Teaching and Advocating to Prepare Student Leaders for a Diverse Workplace

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Edited by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

NAVIGATING DIVERSE SPACES WITH CULTURAL GRACE

MARY ALICE TRENT, PHD

While many organizations would argue that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are foundational to the way they do business and interact with each other, some would also argue that engaging DEI issues in honest, respectful, and civil conversations often poses challenges. A necessary ingredient for navigating our differences is cultural grace. I define *Cultural Grace* as habits of mutual respect, empathetic listening, fair play, and connectedness.

Cultural grace allows us to demonstrate respect for others and show kindness and goodwill toward other people, even when we do not agree with their diverse viewpoints. Cultural grace allows us to be vulnerable and encourages others to be vulnerable with us as we seek to understand each other and work together to achieve mutual goals. We champion showing up as our authentic selves and invite everyone to show up as their authentic self as we work together to create physically and psychologically safe spaces together.

Cultural grace provides an empathetic ear for others and demonstrates compassion. We listen to understand each other first before we reply to each other, and we give each other the benefit of the doubt. We exercise patience with ourselves and everyone, choosing not to knowingly offend anyone or hold offenses against them. We are aware of our emotional reactivity to what we hear see and experience when we engage each other. Through greater self-awareness, we learn what our triggers and traumas are and how these triggers and traumas impact the way we respond to what we hear and see. Along with our verbal language, we are aware of our tone and body language in dialogue with one another.

Cultural grace promotes fair play and justice for all people at all times and in all places. We accept each other welcome our diversity to the table and seek to include diverse voices in the decision making. At tables of influence, we recognize those who are underrepresented and/or not represented at the table and become allies for inclusive policies, processes, and procedures that create equitable workplaces. Cultural grace is the courage to call each other in, not out when we need to address prejudicial behavior, bias, or stereotypes that threaten equity by seeking to educate and challenge exclusionary customs and attitudes.

Cultural grace embraces the connectedness of our humanity. We need engagement for our social well-being, and we need engagement to collaborate on strategic organizational goals. Innovation and creativity are driven by diverse people who understand the power of the collective imagination. Cultural grace requires courage and discipline to cooperate with a person whose values, worldview, beliefs, and traditions categorically contradict those of another.

As you read each essay in this book, each contributing author offers readers a unique pedagogical perspective from their specific discipline. You will also discover their commitment to teaching, mentoring, and advocating for their student's academic well-being and social well-being and to equipping them with the critical thinking skills, collaborative skills, and communication skills necessary to lead a diverse workspace. Lastly, as you read the selections, each author demonstrates cultural grace in their unique manner, preparing their students to lead with respect, empathy, justice, and connectedness.

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The Habits of Cultural Grace were originally published in a mini white paper penned by Dr. Mary Alice Trent in the *DEI Quarterly Newsletter,* which she currently serves as Editor of, along with Pam Kinslow, the Associate Editor.

CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE MULTICULTURAL CAMPUS: THE ROLE OF FEMINIST RESILIENCE IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

KAREN R. TELLEZ-TRUJILLO, PHD

My decision to become a composition teacher was stoked by a fire that started in me as a non-traditional undergraduate student. I moved between the English and Gender Studies Departments, learning in dialogical spaces that provided me with opportunities to compose in numerous genres and for varying audiences. It was in these classes that I was introduced to the vocabulary I'd long needed to express the frustrations I have felt coming against injustices experienced as a result of my many intersectionalities (Crenshaw). I learned that I am a Chicanx feminist scholar committed to decolonial work, always thinking about the multiple places in which I and my students locate ourselves, the "in-betweens" and "borderlands" (Anzaldua) in which we exist. I am a teacher who encourages reflection and critical examination of the spaces that require us to "make faces,[1]" hacer caras, wear masks that assist us with presenting differently, and as a means of protection from others. Over time, and with practice, I have become a reflective and reflexive teacher and researcher who gives as much credit to experience off campus, as to my formal education.

Because both being teacher and student are embodied practices, awareness of our subjectivities helps us to stay attentive to where we position ourselves socially, and where others position us inside and outside the classroom. With this knowledge, I welcome my students at the beginning of each semester by sharing with them the many subjectivities I enact daily. These

[1] From Gloria Anzaldúa's *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*

include being a partner, mother, and daughter, as well as being a Chicana, middle-class, cisgender woman. Taking a step such as this helps me as I endeavor to work with students toward building an environment in which they feel they can gain knowledge and information about themselves and others. This is an initial step, as students begin acknowledging how their actions affect others, and how others' actions make a significant impact on them. When students reflect on their practices and beliefs, they are supporting themselves and peers who have experienced exclusion, marginalization, oppression, and discrimination.

