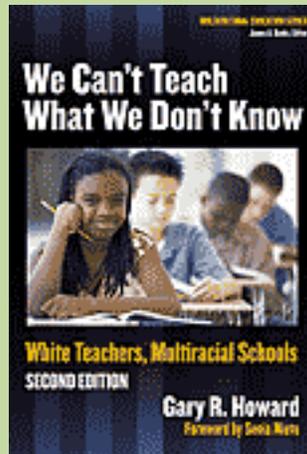


We Can't Teach What We Don't Know White Teachers, Multiracial Schools

Second Edition, By Gary Howard
Teachers College Press, 2006

This excellent little paperback is another in the outstanding Teachers College Press's "Multicultural Education Series," edited by James Banks. It is an absolutely must read for those of us who are white educators on the personal and professional journey of transformation. As a white, heterosexual, male with a PhD, I am one of the most privileged, and as Gary Howard (another white male) puts it – "...we now have a choice to turn the full force of our privilege and power toward dismantling the very system that has granted us our historical advantage." In reviewing this seminal book – whose title alone speaks volumes – I am choosing to take one more step on that journey, and I invite others to read this book and join me.

Gary Howard is the president and founder of the REACH Center for Multicultural Education in Seattle, Washington. He travels widely delivering keynote addresses and facilitating workshops addressing issues of race, social justice, educational reform, and personal transformation. In her "Foreword," Sonia Nieto (Professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and author of another book in the Multicultural Education Series – *The Light in Their Eyes* Creating Multicultural Learning Communities) states – "I had been waiting for years for an acknowledgment that whites, too, need to engage in the difficult dialogue and action of multicultural education without, as



"As White, privileged teachers, we now have a choice to turn the full force of our privilege and power toward dismantling the very system that has granted us our historical advantage."

"I see you. I acknowledge your presence in this classroom. I know your name and I can pronounce it correctly. I respect you. I respect your life experiences and your intelligence. I believe in you and I will hold both you and myself accountable to honor your capacity to learn. I enjoy being in this work with you."

Gary Howard writes in this book, having 'to rip off their white skin.' Nieto goes on to provide this excellent overview:

"Involving whites in multicultural education therefore needs to resolve two seemingly contradictory aims: to confront in a brutally honest way white oppression, and to promote the development of a healthy identity that is at the same time anti-racist and multicultural.

In this book, Gary Howard has managed to accomplish both of these aims, and he has done so admirably and with a blend of humanity and critique that is unusual in many academic discussions about controversial issues. The theoretical work he has developed on white identity orientations is groundbreaking.... What was missing until now in many discussions concerning the role of white teachers in multicultural education was a recognition that, in the words of Gary Howard, 'there is not one way of being white, but many.' For white teachers who undergo the difficult course of facing the implications of their privilege, it means that there can be more than just pain and suffering in the end. For teachers of other backgrounds it means that they are not alone, that they can look forward to having colleagues and allies who are committed to anti-racist multicultural education for all students."

A partial list of the chapter titles provides a sense of Gary Howard's approach to organizing the book as the weaving together the warp of practice and the woof of theory, "...designed as a weaving fashioned from two textures of yarn: the texture of personal experiences and stories drawn from my many years in the field, and the texture of research drawn from the rich literature related to multicultural education and social justice:"

1. White Man Dancing: A Story of Personal Transformation
2. White Dominance and the Weight of the West
4. White Educators and the River of Change
6. Ways of Being White: A Practitioner's Approach to Multicultural Growth
7. White Teachers and School Reform: Toward a Transformationist Pedagogy

And in the back of the book are “Guidelines for Discussion and Reflection” to accompany group discussions of each of the chapters. For example, for “Chapter 1. White Man Dancing” are the following questions:

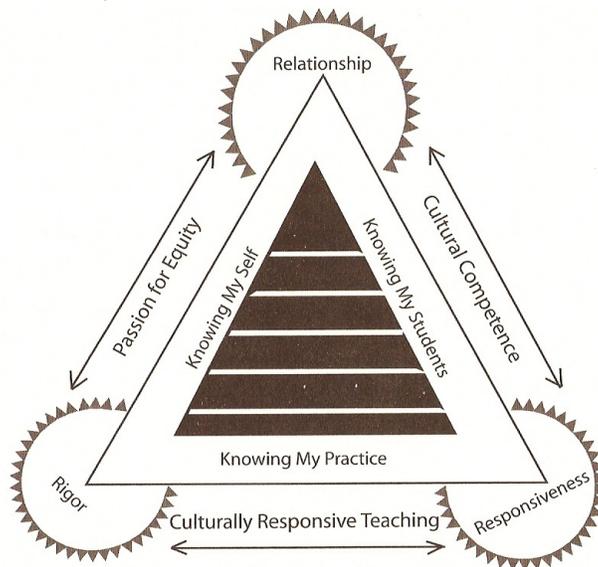
1. In what ways is the author's personal story similar to or different from the experiences of other white people you know?
2. What were the significant events/lessons/experiences that led Gary Howard to the work of multicultural education and social justice? How might other white people have responded differently to these same events or experiences?
3. What questions/challenges would you like to express to the author about his account of his personal journey?
4. What have been your own formative experiences related to race?

