kohli (2018), studying how the racial climate of urban schools affected the professional experiences of racial justice-oriented TOC, hypothesized that TOC experienced racism in the form of colorblindness and racial microaggressions. She interviewed a number of TOCs to understand their experiences in the workforce. One Latinx high school teacher described having difficulties building a community of educators dedicated to addressing academic disparities between White students and SOC because faculty members in her school “insist[ed] that all students are the same and should be treated the same” (p. 315). A second teacher, also Latinx, who taught at the school he attended as a student, described how his department chair made a racist joke about Latinx in a department meeting, which ultimately alienated the teacher from his coworkers. Kohli and Pizarro (2016) documented the barriers that racial justice-oriented TOC encountered in their schools as

they sought to challenge injustice. Teachers reported being exposed to racism from their White colleagues. A female TOC stated that White teachers pathologized children of Color and their families when disciplining students. For example, she observed one teacher saying, “If you don’t get your act right, you are going to end up raising your children in the ghetto just like your parents” (p. 79).

Bristol and Goings (2019), Bristol and Mentor (2018), and Brockenbrough (2015) explored the experiences of Black male teachers. In each of these studies, the teachers described navigating hostile school environments where coworkers—White and non-White—frequently engaged in racist and sexist assumptions and discourse. According to the teachers, their colleagues doubted their content knowledge and qualifications (Bristol & Goings, 2019) and treated them as “de facto disciplinarians,” uniquely responsible for managing student behavior because of their combined Blackness and maleness (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Brockenbrough, 2015). Black male teachers spoke about the impact of deviating from school cultures that expected Black men to be firm with students, especially boys of Color. In contrast to their colleagues’ expectations, some adopted nonauthoritarian disciplinary styles focused on relationship building. However, Black male teachers were repeatedly called on to be the “hardasses” (Brockenbrough, 2015, p. 509). At times, they were asked to leave their own classrooms—mid-lesson—to address student misbehavior in other teachers’ classrooms.

TOC also talked at length about bringing with them unique sets of pedagogical practices that were valued by their culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students but received pushback or little support from White colleagues, including administrators. Some practices included the practices of relationality and care (i.e., teachers used community knowledge to build meaningful relationships with students and attend to their social and emotional needs) and the use of students’ second language in the classrooms (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). A female,

Southeast Asian teacher contended there were many issues impacting the Southeast Asian community, “primarily stemming from the Vietnam War and the Cambodian genocide,” and she yearned to foreground those issues in her school (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016, p. 78). Unfortunately, she described resistance from her colleagues who drew on the model minority myth (i.e., stereotype that Asians are monolithically successful and high-achieving) to silence real problems affecting her Asian students and the broader community. Another TOC, in her first year, recounted the faculty’s indifference and resistance to her nomination of a graphic novel about Filipino youth as the school-wide book (Borrero, Flores, & de la Cruz, 2016).

White allies can and do confront the racial biases and stereotypes that percolate through our schools and communities. Achieving equity and justice for SOC requires a commitment from all teachers to deeply engage their students in discussions of race and associated socially constructed identities such as social class (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Despite a wealth of literature exposing the difficulties faced by White teachers when working with SOC and TOC, research exists demonstrating that some White teachers are fully capable of bridging cultural rifts (Goldenberg, 2014). For instance, Boucher (2016) investigated the relationship between a White male teacher and his Black students in a Midwestern, urban high school and discovered that the teacher worked successfully with the students by foregrounding his Whiteness and building solidarity with the students, their families, and other school personnel. The teacher shared stories about his cultural background, created a space where students could freely ask questions and express their thoughts and feelings, established positive relationships with families at the beginning of the school year, and readily took advice from Black teachers on how to better understand Black students. Earlier work on effective White teachers of Black children suggested that the beliefs and practices of three White, female elementary school teachers—identified as effective by leading