Teaching in a multicultural space requires acknowledgment of responsibility to our students to create well-facilitated dialogical spaces that encourage sharing, constructive feedback, and ample time for reflection. It is not enough to focus on diversity initiatives that only work to invite more students onto an unequal route. There are numerous ways to work within an equity framework where resources are redirected through pathways needed to fix barriers and intentionally provide support to students. Some of this intentional work can be done in the composition classroom, which is an important site of support and a place of possibility. The reason I think of this space when I think about a multicultural campus is that we can count on finding nearly all students in a composition classroom at some time during the college experience. In *Reclaiming Composition for Chicano/as and Other Ethnic Minorities*, Iris Ruiz writes about the composition classroom, as it "meets the needs of both minority and mainstream student populations" (17) as a space that is ideal for reaching the largest number of students because it serves all first-year students, of all majors, races, classes, and genders, in the university and includes students from a variety of positionings. Students take it as part of First-year composition as a gateway course into the university. It is also one of the few organized communities on campus, in which students learn their classmates' names, unlike the many large lectures attended to fulfill general education requirements. The composition classroom also offers possibilities for reading, discussion, writing, and reflection, all of which can help students begin to explore what a multicultural campus means to them. As well, they can begin to examine how behaviors build and disrupt the possibility of a multicultural campus. I posit that when students know what to look for in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive multicultural campus, they can do their part to build this space, and further, the knowledge they create is transferrable into their leadership roles beyond the classroom and graduation.

Like most people within a community, students don't present with many resources that they believe can affect change. Similar to others also, students

do not hold much power on their campuses or in their communities by way of financial backing or position. It is for this reason that they must begin to think about affecting change through small gestures, rather than through grand acts of resistance. Many composition teachers at my past university felt that it was risky to ask students to examine the racial harm they may have inflicted or that has been inflicted on them for fear that it would trigger emotions that the teacher or student could not manage. These teachers avoided difficult discussions because they were just that – difficult. While this is a valid concern, reluctance or failure to discuss or examine inequity severs opportunities to bring about change. We must remember that students don't come to these conversations empty-handed and can contribute in numerous ways through discussion, writing, and sharing, should they feel comfortable doing so. Chances are that our students have engaged in feminist resilience when faced with adversity[2] in situations such as those being discussed and have much to say.

One might wonder, as I did, the difference between resilience as we have come to know it as a commonplace term, and feminist rhetorical resilience (Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady). Then, one might also wonder how the concept of feminist resilience can be helpful to students in the composition classroom as they prepare for a life in a multicultural workplace and world. Resilience studies span numerous fields from ecology to business and has become a word used too often, particularly around popular discussions around trauma and survival. Most often the term resilience is defined in popular circles as "bouncing back" (Coutu) or returning to a prior state. Expectations of resilient enactment in psychology can often mean relying on individual strength or signaling a positive attribute of one's character. The American Psychological Association notes that psychologists define resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors".

[2] Adversity is oftentimes seen as major events in a person's life such as divorce, illness, death, or injury. What I learned from my student however is that students experience adversity all day long, of varying magnitudes. Students spend each day surrounded by environmental microaggressions (Sue), such as buildings named only after white people, and comments or behaviors they've become accustomed to, so much so that they begin to accept or ignore the effects of microaggressions and implicit biases in which they themselves engage or have come to accept.

In 2012 Elizabeth Flynn, Patricia Sotirin, and Ann Brady edited the collection *Feminist Rhetorical Resilience*. These theorists focused on "social justice, equity, care, and gender…" all of which give attention to "processes and context rather than individual qualities and behavior" (7) when it comes to resilience. Feminist rhetorical resilience is enacted while one works toward "empowerment, growth, health, and transformation" for themselves, as well as for others at the local level in the communities with which they engage, and through small gestures, at the global level (22). Feminist resilience calls for gathering resources and fostering relationships that present additional means to reshape possibilities, and oneself, by seizing opportunities to "change shape to meet the exigencies of…circumstances" (9). Because most are low on power and resources, it is important to focus on the social and relational aspects of feminist rhetorical resilience, as there will be many calls to action in one's lifetime. Seeking the end of adversity is not the goal of these actions, but continuous forward movement is what matters, calling for progression through consistent gestures that need not be grand, but lead toward change.

I developed my concept of feminist resilience by extending Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady's approach to the concept. The development comes from an extension of feminist resilience that calls upon the individual within a community to create responses to being Othered. These thoughtful responses are the product of pause when faced with adversity, reflection during time of withdrawal from adversity, and action as a form of reengagement, or re-scripting of encounters. Pause can take many forms, such as meditation, withdrawal, silence, and removal for instance. It is during pause and reflection that one moves in and out of a liminal space where they can re-script encounters and then choose to reengage as a recursive process that does not rely on the boundaries of time and can be lifelong. In the writing classroom, pause and reflection might look like reading, journaling, or free writing. Reflection and action can take place in discussion and in writing where a student can consider ways that they might re-script encounters and create new meaning. Action can take the form of silence, speaking out, and withdrawal, as small gestures of resistance, for instance.

