

# White Teachers, Students of Color: How to Respond?

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# What do our schools look like?

- In the US educational system, students of color represent the majority student populations
- Educators in these settings are predominantly white and female
- “The pedagogy of poverty rewards [students] for being docile and punishes them for being overly vocal or expressive.” (Emdin, 2016)

# Scope of the issue

- Specific issue: White teachers, students of color
- Broader issue: Teachers and students of all types will need greater cultural competence on multiple dimensions to thrive in the classroom and beyond

# Purnell Model for Cultural Competence

- Primary characteristics of culture: age, generation, nationality, race, color, gender, religion
- Secondary characteristics of culture: educational status, socioeconomic status, occupation, military status, political beliefs, urban versus rural residence, enclave identity, marital status, parental status, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, gender issues, & reason for migration (sojourner, immigrant, undocumented status)

# Educators too often. . .

- Make assumptions about their own positionality in the school/society hierarchy
- Fail to acknowledge their own positionality with their students
- Experience discomfort with and fear of their own biases
- View the academic ability levels of students of color from a deficit standpoint
- Fall into the “white hero teacher” narrative of colonialism (problematic savior complex)

# What can we do?

- Learn about our students' backgrounds
- Learn about our community context
- Consider our own racial & cultural identity
- Construct our own racial/cultural autobiography
- Seek out experiences with individuals, groups and organizations that are unfamiliar to us
- Understand how white power is deeply rooted in American education

# How can we respond?

- Develop our cultural competence as teachers, advisors, administrators
- Employ culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994)
- Find out about and experiment with good practices such as reality pedagogy (Emdin, 2016)

# Sources

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.
- Emdin, Christopher. *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood. . . And the Rest of Y'all Too*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.
- Purnell, Larry. *The Journal of Multicultural Nursing & Health* 11:2, pp. 7-15, Summer 2005.



# Further reading

- *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (Mahzarin R. Banaji & Anthony G. Greenwald, 2013)
- *Everyday Bias: Identifying & Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives* (Howard J. Ross, 2014)
- Teaching Tolerance ([www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org))
- *What If? Short Stories to Spark Diversity Dialogue* (Steve L. Robbins, 2008)
- *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* (Claude M. Steele, 2011)