Black educators in a historically Black school district—aligned with the beliefs and practices of effective Black teachers described in research literature (Cooper, 2003). Examples included the use of an authoritative (not authoritarian) discipline style, holding high expectations of Black children’s abilities, having empathy for Black children and respect for and commitment to the Black community, and possessing a race consciousness. Unfortunately, the White teachers in Cooper’s (2003) study also deliberately avoided talking about race and racism in their students’ lives. When teachers evade race talk, they telegraph that such conversations are inappropriate or unimportant, undermining the racialized histories and experiences of children of Color. Moreover, omitting race and racism discussion denies White students the opportunity to understand how the exercise of silence and policing talk is a form of privilege that erases some experiences and privileges others. We have raised important questions regarding the degree to which White teachers have the knowledge and skills to provide children who identify as White or of Color with the education they need to navigate a world where race has material consequences. If White teachers are afraid to talk about race with their students, how can they teach meaningful lessons about America’s criminal justice system? Can Black and Latinx families trust that White teachers will instruct their children about what to do and the rights they have if stopped by law enforcement officers? Can communities of Color trust that White adolescents will learn the potential dangers of calling the police on Black and Brown people?

Infusing our educator workforce with racial and ethnic diversity will help deconstruct some biases and stereotypes but teacher education needs transformation. Preparation must invest in building deep knowledge and critical thinking about the historical and contemporary intersections of race and ability through coursework in the humanities and social sciences. Both strategies have great promise in transforming the educator workforce to support underserved, marginalized SOC in general and special education.



## Interdisciplinary Professional Knowledge Informs Practice

The most important contemporary teacher education reform issues are directly related to educational inequalities (e.g., achievement gaps, lack of effective, inclusive education programs, over- and underrepresentation of minority students in special education, and dismal graduation rates for students from minoritized populations; Kozleski et al., 2014; Leko et al., 2015). School systems struggle to close achievement gaps, reframe and reform disciplinary methods, reduce disproportionality (both under and over) in identification and discipline referrals, restructure and improve schools, and increase the effectiveness of inclusive education programs (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Although the equity definition that underlies school improvement has been criticized for its simplistic and static understanding of culture, equity agendas are at the forefront of current national reforms (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). There is growing recognition of the need for educators to comprehend and more directly respond to broader structural inequities such as the racial wealth gap, racial/ethnic disparities in health, poor housing, and food insecurity (Gorski, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Nationally, resource distribution inequities permeate the lives of SOC and contribute markedly to the disparities they face in school (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Equity issues are connected to the 45-year history of over- and underrepresentation of students from CLD backgrounds in special education (Morgan et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2016). Special education has, in many respects, received its students from general education. Questions about who is identified for special education services and for what purpose continue to trouble the field (Skiba et al., 2016). Resolving false-positive referrals requires educational collaboration between general and special education teacher education (Pugach & Peck, 2016). Young (2011) revealed the extent to which one combined credential program in California “(re)produced and reified separate forms of education”

(p. 485). The author explored how general education and special education were organized physically and socially and observed separation between the two disciplines with respect to national and state teacher education policy documents, bureaucratic infrastructure, the built environment, and pedagogy. Young’s (2011) research calls for educational stakeholders to perform critical self-reflection—to ask themselves questions such as, *Is it possible to foster meaningful collaboration between general and special education when the respective programs’ offices and classrooms are physically separated or when general education faculty neglect to teach about disability and special education in their cultural diversity courses?*

One of the important areas of inquiry surrounding disproportionality in referral, identification, and placement issues has to do with the cultural understandings that teachers in general and special education bring to their knowledge of student development, participation, and performance in schools, and designs for learning that support and acknowledge the cultural histories and experiences of their students (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016). The (mis) measurement of learning that places responsibility for particular kinds of outcomes on schools and teachers produces local policy environments that constrain and limit the social and intellectual capital that resides within communities and schools (Mislevy, 2018).