I came to my definition of feminist resilience while completing a dissertation study[3] in 2020 titled, "*Enactments of Feminist Resilience in the*

[3] In order to accomplish this goal, I was participant-observer in three first-year composition classes at a Southwest Border university. I analyzed two student essays, and interviews with five men who self-selected for this feminist study. Using

Composition Classroom: Re-Scripting Post-Adversity Encounters Through Writing." The objective of this study was to examine the occurrences of feminist resilience enacted by students as they recall resilient responses to adversities faced inside and outside the composition classroom. From my findings, I make an argument about the need for a composition curriculum focused on feminist resilience, a construct that invokes rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe), silence (Reda), and reflection for the sake of re-scripting encounters to adversities of multiple magnitudes. The results of the study suggested that students do not often think about the feminist resilience they enact unless they are explicitly asked to do so. It also revealed that students are more likely to spot resilience in others before recognizing resilient actions of their own. I also learned that through withdrawal and movement in and out of silence as resilient action, students re-scripted encounters as it is in a liminal space that they learn more about themselves and others around them. Lastly, the student participants expressed the belief that resilience is learned from others' actions and through experiences, rather than being something that can be taught as popular culture has suggested. Interviews and essays revealed this to be true, for it was through reflection and pause that the students learned most about how they wanted to engage with the world after they had been in an adverse situation.

When investing such as by incorporating feminist resilience into the composition classroom for the sake of growing as racially conscious leaders and contributors to multicultural spaces, one must acknowledge that the classroom is a place of conflict. It's not easy to write about or discuss how we perceive others, how others perceive us, or how we perceive ourselves. It isn't only the students who are vulnerable in this space, but also the teacher who in that moment commits to facilitate discussions in this space. Susan Jarratt, in "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict," reveals evidence that students benefit from seeing parallels to differences from others and their experiences and writes in support of the role of conflict when conversations that focus on difference take place. Feminist resilience in the composition classroom depends upon these contact zones (Pratt), as well as conflict, for students to make connections across their experiences.

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grounded theory, I answered the following research questions: In what ways is feminist resilience exhibited, how gestures of feminist resilience allow students to re-script encounters and push back on their social positioning, what motivates students to enact feminist resilience, and how processes of enactment of feminist resilience learned, if at all. By answering these questions, I identified numerous expressions of resilience by students, which occurred in a variety of adverse situations.

Without conflict, there is complicity and accommodation, which are both forms of oppression. Jarratt writes, "…those who avoid conflict minimize unforeseen possibilities for using the argument to reconstruct knowledge available to both the teacher and the student" (106). I cite Jarratt because, in the inclusive composition classroom, I envision that students are asked to think about how they exist in their stories of adversity whether it is their own experience, or they have created an adverse situation for someone else. The stories of adversity are often those in which their intersectionalities (Crenshaw) have cut them off from retention, access, and attainment in environments such as the college campus.

I acknowledge that conflict could occur in situations where students fail to relate to the experiences of their peers and do not respond in a way that makes their peers feel as if they were heard. Defensiveness happens and a situation such as this could also occur if a student disagrees with a peer's perception of an event. As well, a student could minimize the trauma caused by the experience another student has endured. The effect of these misinterpretations of their classmates could lead the misunderstood student to shut down or refuse to share as the course moves forward. We can be certain, however, that as our students move out into leadership roles in a multicultural world and have more practice engaging in difficult conversations, the less likely they will be to avoid these challenging conversations or hesitate to ask hard questions.

Coming up against boundaries does not mean that doing the work of feminist resilience ceases to be meaningful or even imperative. As the result of my 2020 research, I note that Jarratt also contends that "When we recognize the need to confront the different truths our students bring to our classes – not only through self-discovery – but in the heat of argument – feminism and rhetoric become allies in contention with the forces of oppression troubling us all" (121). Argument and confrontation, particularly when holding discussions that are more likely to be avoided, can enable self-discovery as to why students hold the positions they do, as well as create an opportunity for understanding across similarities, and more importantly, across differences. A productive place to start is with students acknowledging that we all come to the classroom prepared with implicit biases and meaningful experiences (Trujillo).

