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# *Prologue*

**D**ear Reader,

Welcome to a journey of self-discovery. Since you chose to read this book, you must be interested in learning about the impact of race upon your students, and in particular, children identified as biracial or multiracial students. This book is an endeavor to examine what educators need to know about multiracial students presented in the format of a learning journey.

As with any journey, we begin in one place and end in another. The place where we end may not be, and probably will not be, the destination we had planned, but that is part of what makes it exciting. For this journey, we need our minds and our hearts as we embark on a journey to cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency is a “mindset for how we interact with all people, irrespective of their cultural memberships” (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 21). It is a worldview, and the lens through which we see the world. It is “who we are, more than what we do” (p. 20). Our journey is about cultural proficiency.

The journey to cultural proficiency includes creating spaces for individuals who differ from us then listening to their stories and learning from them. As we reflect and interact with the racial narratives found in the book, we develop racial literacy. Racial literacy is the ability to “talk with people in order to understand and address racially loaded controversies” (Bolgatz, J. p. 1). I would add it is the ability to be fluent about issues of race and to understand the power and impact it has upon us and the students in our classrooms.

In order to be fluent about issues of race and address racially loaded controversies, we must engage in courageous conversations about race. To do this, we need a guide. I found a guide in Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton’s book *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (2006). The book provides a framework for dialogue about race and informs the journey I take with this book.

I recently read an article that spoke to the differences between young people (born after 1980) and those of earlier generations. The new generation

values transparency and disclosure; earlier generations tended to believe more in “minding one’s own business” and “keeping it in the family.” Transparency and disclosure is everywhere in our present society. Reality shows speak to this phenomenon as do Web sites, such as Facebook, text messaging, Wikipedia, and all the other technology sites and tools that allow us to know where our friends are and what they are doing any minute of the day. We live much more public lives, should we decide to do so.

This book mirrors that new transparency and disclosure. The people in this book volunteered to disclose their private lives so we could better understand the cultural lens of those who live lives of mixed identity. This is their reality. Each of us struggles to understand reality and what we can do to better navigate our reality. My hope is that this book offers a vehicle to navigate your reality in a fresh new way in hopes we can grow together to better understand what we *don’t know we don’t know* about others’ realities. Why do we do this? To give meaning to others’ lives and to our own. We seek to understand so we can be better at what we do.

## **HOW DID THE JOURNEY BEGIN FOR ME?**

The journey to understand multiracial students began with the birth of my children. As a white mother of multiracial children, I felt the need to learn what I could about the impact of race upon my children, my students, and me. You will learn more of my racial history in this book. Even though this book is written from the cultural perspective of a white woman, it is written for anyone who works with the cultural mosaic of students who fill today’s schools.

## **WHAT CAUSED ME TO WRITE THIS BOOK?**

Two things happened around the same time. I wanted to write a book for educators on multiracial students and found an editor who believed in the project. I began my research during the year I became a grandmother for the first time. My granddaughter is multiracial. She is Black, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and White.

When we drove to the hospital to pick up the birth certificate and accompanying paperwork, an interesting thing happened. They asked Reeve, my son, his race, and he replied, “African American.” Brenda, the baby’s mother, replied, “Hispanic.” Nowhere in the paperwork for my first grandchild was there a mention of my whiteness. I was proud my son was confident of his identity and designated himself as African American, yet I wondered, “Where is the whiteness of my granddaughter?” or “Where am I?” This caused me to wonder even more about the entire equation of race—its designation, power, influence, and control over our lives and the lives of those we love.

## WHAT WE *DON'T KNOW WE DON'T KNOW*

Two things—the research for this book and the birth of my granddaughter—catapulted me to a place where I wanted to know more about what I “didn’t know I didn’t know” about race, racism, and privilege. As a result of this study and writing this book, I think about race, racism, and privilege in a different light.