Kuranishi and Oyler (2017) alluded to this in an article examining why Kuranishi failed the edTPA—a teacher performance assessment required for state certification. The authors recounted the troubling story of how Kuranishi, a male special educator of Color, failed the edTPA despite receiving positive reviews from clinical supervisors, his principal, and one student on all program assessments during his yearlong teaching residency in a New York City public school. They analyzed Kuranishi’s edTPA submission and the Pearson evaluation of his submission, juxtaposing Kuranishi’s evidence of successful teaching within an inclusive classroom with the low Pearson scores, and demonstrated that

Kuranishi's use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and culturally sustaining pedagogy was "in conflict with the Pearson/SCALE edTPA expectations or scorer training" (p. 299). Essentially, the edTPA served as an institutional barrier that prevented a person of Color from accessing the teaching profession and providing students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds with a culturally responsive education. Additional research on the edTPA suggested that how the edTPA conceptualizes teaching may constrain TOC's ability to enact social justice pedagogies (Petchauer, Bowe, & Wilson, 2018). Such environments influence the ways in which school administrators and teachers perceive their jobs and contribute to attrition in the teacher workforce (Kozleski et al., 2014). Educational discontinuities are shaped by structural, economic, political, and cultural fissures that give students from nondominant cultures less access to higher education and thus to teaching careers (Moss et al., 2008). Today, more than ever, our educator preparation must respond to these tensions and concerns by engaging sociology, economics, anthropology, and learning sciences.

In the past 5 years, much has been written about the shortcomings of teacher preparation programs in regard to effectively educating and supporting preservice TOCs and preservice White teachers (Cheruvu, Souto-Manning, Lencl, & Chin-Calubaquib, 2015; Griffin, Watson, & Liggett, 2016; Scott & Rodriguez, 2015; Tolbert & Eichelberger, 2014). Researchers reported that teacher preparation programs poorly equipped students to tackle issues of power in their practice and inadequately addressed issues of power and privilege that manifested during interactions between preservice TOC and White teacher educators and preservice teachers. When power goes unexamined, due to hegemony, so does Whiteness (Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, & Galindo, 2014). Understanding the history and function of racism and power in America is especially crucial for achieving equity and diversity in the classroom. Together, CRT and Whiteness studies (WS) can help educators realize that goal, as

they are frameworks for interrogating race, racism, and Whiteness in society, broadly, and in education, specifically (Matias & Liou, 2015). CRT recognizes that race is a social construct with material consequences (Ladson-Billings, 2013) and acknowledges that racism is systemic and a normal, fundamental part of society (Sleeter, 2017). Likewise, WS affirms the socially constructed nature of Whiteness and contends that Whiteness, as an ideology, is prevalent throughout society but remains unseen due to the naturalization of Whiteness and Otherizing of nondominant racial groups (Leonardo & Manning, 2017; Matias & Mackey, 2016). Teachers equipped with the tools of CRT and WS have the power to embrace the voices, cultures, histories, and practices of communities of Color while simultaneously disrupting the centrality of Whiteness in education (Matias & Liou, 2015). When teachers have deep knowledge of the systemic oppression of nondominant groups and the normativity of Whiteness, they can question aspects of the education system that are seemingly objective and culture free. Questions should interrogate how students learn and are assessed, the practice of sorting and categorizing students, what information educators are required to teach, how knowledge is transferred (e.g., from teacher to student), and what languages or dialects constitute *school* language.

CRT and WS can also help teachers grasp, for example, how a complex symptom of larger sociohistorical issues of equity in a society stratified along the intermingled lines of race, language, class, and ability (Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton, 2014) leads to continuing pernicious gaps in achievement, graduation, and post-secondary opportunities. Although the debate regarding causal factors of disproportionate representation has centered on socially constructed dis/abilities (e.g., emotional disturbance, mild and moderate intellectual disability, learning disability), recent evidence indicates that autism also must be considered a racialized disability category. Epidemiological data indicated that race and social status were not predictors of autism

diagnoses (Fombonne, 2007), but recent data indicate an emerging racial disparity on autism identification (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016; Mandell et al., 2010). Investigations of administrative data indicate that this problem has gone unnoticed in special education as early as 1998 (Travers, Tincani, & Krezmien, 2013). Travers et al. (2013) found that Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Native students were significantly underrepresented in the autism category at the national level in all years 1998 to 2006. They also found that African American children were overrepresented in the autism category in 1998 and 1999, but experienced alarming growth in underrepresentation in all years 2000 to 2006. Travers, Krezmien, Mulcahy, and Tincani (2014) investigated administrative autism prevalence at the state level for all states in 2000 and 2007 and found that almost every state imitated the national profile of racial disparity in autism identification. This somewhat sudden emergence of racial disparity in the autism category suggests that a disability category can become heavily influenced by race and implies that CLD students with autism are likely losing the intensive intervention services critical for attaining desired educational outcomes.