Facilitated arguments by the composition teacher have the potential to draw out deeply held beliefs and feelings that are unknown to or ignored by the students and those around them. By not hearing what peers have to offer and are willing to share, students limit themselves by only accessing a

reiteration of the knowledge with which they came to the campus, rather than contributing to their knowledge through others' feedback. Acknowledgment of difference, along with understanding that conflict should be allowed to occur in a classroom, will lead to opportunities for the practicing of argument. Becoming comfortable with this practice opens up the potential to be guided away from persuasion and dominance, or accommodation and consensus, toward the learning of history, context, and the structures of power that bolster deeply held positions. The writing classroom that focuses on feminist resilience is an ideal place for this to occur.

A potential outcome of students being asked to recall situations where diversity, equity, and inclusion toward a multicultural campus are the foci is that they could refuse to write about these experiences and/or resist reflection. There is a risk that students will be afraid to write about feelings that are highly personal for fear of vulnerability, but also because they will then need to face their emotional responses to calling the situation. There is also the potential that students will write what they believe the professor wants to read, resulting in manufactured stories that do not take place at all. In this case, the teacher can rely on a well-crafted reading list to create opportunities for discussion for writing and research.

When the space becomes one where students share openly, there is also a chance that emotionally charged conversations will require extensive facilitation to guide students to and through respect for each other's stories of experience that can and may include pain, regret, shame, or anger. These are the times at which the teacher must decide to reroute a conversation or to take a break. Taking a break can take the form of a writing break, to ask students to write about what they are feeling in this emotionally charged situation. Students can then be given the option as to whether or not they want to share, as this is an exercise in critical self-reflection, rather than a writing prompt used to encourage discussion. Should the discussion end up with an outcome, this dialogue opens up an opportunity to explore the need to modify and challenge long-held beliefs, all of which can lead to change and therefore make this hard work worth the emotional and physical energy it has asked of the classroom community.

Facing racialized issues and automatically turning the discussion into a meaningful moment may not occur every time, but it should be accepted that it is a worthwhile and imperative task. Many students come to class with the idea that one should not call on others for assistance or trust others enough to share their experiences, questions, or concerns, particularly

around topics that are a threat to multicultural spaces. Many students are resistant to looking to their community for help. So, when a teacher asks for them to read about others' experiences with racism, or to analyze others' writing, trust may need to be built before they are willing to share their narratives. When the conversation shifts to writing about one's own experiences with racial aggressions, students might be more apt to rely upon themselves to see their way through the challenges presented by this whether they have been on the receiving or acting end of this aggression. It is common and comfortable to feel positive about relying on individual character strengths to make way through difficulties. By utilizing "creativity and resourcefulness to improve situations, particularly in contexts of adversity where access to resources is limited" (Flynn, Sotirin, Brady 1), students can put feminist resilience to work. Therefore, reading and dialogue should take place before writing and sharing personal narratives.

While I do not suggest that consistent acts of resilience will ease one's comfort with sharing or reflection, the difficulty is worthwhile and lasting to others. It is worthwhile to engage feminist resilience in the classroom because I believe it can help students see how they can use writing to make changes in their lives and the lives of those around them as reflective and reflexive present and future participants in a multicultural campus and society. One cannot become a thoughtful, intuitive, and reflective leader in a diverse society without asking themselves what those actions look like and do not look like.

I propose that it is not until students encounter the emotions they feel as a result of acknowledging their adversities and recognizing their resilient responses that they can begin questioning the racialized and oppressive structures at the root of the situations they have faced in classrooms and across campuses. However, recognizing this is just the beginning of a lifelong journey that will take many starts and stops. By acknowledging that they have faced or been complicit in an incident of racial or other adversity, students can then begin to communicate more deeply about their resilient responses. My early analysis of enactments of resilience reveals that it could be years before a student can have insight into their resilience, but this one-semester experience gives the students the tools to store until they are ready to put them to use.

A critique of my position is the limited progress that can be achieved in one semester and how much impact the experiences in a classroom can have on an entire campus. I do not mean to suggest that the work is not lasting and valuable. The readings assigned to students can contribute significantly to

the richness and rigor of the writing and discussion that ensues after the reading takes place. As noted in my 2020 monograph, I would suggest including such readings as Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue", Chimamanda Adichie's "The Danger of the Single Story", and Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue". But I also see the potential that would come from students reading Jacqueline Jones Royster's "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own", as well as critical readings by authors such as Fan Shen, Bell Hooks, Min-Zhan Lu, Roxanne Gay, Audre Lorde, Victor Villanueva, and Bernadette Calafell, and fiction from Sandra Cisneros, Sherman Alexie, and James Baldwin. I believe texts such as these will continue to resonate with students who see some of the enactments of resilience they experience in the writing of others. Readings that explore approaches to human resilience in composition studies can help with students' understanding of what resilience is and what it is not (Trujillo).

