
Preface

The concept of this book began when I was an elementary school counselor in the Washington, DC, area. Like most counselors, I saw and heard everything. I heard parents' stories about insensitive and biased teachers, I heard teachers' stories about negligent and "unfit" parents, and I heard administrators' stories about unrealistic district policies and goals. I learned that everyone has a story in a school. But most important, I learned that counselors are in the optimum position to bring those stories together and create change for students.

My first year in teaching changed the way in which I viewed education, particularly education of low-income and ethnic minority students (or students-of-color). As a beginning teacher and later as a beginning counselor, I believed the myth that if students didn't succeed in school, it was because of their unwillingness to achieve. However, as I became more experienced I learned that it is not that simple. In many cases, schools fail students by implementing biased policies and tolerating culturally incompetent educators. I also learned that it is often ethnic minority students who receive covert and sometimes overt messages from educators that they are not valued and "smart enough" to be successful. My peers, who included White teachers and teachers-of-color, were both guilty of this "lack of faith" in all students.

My disappointment in schools and school counselors led me to write this book. Although there are many well-intentioned and truly caring school counselors who make an impact on the lives of students, there are far too many school counselors who are silent and keepers of the status quo. It is time for school counselors to become more visible in education debates and to make cutting-edge decisions about the future of schools and education. With school counselors' training in counseling, education, group dynamics, human development, and systems theory, they have the unique capacity to understand students' academic as well as social and emotional development. If any group of educators can make a difference in the lives of students, it's school counselors.

While writing this book, I thought about my own personal journey as a mother of two African American children. The constant struggle to manage teachers' and other peoples' negative perceptions of not only my children but all African American children is overwhelming and anxiety-provoking. More important, I worry about my children and the mixed messages that they receive about their worthiness and abilities. My hope is that they will be able to endure and thrive in a world that does not always value them and find them capable. Writing this book has been therapeutic, and I am hopeful that school counselors will understand how their work can help parents like me rest better and feel confident that there is one person in our students' schools who understands our story.

PURPOSE

The purpose of *School Counseling to Close the Achievement Gap: A Social Justice Approach* is to introduce school counselors to six key elements of school counseling that can help to close the achievement gap and remedy issues of inequities in schools. For many years, school counselors have been blamed for biased advising, faulty assumptions, and discriminating practices that bar groups of students from opportunities in schools. In many cases, this blaming is justified. There are many school counselors who are guilty of damaging the lives of students. Although I believe that most counselors unintentionally promote inequities, I do believe there is a benefit to maintaining the status quo. With the status quo comes familiarity and no need to relearn or reeducate oneself. I am hopeful that after reading this book, that school counselors will feel energized to make changes in their approach to working with students and to take a stand against oppressive practices and the status quo.

I would like to mention that even though a large part of this book is focused on the oppression experienced by students-of-color, the concepts can certainly be applied to any oppressed group of students. I believe that once counselors understand equity and social justice, they will begin to see inequities everywhere and across many diverse groups.