Preparing teachers to confront the complexities of culture, diversity, and systemic oppression is no easy feat; however, the latest research on teacher preparation reform offers a variety of avenues for shaping teachers as 21st century cultural brokers. This body of research focuses on two areas: (a) addressing issues of diversity through self-reflection and (b) facilitating learning via unique field experiences. Moore (2018) created a framework for developing educator cultural awareness and used the framework to conduct a case study with 10 in-service general and special education teachers. The framework drew from research on teacher critical reflection and professional learning communities (PLCs) and Yrjö Engeström's (2001) theory of expansive learning. During a 4-week, 10-session course, White and Hispanic participants engaged in a critically reflective PLC collaboration. They read critical read-

ings, discussed the readings with their peers, and wrote personal reflections. The author found that, while in the course, teachers realized that their experiences reflected their cultural values and norms and how their own cultures and norms often varied from those of their students. In addition, Moore (2018) found that the teachers spoke frequently about how colleagues in their respective schools held deficit views about students and families from nondominant groups and attributed those views to cultural bias. Finally, Moore (2018) noted that the teachers intended to produce change in their schools by educating and bringing awareness to their colleagues and by "bridg[ing] negative talk about diverse and exceptional students into problem solving" (p. 250).

Matias and Grosland (2016) investigated how the use of digital storytelling in a diversity course allowed for White teacher candidates to deconstruct Whiteness in teacher education. Rather than receiving lectures from Faculty of Color about the presence of Whiteness in teaching and teacher education, preservice teachers created multimedia projects that contained photos, video, audio, and music and self-reflected on their own identities based off the curriculum of Whiteness. After analyzing 4 years of digital stories, the authors identified several themes. Digital storytelling (a) stopped White teachers' emotional distancing of race and racism; (b) served as a medium for White preservice teachers to debunk colorblind ideology and acknowledge that society is racialized; and (c) enabled White teacher candidates to engage their emotions, which helped combat their feeling of resistance when being confronted with the truth that society is not colorblind.

Miller and Mikulec (2014) explored how preservice teachers—a majority of whom were White, upper middle class or White, first-generation college students—faced issues of diversity in a demographically diverse Midwestern charter school whose daily operations differed significantly from the operations of traditional public schools. The school had "flexible scheduling, no bell system, students were free to come and go as

they please and call teachers by their first names, and students and teachers [congregated] weekly during ‘community’ to discuss and vote on issues within the school” (p. 20). The researchers analyzed questionnaire data administered to teacher candidates before and after their field experiences as well as data from classroom discussions and candidates’ reflective journals and reflective papers. Through their experiences, preservice teachers (a) learned to relate to students who did not share their socially constructed identities (e.g., race, dis/ability, and sexual identity); (b) recognized that all students have differences and share commonalities with others; (c) found value in safe spaces for marginalized youth; and (d) wrestled with how school should be structured.

Heineke, Ryan, & Tocci (2015) studied eight teacher candidates to investigate educational policy in a field-based teacher preparation program in four culturally diverse Chicago schools. Five candidates were White, one was Muslim, one Latinx, and one Malaysian. The candidates’ majors included elementary education, secondary education, and special education. The researchers analyzed assignments and assessments produced by the candidates and found that, in terms of educational policy and classroom practices, candidates understood that (a) various actors (e.g., principals, classroom teachers, superintendents, and district curriculum directors) shape educational policies; (b) policies look different across educational contexts; (c) multiple policies impact daily classroom practice; and (d) teachers appropriate policies to support student learning. The term *appropriate* here refers to the practice of taking an idea or regulation and using it for an unintended purpose (e.g., to support the education of students). Furthermore, Heineke and colleagues (2015) found that (a) module readings, discussion, and reflections; (b) educational stakeholder panels and perspectives; and (c) educational policy engagement in classrooms and schools were all key to the candidates’ learning.