While there are many tools to assist with teaching racial equity in campus spaces, the use of language, rather than data, is where the composition classroom can be the best place to start discussions. In "From Silence to Words," Min-Zhan Lu recognizes the challenges that students face in their classrooms from discomfort to conflict. Language is often an issue students wrestle with within the classroom, especially for students who use one language at home and another at school. Readings by authors like Lu, Vershawn Ashanti Young, Fan Shen, and Gloria Anzaldúa are beneficial to students who are working to make sense of the role of language in their lives and the roles language plays in access, equity, and inclusion. Rather than using data to analyze equity gaps in our national and global society, composition students should work with readings to which students may relate. These readings can come from academic authors, as well as from classmates.

I draw on Lu's "From Silence to Words" because like many students, Lu spoke one language at home, another outside of the home and at school, and recalls, "But I was silent. My understanding of my education was so dominated by memories of confusion and frustration that I was unable to reflect on what I could have gained from it" (437). Students struggle when they are in between languages and cultural experiences, and I posit that this is where silence can feel safe for students, and speaking up or pushing back can feel dangerous for students. The same silence can come from experiences of exclusion and racial aggression. Studying feminist resilience provides an opportunity for students to work with issues they face in the classroom as they prepare to become global citizens, preparing to work with diverse people. Readings such as those mentioned above can lead to rich

discussions in the classroom, as well as to reflective reading responses, and personal writing through free-writes, journaling, or narrative essays.

By facilitating discussions in response to assigned readings, teachers can take advantage of opportunities for productive spaces of exploration, conflict, and discovery. These discussions provide students with opportunities to respond to the adversities faced by authors. Students can also unpack their resilient responses to the readings. I further propose that maintaining consistent journals will assist students in becoming more comfortable with writing to themselves as an audience, as they consider the adversities that they have faced and are facing. Writing assignments that begin as narrative and extend into research will help students understand oppressive structures that they have experienced on campuses that are not inclusive (Trujillo, 2020).

A writing prompt with which a writing teacher can begin is to ask students to reflect on the act of accommodation (Chase). By this, I refer to the accommodation that has come from gender and racial expectations that are both imposed upon others through behavioral expectations and modifications and rewarded from childhood and into adulthood in both public and private spaces. When students write and share from the perspective of times when they have made accommodations at the expense of their discomfort, there is also a fruitful opportunity to write and share in reflection of times when they have made others uncomfortable. A writing prompt could be as straightforward as, "Write about a time when you stayed feeling uncomfortable because you were afraid to speak up." By revisiting times when we may have accommodated others at our expense, or expected others to do so, we are creating awareness of actions we do not want to take in the future.

As part of the conclusion to my 2020 study, I encouraged students to write to various audiences, to themselves as the audience, to me as a teacher an audience, and to their peers as an audience. I also encourage them to write to an audience to which they could advocate for change. For example, a student wrote about how bullying has affected him, and he didn't see his teachers reacting, so he chose to write to his principal as his audience, in the form of a letter. Opportunities such as this one create the potential for a student to write in a way that doesn't instantly create a text that they think the teacher wants to read or hear. Writing to different audiences invites writing that recognizes the "multiplicity of the 'self' and 'voice,'" a point that is brought to attention by Anzaldúa, in Andrea Lunsford's "Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality." Writing to different audiences creates the possibility and likelihood of

expression of ideas and emotions appropriate to that audience. Regarding my study of resilience, I believe students writing about their experiences to different audiences, including themselves will reveal varying aspects of the ways that they enact resilient behavior, as well as the situations of potential exclusion in which resilience is called for (Trujillo).

I also believe journal keeping in composition class is integral to the writing practice that takes place for reflection on experiences they may want to work through on their own. I think journaling as a practice during which students can write privately about their experiences as students. The journal would not be a place where they would write specifically for the sake of sharing unless they chose to, but as a place to set down what they are encountering throughout the semester, with hopes for later visitation of their experiences and responses. I believe that as students write, they will create a memory of the experience, for the sake of re-visitation when they are ready. Because resilience does not follow a timeline, students can revisit their responses to adversity when and if they feel prepared.

Recognizing that students and teachers struggle to identify resilience, strengthens my position that composition teachers need to create opportunities for students to read, write, talk, and think about not only what has happened to them or how they have behaved, but also how they have responded in the past. As a feminist teacher, I am typically drawn to the experiences that come through in my students' writing because they seem to be the experiences that have stayed on their minds. These are the stories that need to be brought to the surface because when we do not stop to discuss the situations we encounter, we cannot argue or bring to focus the structures that uphold or perpetuate the difficulties. It is only when these issues are brought to light that we can begin to heal and work toward change as practitioners and students in a multicultural world.

