
Foreword

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This is a critically important book. This book is important for the manner in which the complexity of teaching and learning is intertwined with a refreshing straightforwardness in what is possible and achievable. The complexity tackled in this book is a generations-old struggle, namely, the education of all students in our diverse society. The major value of this book is the authors' approachable manner in which they straightforwardly pose three implicit and pivotal questions: *What* structures do we need to develop in order to effectively educate our students? *How* do we develop support systems for facilitating student learning? *Why* are my assumptions and deeply held habits of practice with regard to our students important to the development of trust with colleagues and basic to transformative changes that benefit our students?

As educators and authors, we, Delores and Randy, have been engaged in equity-based work for over four decades and have observed slow progress in schools shifting from deep-seated resistance to a burgeoning support for equitable educational practices. Active and passive resistance are still expressed in comments such as, "*Given the circumstances these students come from, we can't expect too much.*" Or, "*They are doing the best they can for who they are.*" The "circumstances" and "who they are" are too often focused on students' race, ethnicity, gender, or social class not being aligned with white middle-class norms and experiences. Increasingly we are witnessing educators and schools, albeit unevenly across the country and with pockets of deep antagonism, embracing the notion that all students can learn to high levels. When progress is evident, schools reject the cultural deficit model and regard students' cultures as assets on which to build their (and our) educational experiences.

In the educational history of the United States, systemic awareness of racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic academic achievement gaps

is a fairly modern concept. Reading and mathematics achievement gaps were first ushered onto the consciousness of educators with the initial National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report in 1971. That ground-breaking report documented the gender and racial achievement gap for 9, 13, and 17-year-old students in reading (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005). It was followed in 1973 by the NAEP report on mathematics that described gender and racial achievement gaps. NAEP has continued to issue reports every odd-numbered year since then and has provided the reports to school districts and related agencies across the United States. Unfortunately, those reports were rarely embraced or studied by mainstream educators and too often were remanded to those involved with Title I or school desegregation programs. President George W. Bush revealed the achievement gap to all educators and the general public with the signing of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. What had been the province of equity advocates became public and set forth a veritable tsunami of finger pointing, ill-conceived accountability measures, and consternation among educators who were content to avoid equity issues. However, for equity advocates, NCLB provided a “silver lining” by removing systemic excuses of blaming students for their under-education, and rightfully, holding us, educators and our schools/districts, accountable for identifying and closing achievement gaps.

A myriad of programs and approaches to addressing “achievement gap issues” were rolled out by commercial enterprises and think tanks in response to NCLB and related state level actions. A common characteristic of most programs is that they provided educators with detailed processes for the *What* and *How* of educational reform and change. The downside of such efforts has been programs, strategies, and accountability movements that promote mechanistic, top-down approaches but do little to engage teachers and administrators in substantive dialogue about curriculum or pedagogy. Such approaches have rarely involved educators in understanding how student engagement is hindered or facilitated by uncovering the assumptions embedded in curriculum and instruction. In marked contrast, Colton and her colleagues contend that the professional learning of educators is a key ingredient to accessing and narrowing achievement disparities. In presenting professional learning as the central activity in their *Framework: Teacher as Collaborative Inquirer*, the value of *Why* is coupled with the *What* and *How* in fostering personal, professional, and institutional changes required in transforming assumptions about teaching, learning, and leading (Sinek, 2009). This approach is what sets this book apart from others.

This book demonstrates that the inquiry approach is important at two levels: (1) guiding educators to understand the manner in which their

assumptions and beliefs about student cultures influence how they interact with students and (2) engaging educators with colleagues in ways to facilitate student learning. The Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL) engages educators, teachers, and administrators as co-learners. This book is a substantive rewrite and update of their successful 2003 ASCD publication. This new edition is recognition by these reflective authors that they, too, continue to learn. In doing so, this volume holds cultural diversity and the transformative power of educators as a central organizing theme in recognition that the question pivots away from asking *if* students can learn to asking what is it that we educators need to learn in order to be effective teachers and school leaders. In doing so, this becomes a critically important book. The authors provide a source of hope for today's educators. The hope is found in the authors' clearly defined framework. The Framework: Teacher as Collaborative Inquirer defines the knowledge, skills, and dispositions possessed by teachers who successfully pursue, discover, and apply responsive approaches for learning so that each and every student reaches standards of excellence. This approach translates hope into practice and reality for educators and the students they serve.

We close as we began this essay: this is a critically important book. The authors demonstrate that we have the capacity to learn what it takes to teach all students to higher levels than ever before.