These data point to the need to arm teachers with an array of knowledge across multiple disciplines to tackle the overwhelming

equity challenges impacting children of color and the communities in which they are situated. Implied in this research is also the need to give particular attention to the ways in which teacher educators are prepared to engage in cultural work (Kozleski & Handy, 2017). Developing teachers’ professional knowledge cannot be accomplished without the labor of teacher educators. Teacher educators are the ones who construct environments in which preservice teachers can “understand, engage, and respond to their students’ cultural contexts through the design and development of lessons that connect students’ lived experiences to the standards and curriculum” (Kozleski & Handy, 2017, p. 197).

### **Researching Individual and Collective Educator Identities and Teacher Learning**

We need highly competent, socially committed teachers engaged in the design, development, and/or use of educational and social interventions that result in transformational outcomes. The education arena offers the opportunity to engage in systemic efforts to reveal the historical and contemporary ideologies, policies, and practices that are normalized in our education systems. One of the greatest opportunities for knowledge building and transformation exists within the U.S. education system. Current education outcomes emphasize the persistent inequities in who benefits from the system as it is. Those same outcomes highlight the groups that benefit the least. White, female teachers who are disproportionately represented in the teaching force also come from the racial group that consistently ranks first or second in terms of graduation rates and testing performance. Changing the teacher production cycle means transforming approaches to learning and assessing. These changes must come from shifts in how teachers understand and perform their work. Teachers must steward their profession, working across disciplinary boundaries to address 21st century, interdisciplinary educational challenges. They must recognize that these

challenges require a sense of collective social purpose and that the greatest responsibility is to people most affected by educational failure. This will require a reassessment of teacher education.

Teacher education is a complex process of *formation* emphasizing development of teachers' professional identities, including their recognition of the role that teachers play in knowledge transmission and social and emotional learning. This active professional identity requires that teachers play agentic roles in their identity development. Highlighted below are five critical implementation issues that *teachers need to address through* interdisciplinary teacher education programs that draw on theory and methods across the social sciences. Furthermore, these implementation issues must surface in practice in classrooms to transform the system.

### ***Conceptual Confusion, Knowledge, and Skills***

Teaching is a deeply personal and relational practice. The social, intellectual, and political capital teachers draw from informs the rapid transactions within classrooms between and among teachers and students (Erickson, 2004). Not only do teachers draw on their own rich cultural histories but the institutional cultures in which they practice also mediate the nuances of their practice. School cultures reify certain kinds of knowledge through sorting, gathering, and predicting—to the neglect of other types of knowledge. Particular epistemological assumptions undergird school curricula and constitute knowledge, knowledge accumulation, and knowledge usage (Pugach & Peck, 2016). The very recent history of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States provides a horrific example. The boarding schools sought to erase the cultural heritage and knowledges of American Indians by subjecting young children to systematic bans of their native language and tribal clothing. The erasures were replaced with a one-size-fits-all basic curriculum that erased the children's histories and replaced them with the unreconstructed

U.S. story of the rise of democracy in a nation created out of a wilderness. The Indian Boarding school history is a reminder of the ways in which schooling may or may not account for and connect to the cultural histories and practices of students.

We continue to reproduce histories that reify Whiteness. Teachers have become pawns in this reproduction. What we need is a teaching force that is able to explore deeply the relationships between discipline knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, intervention research, professional content knowledge, and high leverage practices in general and special education. To what extent are these skills universally effective across groups and individual students? To what extent do our school leaders, professional cultures, and institutional structures impact implementation? In what ways are normalized assumptions about what needs to be taught and how impacting the capacity of skilled educators to make informed decisions about what to teach to whom and in what order? Instead of faithfully reproducing the packaged curricula, teachers need to examine the impact of the curricula on their students through an ongoing systematic, evidence-based inquiry in which what is being taught, in what order, is as important as the scientific search for the more effective pedagogies or procedures.