While I don't anticipate that a monumental change or life-changing reflection always occur over the course of one semester, I am confident that students will not quickly lose the stories shared by their peers and by the authors to whom they are introduced. Like adversity, change does not have to be extreme to be impactful. Like the transfer of knowledge outside the campus, the effects of reflection and sharing cannot always be measured. Similarly, the acknowledgment and development of feminist resilience as a response to racial adversity cannot be measured unless a researcher has worked with a particular group for many years. However, I posit with conviction that once the students begin to tune themselves toward their own

and others' feminist resilience, as well as behaviors, they will be more likely to spot resilient action throughout their lives.

There is a vital need for teachers to create spaces where students study feminist resilience as a resource that does not rely upon access to power or an individual strength but engages intellect and community to spark change. Feminist resilience is a promise that we can do better than return to who we were before facing unavoidable adversities that come from racialized beliefs and behaviors. It is an assurance that if we do the hard, emotional, and time-intensive work required of sharing, responding, arguing, welcoming conflict, and recognizing differences, we are taking a step in the right direction toward bringing about change, one small gesture at a time by empowering future leaders to create a more equitable society where everyone can feel that they are included and belong.

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CHAPTER TWO

AMERICA'S UNFINISHED BUSINESS: EQUITY IN EDUCATION; CREATING ACCESS FOR BIPOC STUDENTS AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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One of the most pressing matters for America's society is the continuous lack of access to quality education for the majority of citizens. As citizens, students from diverse backgrounds too often find themselves locked out of higher education, and those who do get through the door often lack the support for their success. Creating access to quality education for all students is impacted by the social construct of race. In their article, "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity," Gita Gulati-Partee and Maggie Potapchuk capture what seems to be the unfinished business of America that seeps into all sectors of society, including education:

> "Against the backdrop of persistent racial inequities in every region of the country and across nearly every aspect of U.S. life, few foundations can escape reflecting on race and how it relates to their grantmaking priorities, internal operations, and community leadership. While many foundations have chosen to focus on diversity and inclusion, a small but growing number have engaged more deeply with the cumulative impact and current reality of structural racism – the ways that history, culture, public policy, institutional practices, and personal beliefs interact to maintain a racial hierarchy" (p. 25).

Disproportionately students from Black, Indigenous, and other populations that identify as People of Color, otherwise known as BIPOC, live with the lifelong impact of America's lack of inclusive educational equity. The above quote highlights how persistent systemic bias occurs and is at the root of what students experience or do not experience in America's schools. If

America is to finish the business of "We the people to form a more perfect union, do hereby declare…," then a consistently inclusive school system will be needed to reflect broader society.

Many works such as *A Class Divided: Brown Eye/Blue Eyes* by Jane Elliot reveal the impact of what happens when students internalize their role, place, and acceptance in school and society (PBS/frontline). The impact of bias based on race often starts as early as Kindergarten and persists throughout a child's entire academic career and beyond. BIPOC students come from communities that are part of the fiber that makes America what it is on the global stage. Access to opportunities prepares students for becoming leaders of tomorrow. Equity as a way of life includes quality education, which benefits all of society. Without inclusive education, America misses out on the innovation that diversely talented students bring. Educational equity is an essential ingredient in America's global story.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in 2011 explained the purpose of education and relied upon the scholarship of Arthur W. Foshay:

> "The main purpose of the American school is to provide for the fullest possible development of each learner for living morally, creatively, and productively in a democratic society." "The one continuing purpose of education, since ancient times, has been to bring people to as full a realization as possible of what it is to be a human being. Other statements of educational purpose have also been widely accepted: to develop the intellect, to serve social needs, to contribute to the economy, to create an effective workforce, to prepare students for a job or career, and to promote a particular social or political system. These purposes offered are undesirably limited in scope, and in some instances, they conflict with the broad purpose I have indicated; they imply a distorted human existence. The broader humanistic purpose includes all of them, and goes beyond them, for it seeks to encompass all the dimensions of human experience" (Foshay).

Tapping into the intersections covered in the above work is what advancing educational access for all students in America should entail. To prepare the next generation of leaders with skills that are inclusive and innovative, diversity is essential. It is in the hallways of America's schools that effective cross-cultural skills are built, and it will be these skills that give the most positive return to America.

The 2019 National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) report titled *Condition of Education* shows overall higher education access for BIPOC populations, referencing: "Asian young adults (58 percent), two or more

races (42 percent), white (42 percent), hispanic (39 percent), black (36 percent), pacific islander (21 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native (19 percent)". The Condition of Education section of the report presents 48 indicators [that impact student's success] on topics ranging from prekindergarten through postsecondary education, as well as, [education's impact on] labor force outcome." When society seriously considers current trends in education addressing equity, access should be a part of anchors that support what falls under advancing diversity and inclusion. The importance of supporting access to quality education for BIPOC students is reinforced by many data points.

