



Washington State ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”

www.wsascd.org

What do we need to understand about our students and colleagues of color to confront systemic racism and our own biases?

What kind of power do our words have? What is the experience of students of color in our classrooms? What about our colleagues?

Last summer, as the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum across the nation, I saw many of my friends and colleagues embrace the need to confront systemic racism. Friends shared books and resources for teachers to read up and prepare to tackle systemic bias and racist culture.

As months have passed, we are seeing a growing backlash against the protests. People are decrying the damage and the social disruption. This begs the question, have we done the work necessary to confront the implicit biases we’ve lived with for so long? Do we truly understand why our colleagues and our students need us, in this moment, to stand strong with them to bring about change?

But who am I, a middle-aged white woman, to answer these questions? Instead, listen to the voices of a couple of our young colleagues. Women of color who have grown up in what is sometimes called a “post-racial” society.

Dawnesha Cathey

*4 years old: “You’re white with a permanent tan.” When I asked why I was a different color.

*7 years old: “You are black.” Finally told.

*9 years old: “You are the worst because your white mom slept with a n...” Random lady at the beach.

*16 years old: “Because you are a minority it will be easier to get into the college you want to.” When talking about going to college.

*19 years old: “You only made it into this college because you are black.” Second year ethics class when talking about affirmative action.

*23 years old: “You only got the job because you are black.” When I was talking to someone about getting my first teaching job straight out of college, at a job fair, on the spot, and for one of the hardest classrooms.

*24 years old: “I stopped to see if he needed help with his tire and he pulled his gun on me.” My boyfriend of color at the time, calling me almost in tears about someone who is trained to protect us.

*25 years old: "Well that sounds like a 'you people' dispute so there is not much we can do." The person who was supposed to help me after I got assaulted outside my son's basketball game. Why, all of a sudden, am I very open about Black lives? These statements are why. These are statements made to me throughout my life that have always weighed on me. It took having a 6' 1", 180 pound black/ Native American son for me to finally wake up and understand why this is important. It took me finally accepting who I am to understand these statements are never okay to say to anyone. I am a strong person and these statements affected me. My mama bear would, and has, come out ten-fold when anyone says anything close to that to my son (which has happened). Can you imagine if he was murdered for no reason?

I am going to continue to post, protest, go to city council meetings, and do whatever it takes for as long as it takes. So my son doesn't fear driving alone next year. So I don't fear him driving alone next year. So he can walk to the store and not run home before it's dark, or me worry the whole time they are going to mistake him for doing something wrong. So he doesn't have to have people yelling at him because he took a dog for a walk.

I feel for these families because if I was in their shoes, I don't even know what I would do. Place yourself in their shoes. What would you do?

Jordan K. Carte

I received a gift this year, the most precious and sacred gift of a child to raise and protect. This means, I no longer have the luxury or privilege of silence... even though, believe me, I would MUCH rather do that.

For so long I have quietly participated in conversations with co-workers, family members and friends... and said nothing... because it "wasn't worth it". Lupine changed that for me, NOW IT'S WORTH IT! I have a beautiful brown skinned baby, whose life will be shaped by the color of her skin, and I have to show her what that can mean.

My skin is brown. Have you noticed? For a long time I have only shown my color to people I feel safe with. In recent years I have learned to proudly wear my skin with some, but in lots of places I try to hide and blend in...

When people say "I don't see color" I hear "I don't see you".

You see, being brown to me means so much more than just the skin I wear... it tells you something about where I come from. My brown skin says a lot... if you are willing to go there... My brown skin says I am Indigenous.

My brown skin says- that my ancestors originated on this continent, and survived hundreds of years of oppression.

My brown skin says- that my genes are resilient and strong and have survived the horrific genocide that happened where you now live. It says that my story is so directly tied to U.S. Federal Policies, that most people know NOTHING about.

My brown skin says- that I myself suffer from Generational Trauma, that is passed down through our DNA. I have a deep seeded anxiety that I carry with me, and it makes life really hard every day.

My brown skin says- that I am one of many individuals on a road out of oppression, headed for freedom and equality. You help me get there or not... but it's happening either way.

I want you to see these things... I don't want you to ignore them any more. I want you to know that my brown skin is what pushes me forward each day, it's what gives me my passion and

conviction to do the work that I do, it shapes all my interactions and how I see the world each day. I WANT US TO STOP PRETENDING IT DOESN'T! My color is beautiful, so is Lupine's, and I want you to see me, so that someday, people will see her too.

Please stop being color blind, and instead see the beauty in our differences... skin color can tell important stories that shouldn't be ignored or forgotten. I hope that someday people see Lupine's color, and realize that it shows how strong and smart she is, and how much she's had to overcome to do what she does. I hope instead of seeing color as something that = Less, they see it as something that = MORE!

Nothing comes from staying quiet... only pain and loneliness.

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