Teaching is a political and cultural practice in which the dominant culture threads through teachers via the lessons they internalize about themselves and their worth. The dominant culture weaves through curriculum in ways that grant access to some students with prior exposure and knowledge through cultural practices in their homes and communities, whereas others lack initial access. It is imperative that teachers are conscious of their role in selecting what to “deconstruct, conserve and transform.” Critically reflexive practice requires thinking critically about personal beliefs, values, and assumptions about the world we live in and how these ideologies impact interpretations and interactions with others (Cunliffe, 2004). Teaching requires knowing students. That is, teachers must know not students as a general class, but

students in particular, the ones assigned to a particular section and a specific time slot. Each classroom of students brings a specific set of individual characteristics, histories, understandings, and learning skills and together they create a community that is specific to that constellation of individuals which includes the teacher. This *classroom constellation* comprises culture in action, as the members seek to find patterns of acting and responding that rely on the mediational tools that the teacher and the students use to communicate, exercise choice, and engage, or resist the disciplined work of learning in a content area (Pugach & Peck, 2016). Teachers assess, plan, evaluate, grade, explain, manage, and communicate with external authorities all in the context of their subject matter. Teachers who have specialized knowledge of their content and their students are able to respond to the needs of their students, selecting experiences and examples that resonate, while teaching the fundamental concepts and tools of their discipline.

Transactions between and among students and teachers not only shape the accumulation and expansion of transmitted knowledge and discovery, they form the web of cultural practices that determine what is valued, permitted, and suppressed (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Assumptions made about students' backgrounds, home life, and access to resources and support undergird decisions about who may need special help, who can flourish with a bit of extra attention, and whose needs are too complex to address (Kozleski & Siuty, 2016). The biases that underlie triage decisions (e.g., distinguishing between who needs extra attention or more complex interventions) are often unexamined in the rush and bustle of daily life in classrooms and schools. Moreover, when teachers come up to breathe and reflect, they are buffeted by school processes and procedures that require them to sort and count in particular ways. Thus, we need more complete research on the use and impact of measurement, progress monitoring, and assessment on changes in teacher activity and subsequent impact on student learning.

## Context and Systems

Increasingly, cities, suburbs, small towns, and rural areas are sharply divided by demographics, values, and expectations for their local education systems (Henig, 2013). Disappointing outcomes and multiple demands seep into local and state policy, converging in debate about curriculum, assessment, and performance outcomes. Preparing teachers for each of these contexts is difficult. Indeed, the work of preparing teachers is to make explicit the impact of these diverse contexts on how locality impacts the ways in which schools and school systems operate *and* to continue to prepare teachers using the best information from learning sciences and education. Context is more than the obvious structures, interactions, processes, and outputs of a system on any given day. In complex human systems, historicity, privilege, and cultural practices play a major role in determining who has access to levers of power and change and how that access is granted. Systems development needs to account for context, locally, regionally, by state and national boundaries (Fixsen, Blase, & Van Dyke, 2012). Understanding this contextual complexity helps to clarify why attempts to improve the quality of novice teachers need to account for regional variation in the constellations of culture, economics, and work force traditions such as a reliance on union/management relationships. Econometrics, big data analyses, and extensive policy work are needed to better understand schooling in context.

Six learning assumptions associated with adult learning guide our proposal for teacher education transformation: (a) teachers must know the reason for learning; (b) experience (including error) and participation undergird learning; (c) teachers are responsible for their learning decisions through planning and assessing instruction; (d) teachers learn subjects with relevance to their work and/or lives; (e) teacher learning is problem, rather than content, oriented; and (f) teachers respond better to internal versus external motivators. These principles which ground

how teacher candidates engage in learning build upon the findings of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID, G. E. Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008) that describe 21st century doctoral education. The CID report argues that doctoral education is a complex process of *formation*. We agree and propose that teacher education faces the same kind of *formation*. Although disciplinary knowledge and skills exist that are unique to an area of scholarship and intellectual expertise, *formation* underscores the importance of growth of “personality, character, habits of heart and mind” and “the role that the given discipline is capable of and meant to play in academe and society at large” (Elkana, 2006, pp. 66, 80). Interdisciplinarity requires a curriculum that focuses on the development of the teacher’s identity through coursework in the humanities and the social sciences, as well as education. A teacher’s professional identity emerges from an active process that each teacher shapes and directs in a PLC called school.