Diverse students' educational experiences are good indicators of where educational institutions should focus and for which areas need immediate attention. Facts on educational experiences are relevant because they intersect with outcomes on the US economy and workforce. Questions related to educational access should guide actions regarding the experiences of diverse students, such as

1. What happens to talented socio-economically diverse students when they can't access needed learnings that shape them into successful students, workers, career holders, leaders, and contributors to the economy in the best way possible?
2. What happens to the best and brightest from BIPOC populations when the opportunity is denied generation after generation?
3. What happens to America when there is no diverse innovation at the teaching table, in corporate boardrooms, shaping healthcare, part of housing decisions, speaking with agricultural and technology policymakers, and more?

To prepare a successfully inclusive leadership pool for the future, policymakers in the field of education will need to build strategies that galvanize inclusion to produce such leaders. The work of creating equity access will be needed to avoid leaving out those who have been left out far too long. Education has long been the socioeconomic game-changer, and this is the arena where leadership preparedness happens.

An essential question for any 21st-century strategy must include a look at educational outcomes. One such question might be: What is the future of America's quality of life when BIPOC students are entering and exiting college at rates consistently below average? Liz Tovar offered insight on how students from diverse backgrounds should be received at the doors of post-secondary institutions: "Let us state unequivocally that diversity,

equity, and inclusion remain as core values within our institution" (Inside Higher Education, 10/7/2020). The future of America's overall quality of life and global standing cannot be separated from core values rooted in high-quality education.

The actions of quality leaders transform people and society through critical thinking and open the doors to a bold future. Removing persistent barriers in education directed at BIPOC students will lay a path for innovative thinkers, and fill the pool of leaders with young minds that reflect America's society at its best. The 2009 National Governor's Association Report titled "Building a High-Quality Education Workforce: A Governor's Guide to Human Capital Development" gives us more insight into the role of education in supporting a platform that develops what is needed for leadership development. The concept of human capital development draws attention to the need for a well-prepared diverse student body capable of leading and influencing a global audience. Human capital should not be overlooked in the discussion of what benefits come from the intersections of a diversity of lived experiences. This way of thinking can guide preparation for designing an inclusive learning experience for all students. The link is access to quality education that fosters inclusion. The benefits of having a social commitment in America for building future readiness will only happen with the assurance of access to school experiences that demonstrate an understanding of diversity as an asset. Equity education is at the core of achieving equity across all sections of America. Illinois State Government 2010 report said it best under the heading *Recommendations to Improve Education and Workforce:* "For our region to prosper economically and sustain a high quality of life, it needs an educated, skilled labor force. Researchers, business leaders, and elected officials agree that the quality of our workforce is one of the most important factors — if not the most important — in strengthening the region's economy."

Further, on this matter of equity and education, *Inside Higher Education* (IHE) October 2020 special edition stated,

> "The Black Experience in Higher Education has not been exempted from scrutiny during America's current racial reckoning. Far from it, people increasingly question whether colleges and universities have failed in their stated mission of increasing equity in society. Racial disparities in higher education funding could widen during an economic downturn. Since the last recession, the U.S. has made little progress on the funding gap for colleges that serve disproportionate shares of students of color. That gap may widen as the country heads into another recession."

Achieving outcomes that erase barriers requires policies that produce a broad-reaching systematic social justice focus. For this to happen, K-12 schools and higher education institutions need to address areas of disparities (e.g., advising, guiding, and improving culturally relevant practices and pedagogy) through inclusive practices throughout the entirety of a student's educational career. Predictably, without such changes, we will continue to witness disparities based on racism and classism in American schools.

Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros, in "Seeking Predictability in Uncertain Times," addresses the uncertainty that comes from being denied access to quality education (p. 19). The article, though focused on events tied to COVID-19 through the lens of a Tejana, Chicana, brings home what many from BIPOC backgrounds may feel when it comes to unpredictable outcomes for their lives due to imposed barriers. Many voices of work outline the importance of an education that fosters social inclusion. When students have opportunities to learn in classrooms and hallways that support social equity, we will start to see the decline of systemic racism. We will start to see the removal of what hinders and stifles positive views of a diverse society and diverse leadership.