When I give workshops, I tell educators that we are going to examine “what we don’t know we don’t know.” The journey we take in this book examines the space of not knowing—what is it that I, the author, do not know I don’t know? What is it that you, a white educator, don’t know you don’t know? What is it that you, a monoracial individual who is not white, don’t know you don’t know? What is it that you, a multiracial individual, don’t know you don’t know?

## WHY THIS BOOK IS AN IMPORTANT JOURNEY FOR YOU

If you feel the need to *know* and to operate from a place where you “know” the answers, the study of racial issues provides more than a bit of discomfort. Even if you relish ambiguity, the study of race offers dissonance and *unknowing* in large spoonfuls. Yet we must journey there. We must create a space for not knowing in order to begin to learn what we don’t know about race, what we don’t know about racism, and what we don’t know about racial privilege. We must create and then leap into a space of not knowing in order to grow as educators and learn how to provide an inclusive racial climate in which all students can thrive. This book offers that space for a journey to do the following:

- examine your own assumptions, values, and beliefs about yourself and others;
- learn from other educators and students who view the world differently from you and interact with their narratives through written responses; and
- develop cultural proficiency, cultural equity, and racial literacy.

## WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE MULTIRACIAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

What is the point of a book about multiracial students? When we examine multiracial students, we create the space to learn more about ourselves, no matter our color or ethnicity, in relation to all of the students in our classes.

The racial narratives in this book remind us there are individuals who in our society are identified as different from any distinct *racial* group, and

they cite experiences about which we may be unaware. Often, these experiences reflect the experiences of other students of color since the experiences are the result of being classified or viewed as nonwhite. When this happens, we have additional opportunities to examine the experiences of all students affected by the U.S. racial classification system, and therefore we learn more about the experiences of students of color. However, since there is a growing body of literature about mixed students as a separate group, we can benefit further from knowing what the experts say as well as what self-identified mixed educators and students have to share. This book offers both.

You have an opportunity to learn more about the experiences of self-identified multiracial students and how to equip yourself with strategies to best meet their needs. This does not mean stereotyping mixed students into one generalized group. It cannot logically be done. The vast differences among students who identify as mixed are as varied as the students who identify as not mixed.

This book offers you the following:

- Definitions, histories, and complexities of race
- Opportunities to assess your own knowledge and comfort levels surrounding issues of race
- The challenges students of mixed-racial identity may face that differ from your other students
- A model of professional development
- Strategies you can implement in your educational setting that support multiracial students and their families