Our framework introduces concepts from other disciplines to build a scholarship of interdisciplinary educational research, leadership, policy and practice using the conceptual framework of *cultural–historical activity theory*, the tools and processes of *systems thinking*, and the *structure and dynamics of complex systems*. Activity theory (Sannino, Engeström, & Lemos, 2016) is utilized to foreground human activity as cultural work that grounds the context, genesis, and praxis of innovation and systems transformation. Second, systems thinking (Kozleski, Gibson, & Hynds, 2012) helps to advance notions of how innovation, practice, and policy travel between micro-, meso-, and macro levels in terms of time, space, and influence. Third, *complexity theory* (Lemke & Sabelli, 2008) is advanced to support modeling and explaining the structures and processes of change in complex systems.

The framework synthesizes and integrates knowledge of culture, activity systems, and complex systems, with the aim of engaging people in educational systems change aimed toward improving equity in opportunities to

learn, participate, and achieve. In this framework, culture percolates all human activity, the imperative of equity in education, its interrogatory partner, social justice, and the complexity of shifting interlinking systems. In the liminal, or in-between spaces that bind systems, individuals, and practices, we find room to negotiate purpose and leverage our collective capital to transform the imbalances and inequities in our conceptions of learning and what it means to be educated. This stance means that when we face problems such as “under-prepared teachers in science and math classes” and “reading test scores of our eighth graders,” educators engage their colleagues to look deeply at the historical and contemporary contexts that are informed by an interdisciplinary education to understand and transform the structures and processes that have conspired to create particular issues. In particular, a critical examination of the cultural practices that frame the problem is fundamental to transforming the system’s ability to design and act on changes that rely on shifts in understanding and behavior on the part of the whole community. To embark upon and stay situated in an equity agenda requires teachers to co-construct features of healthy solutions that will improve outcomes, the equitable distribution of resources, and access to opportunities as well as the tools for learning. To impact equity requires complex analyses that shift, amplify, and transform educators’ understanding and response to the questions of whose education, for what purpose, and for what world.

Teacher education faculty often assume that increased awareness and respect as well as exposure to content on cultural differences will prepare preservice teachers to work with the increasingly diverse school population. Unfortunately, these laudable ideals are not easily implemented mainly because of the dearth of research on preservice teacher education for student diversity. Knowledge gaps include conceptual vagueness (e.g., basic constructs such as multicultural education are not clearly defined), a lack of attention to disability and subject matter considerations, an emphasis on isolated markers of difference

(e.g., race) instead of the intersection of multiple markers, and a lack of research on the impact of pedagogical approaches on teacher candidates (Sleeter, 2014). Furthermore, because of the lack of effective supports during field placements, many preservice programs reaffirm stereotypes about minority students. It therefore is not surprising that preservice (and many practicing) teachers have trouble distinguishing between student learning difficulties resulting from cultural/linguistic differences and/or dis/abilities (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). It is urgent that teacher education faculty improve the quality of the curriculum, pedagogy, and field experiences of preservice teachers who will work with diverse students in high-need schools with CLD populations. Careful, well-designed research studies are urgently needed to redesign for effective educator preparation.

### *Incomplete, Applied Research Base on Learning*

An explosion of research on learning has helped to advance how learning scientists conceptualize optimal learning contexts and designs. A 2013 report sponsored by the National Science Foundation details critical features of learning that include understanding that mastery of knowledge and skills emerges from decisions about how to access and use information distributed across resources, and then applying that knowledge to authentic, complex situations (Computing Research Association, 2013). The report goes on to highlight the importance of a focus on conceptual and analytical capabilities that ensure that learners are able to function, adapt, and problem solve in diverse contexts. Furthermore, persistence/grit, engagement, and stereotypic threat are among the socioemotional aspects of cognition that have important implications for learning. Another influential group of learning scientists outline the important features of what they call connected learning: “. . . learning that is socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward education, economic, or political opportunity” (Ito et al., 2013, p. 4). Thinking of learning in

these ways has implications for moving away from grades and classrooms in discipline-specific arenas. Instead, schools become spaces where generative scholarship occurs where teachers lead students in solving complex, local issues, drawing on the reservoirs of expertise available through the Internet and partnerships with local and community-based groups, organizations, and institutions. In this way, learning involves support, motivation, persistence, and the emergence of expertise through application. This kind of problem-based learning needs to be sensitive to students with a variety of learning diversities. More research is needed to prepare teachers for emerging educational contexts.