The persistent use of "negative images about African Americans and other marginalized groups underscores unconscious bias that as much as 80 percent of white Americans hold against black Americans… All racial-ethnic minority groups are stereotyped more negatively than whites'' (Wilkerson, p. 186). In her book, *Caste* (2020), Wilkerson reflects on the work done by Harvard's sociologist D. R. Williams, which reinforces how internalized social behaviors harm a healthy workforce [society] (p. 186). Such insightful scholarship stresses the need for in-depth work on unconscious bias, which impedes access to quality education and other components of society. Marginalizing groups through the use of a caste system limits the development of diverse students' potential/leadership skills. Equally so, the dominant culture, whites, are harmed as well because they struggle with seeing themselves in their socialized role, which is often one with bias. The outcome is a social lens that has their struggle with accepting BIPOC in roles beyond stereotyped subordinates or followers. Internalized racism starts early in many diverse students' experiences, who are often treated not just as different but as inferior. Removing barriers cannot be done in isolation; educational institutions cannot fix themselves, but they can start to contribute to removing what is continuing to be the unfinished business in American schools: inclusive equity.

In a race-based complex society like America, educational institutions are ground zero for change. The interconnectedness of race is tied to all things American. Therefore, educational institutions' solutions must be dynamic and interrelated regarding educational equity by design. "All these experiments, orders, and systems were bound to attract, and perplex the government and the nation" (DuBois 12). Solutions that press forward relevant policies designed to create answers that tackle a road laden with complex issues will bring deep, systemic, immediate, and long-lasting changes. At those intersections, diverse students exit educational institutes equally prepared to be dynamic leaders in a socially healthy society. To view, and value all life equally is tied to a lens such as this; "Society can be more magnanimous when people perceive themselves as having an equal stake in the lives of their fellow citizens" (Wilkerson 353-357). Blanket educational policies about valuing diversity cannot guide equity work, and what is needed for culturally responsive educational experiences for BIPOC students.

Megan Cantwell, in "How Systemic Racism Shaped the Ecosystems of U.S. Cities," adds to the knowledge that America has an ecosystem deeply interwoven with race. Education matters are a part of this ecosystem, which requires balance because each component contributes something different yet valuable. Like all ecosystems, there are healthy or unhealthy components. America only needs to look at its current eco-socio/political/health/economic structures to see what it has produced by creating and continuing to support a system based on arbitrary racial suppression to know that our society is out of balance (Vestal). "I raise my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard" (Malala Yousafzai).

Carrying the theme of America's ecosystem a step further, a look at the work from The American Medical Association (AMA) underlined how America is out of balance because "Racism is a threat to public health" (O'Reilly). Science Magazine also tells of the "impact of racial segregation … on urban ecosystems in the United States… [and why] ... incorporating justice, equity, and inclusion into practices [will] improve public and environmental health" (Cantwell). This work explains the documentation of the mounting stress across all populations in America and explains why racism has been declared a health hazard. Such statements should invoke actions that translate into a healthier student educational system. Confronting racism requires systemic policies to eliminate the health hazards it brings. School systems only reflected the correlation allowed in America between race, academic success, resource allocations, graduation

rates, career path, and income. However, education does hold the power to influence society and activate needed change that supports the potential of BIPOC students.

A society with a lens of equity, inclusion, and governing policies centered on access are actions that will ensure a pool of diverse leaders emerge from America's schools. The economic benefits for all Americans are rooted in quality education. Historically narrow views of who can lead should no longer be allowed to shape decisions that impact America's standing in the world. Admiral Michelle J. Howard, an African American, put it this way, "By taking the time to educate ourselves on our history and the people who shaped this nation, we can more fully appreciate the ideals set down by the founders… It's a reminder that our work is to sustain freedom and ensure that rights and liberty belong to all our citizens." When it comes to what diversity brings, Admiral Howards says "When you have a diverse team, you get different perspectives that help you to succeed. It's about having a team that has lots of ideas and grabbing the best one – that's what diversity brings you" ("The African American Experience in the U.S. Navy"). Leaning into this key learning educational institution could gain traction in helping BIPOC experience success by creating a platform centered on critically thinking about how to amplify diversity in ways that gain from a variety of lived experiences.

Margaret Wheatley, in many of her works, addresses the link between access to diversity being the key to access to innovations and the benefits of such relationships:

> Our twenty-first-century world is descending into aggression, fear, and separation. War, genocide, violence, slavery, pandemics, poverty, natural disasters – all these are commonplace in this new century, despite most people's deep longing to live together in peace. What are we going to do about this? What role do we choose to play? Do we withdraw and hope at least to live a satisfying private life? Or do we turn to one another and do what we can to birth a healthy future? Relationships are what matters–even at the subatomic level. Life is a vast web of interconnections where cooperation and participation are required. Chaos and change are the only routes to transformation… non-linear networks and self-organizing systems are flourishing in the modern world, and during turbulence, we create work and lives rich in meaning (2006 and 2009).

Living in such a society, as outlined above will work best when a platform of social equity is embraced, and that includes starting early in schools to bring change.