It is also noteworthy that Howard acknowledges similar processes of social dominance and oppression that function across other major dimensions of human difference in our schools, including gender, religion, language, age, sexual orientation, social class, and ability. But it is primarily from the reality of race as a central marker in his own life, that he has selected race as his focus, noting that many of the conclusions presented could be equally applicable to other dimensions of diversity and social justice. Here Howard has developed the

“Achievement Triangle: Transformationist Pedagogy” (see inset).

This model representing Transformationist Pedagogy represents the inter-connectedness of personal transformation with professional transformation as viewed through three “doorways” at the intersecting corners. At the top of the triangle is the “doorway of relationship” which represents the key intersection of “Knowing Myself” with “Knowing My Students” and is grounded at the base with a deep understanding and skill – “Knowing My Practice.” And relationships does not mean being buddies or best friends with our students, nor being soft-hearted missionaries, rather it means developing authentic relationships, with what Howard describes as the following attitude:

“I see you. I acknowledge your presence in this classroom. I know your name and I can pronounce it correctly. I respect your life experiences and your intelligence. I believe in you and I will hold both you and myself accountable to honor your capacity to learn. I enjoy being in this work with you.”



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Here, too, at the bottom left corner, is the “doorway of rigor” connecting knowledge of self with authentic professional knowledge and skills as a teacher - including curriculum and instructional design, developmental psychology, history and philosophy of education, legal issues, human relations, cross-cultural communication, conflict management, and pedagogy. And on the right corner of the triangle is the “doorway of responsiveness,” making the connection between self

and students. Lastly, this model of transformational pedagogy shows the connections between our “passion for equity” with our “cultural competence” leading to a solid foundation at the base of the triangle—“culturally responsive teaching.”

In the closing Chapter 8, “Our Unfinished Work: White Educators and La Tierra Transformativa,” Gary

Howard uses the phrase “La Tierra Transformativa” to describe a new country, a new place within our minds, hearts, and spirits, a place of vision, healing and positive change. He sees the journey, the “diversity dance” down the “river of change,” on the way to this new country, in the following positive light:

“There is, however, a sense of excitement and an invigorating challenge to be found on the road to an emergent transformationist white identity. There is a feeling of adventure and discovery in growing toward greater awareness. There is a personal renewal and hope to be found in the possibility of change and the opportunity to believe and act in new ways. There is a positive and healing privilege gained through our connection and collaboration with colleagues and students from other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. And there is joy in knowing that we have chosen to be in this struggle, that we are part of a movement to dismantle the foundation of our own past and present dominance. The reward for transformative white educators is that we have a vision worthy of a lifetime of work.”



Participants came from nine states throughout the United States for the July Open Training for new CFG Coaches in Bloomington, Indiana.

Please take a moment to think:

How has your CFG improved your practice and/or your life?

At NSRF, we hear great stories all the time about how Critical Friends Groups and NSRF protocols have transformed educators' practices and sometimes their personal lives. From the teacher's lounge to the classroom, the office to the bookclub, sometimes to the living room at home ... [what's your story?](#)

How many NSRF protocols have you downloaded from our website or CD-ROM?

At last count, there are over 250 NSRF protocols and activities available on our website, plus many more within the pages of Connections over the years (including two new protocols in this issue alone!). We're collecting new protocols for upcoming projects, and collecting data about usage, too. Everyone has favorites for different purposes—[what are yours, or tweaks you've made?](#)

Help others attain similar or even better benefits of CFGs.

Our office often receives requests from students, new teachers, and teachers from underserved populations asking about scholarships to our Trainings. As you [join NSRF](#) or [renew your membership](#), please think about the benefits you personally have gained from your CFG training and participation. Your paid membership allows us to keep these protocols free on the website. **If you can, please send a donation to the NSRF Scholarship Fund.** (If you've renewed recently, you can always send a scholarship fund check or call us with a credit card number to donate.) Remember that every scholarship recipient will eventually touch the lives of thousands.