### **Discussion**

Supporting diversity and achieving equity require an examination of the White normativity grounding conventional understandings of schooling, teaching, and teacher education. Attracting, developing, and retaining TOC depend on our ability and capacity to re-examine our understanding of the cultures that underlie the assumptions that we make about what constitutes expertise in teaching and mastery of the development of lasting human relationships that influence and sustain learners during their schooling and their lives as adults. Educators must be willing and able to engage deeply with race, racism, and other structural factors and value the cultural-historical assets of SOC and TOC. Much of the focus on intervention research does not consider the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and needs that SOC have for an educational context that recognizes and values their familial and group identities and practices. Nor does our focus on specific kinds of research methodologies and ways of knowing allow for the examination of how the dominant White culture manifests itself in the social, political, and intellectual capital indexed in schooling in the United States. This is not a call to abandon important lines of inquiry. Rather, it is a call to be mindful that we need multiple lines of research that help us invest in a teacher workforce that can meet the social



and political challenges of the 21st century. We need a teacher workforce that leads the next generations toward an intellectual world that can encompass diverse and, at times, conflicting ideologies without marginalizing research that seeks to advance our understanding of the complexities of the social, political, intellectual, and environmental challenges of today and tomorrow. Carver-Thomas (2018) proposed advancing the diversity of the workforce along three dimensions: (a) building supportive pathways to teaching careers; (b) establishing hiring and induction strategies that account for the needs and supports of diverse new teachers; and (c) sustaining improved work conditions for teachers by transforming school leadership. We cannot do this work without the collective will to do it in every teacher preparation institution.

Across the nation, large numbers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) SOC experience bullying and harassment due to their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender expression and receive little support from adults within the building (Burdge, Licona, & Hyemingway, 2014). Just recently, in April 2019, Nigel Shelby—a Black, gay, Alabama teen—died by suicide after being bullied by his peers in school for his sexuality, and according to Nigel’s mom, Camika Shelby, school personnel failed him (Griffith, 2019). In fact, Ms. Shelby reported that during conversations between Nigel and school administrators about homosexuality, administrators told Nigel that “being gay was a choice (Griffith, 2019).” Nigel’s tragic story underscores the pressing need to reimagine and reinvent teaching and teacher education. The lives of students who exist at the intersections of multiple oppressions (e.g., racism, homophobia, and classism) depend upon their educators’ ability and willingness to grapple with these equity challenges that challenge the White normative culture.

As a self-identifying Black man, the second author knows firsthand the shortcomings of American public schools in regard to addressing issues impacting Black boys like Nigel. Neither I nor my classmates were provided

spaces to freely work through personal and societal notions of masculinity, gender, and sexuality, or dialogue about the dangers faced by LGBTQ POC. I observed teachers (a) criticize Black students’ use of Black Vernacular English; (b) police Black students for being too loud, talkative, or rowdy; and (c) relay the message that Black history and culture were insignificant. They failed to foreground Black scholars and leaders (e.g., James Baldwin; Fannie Lou Hamer) and major Black concerns (e.g., the massive racial wealth gap; the crumbling infrastructure in communities of Color). Although administrators and teachers stressed closing the achievement gap, few spoke about the systemic factors that sustained it. My school was concerned with maintaining the status quo rather than challenging it.

For the first author, schooling consisted of White teachers. Memorably, I had Mrs. Palmer in third grade, Mrs. Osborne in fourth, Mr. Hawthorne in sixth, and Mrs. Truman in 11th. Each teacher taught in very different ways, warmed me to learning, encouraged me to explore the library, and made me believe that I was a capable, competent, and successful learner. But I never had TOC. I was lucky to attend a number of schools within and outside the United States where I learned to enter and join new cultures in schools and communities. Without these experiences, I would never have been aware that multiple realities swirled about, inhabiting the same spaces and having different forms of legitimacy. My teachers never spoke of this. It was only standing online as a young mother clutching my infant, waiting for commodity foods to be distributed, that I understood my own privilege. I became a White teacher. It’s time for change.

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