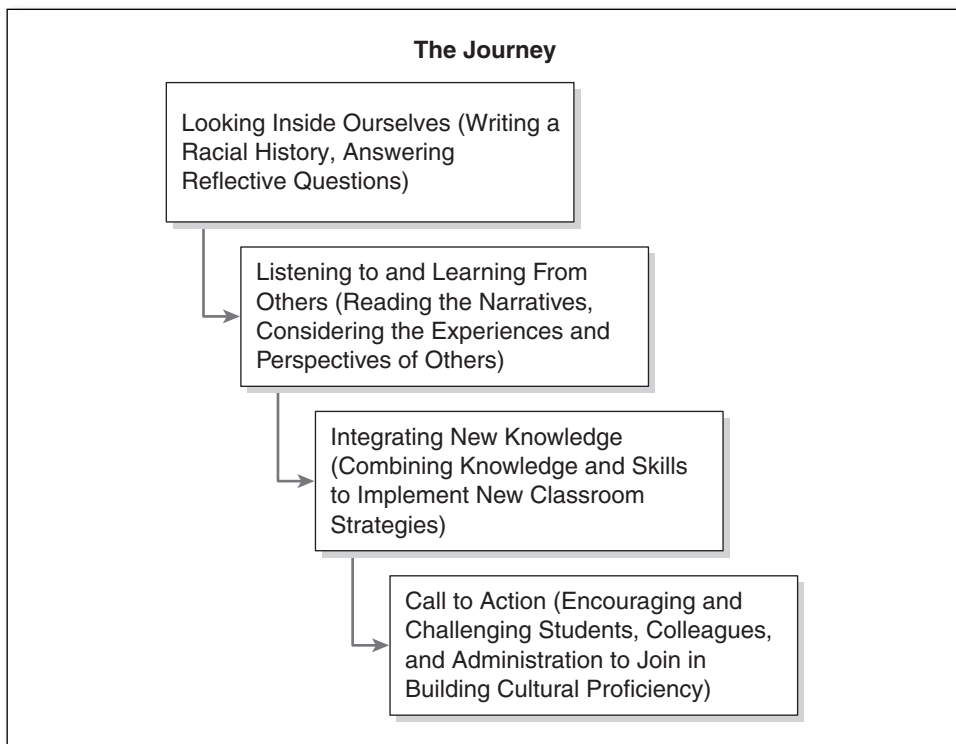
My greatest challenge in writing this book has been to present the information in a way that does not accelerate racism. To avoid this, I talked with experts such as Randy Lindsey and Glenn Singleton. Mr. Singleton asked me to consider this question as I wrote the book: “What accelerates racism when dealing with the topic of *multiraciality*?” I used this question as a guide to my thinking and writing. Additionally, I read and *reread* Rainier Spencer’s outstanding book *Challenging Multiracial Identities* in the hopes of better understanding this complex topic. His question, “How do we move away from the fallacy of race while remaining aggressive in the battle against racism?” was another idea I used to guide my work. This book is what I now know I know.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is organized as an inductive, *inside-out* journey. It begins with the self and then travels through history and research, interwoven with personal narratives and educational strategies, to culminate with voices of the future—our young people who see a world of change and hope.

Structured as a journey of discovery, this book offers you the opportunity to share your responses to the material with reflection questions. These reflections and responses are *key* to your participation. By the time you finish the chapters and respond to the reflection questions, you will know more about multiracial students in addition to understanding better how race impacts their lives and yours. You will be practicing cultural proficiency and racial literacy while learning strategies for culturally proficient instruction.

In thinking about our journey, I visualized how the steps might look on a flowchart. The following flowchart illustrates the path of our journey.



Even though the illustration is simple, the topic is complex. Due to the complexity of the material, I offer the following disclaimers as I take this journey with you.

## DISCLAIMERS

I am an antiracist, yet I must remember, “even antiracist educators reproduce a racialized social system” (Pollock, 2008, p. 348). I have no other choice; I am part of this system. To continue this work, I pledge to do my best and work within this unequal system to try and change

it. This book is my attempt to do that, but it is only what *I know I know* at this time in my life.

This book is a journey to learn about mixed-identity students; it is not designed as a handbook of classroom instruction. Cultural proficiency is “*not* a set of independent activities or strategies you learn to use with others” (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p.21). Even though there are strategies for the classroom embedded at the end of the chapters as well as an entire chapter, Chapter 9, devoted to classroom strategies, the focus is on change as an *inside-out* process. This inside-out process is the “first step in one’s personal transformation that can lead to systemic educational reform” (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 3). We begin with our racial autobiographies and continue our journey from the inside to the outside as the model reflects.

I prefer the term *mixed identity* because it eliminates the term *race*, which is a debatable term in the research. Throughout the book, the terms are used interchangeably since they are interchanged in many of the articles and books written on the topic. Also, in some cases, the labels for identities and *races* are capitalized and in other cases they are not, based on the context and the sources of the information.

Finally, the writers of the narratives occasionally use capitalization and grammatical constructions that may differ from the preferred Corwin style. These constructions remain in order to retain the integrity, individuality, and voice of the narrator.

As you journey through this book, you will read personal narratives of those who contributed their stories. Without these, there would be no book. These individuals share very personal aspects of their lives.

I hope you gain as much from your journey with the book as I did in mapping it for you.