

Discussion Questions for *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There (Second Edition)*
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Preface

What is necessary for educators to build the capacity to (1) transform instead of oppress, (2) liberate instead of limit, (3) propel instead of stifle, and (4) accelerate rather than remediate? (see pages ix–x)

What are the five principles of the Opportunity Gap Framework and why is it essential for educators to know about them and address them in their practices with underserved students? (see page xi)

What do educators need to know to be able to more effectively meet the needs of students?

Introduction

What does Milner mean by the need to focus on “inputs” over “outputs” in supporting the needs of minoritized students? Explain some of the (potential) inputs that are essential to building pedagogical, relational, assessment and curriculum practices. (see pages 2–3)

Describe and discuss what Milner means by “too much testing” and “not enough teaching.” (see pages 3–4)

Explain how relational efficacy and instructional agility contribute to addressing gaps in opportunity for young people. (see pages 7–10)

What are Opportunity Gaps? (see pages 10–11)

Discuss and describe Eisner’s explanation of the explicit, implicit, and null curriculum. What are some examples from your own practices that align with each? (see pages 12–13)

According to Milner, what are some curriculum practices that can make a difference for minoritized students—particularly during moments of injustice inside and outside of education? (see pages 13–15)

What are some examples of curriculum sites that might explicitly help students heal and learn to disrupt injustice? What are other potential curriculum sites that might be used to help students think about and heal during these and related challenging times? (see page 15)

What is the difference between culture and cultural practices and why are these differences important to understand when addressing gaps in opportunity? (see page 16)

Chapter 1

Define and discuss, in sufficient depth, what Opportunity Gaps are in education. Why is understanding Opportunity Gaps so important for students' academic, social, and relational success?

Explain each tenet of the Opportunity Gaps Framework and provide an example to illuminate the principle.

- Reject Colorblindness
- Understand Cultural Conflicts
- Recognize the Myth of Meritocracy
- Disrupt Low Expectations and Deficit Mindsets
- Counter Context-Neutral Mindsets

(see pages 21–60)

Examine the mindsets that Milner introduces and explicates in Chapter 1. Identify one mindset from the book for each tenet of the Opportunity Gaps Framework (Reject Colorblindness mindsets, Understand Cultural Conflicts mindset, Recognize the Myth of Meritocracy mindset, Disrupt Low Expectations and Deficit mindsets, and Counter Context-Neutral mindsets) that resonates with you the most. What mindsets might you add to each principle to better align with your own experiences as an educator? (see pages 21–60)

Why is it so difficult for people to talk about race and racism inside and outside of classrooms and schools? Explain. (see pages 28–38)

What are potential benefits of engaging race with colleagues, parents, families, and students? Explain. (see pages 28–38)

Why is it important to increase the Teacher of Color pipeline? What do these teachers bring into teaching and learning from which other teachers might learn and benefit? (see page 34)

What are some potential cultural conflicts that you have encountered in your work as an educator and/or outside of it? How did you identify the conflict as cultural? What did you do to address the conflict? Explain. (see pages 38–43)

Why do some educational researchers and practitioners believe meritocracy is a myth? Explain. What does generational and family wealth reproduce that makes it difficult—if not—impossible to “level the playing field” inside and outside of education? Explain. (see pages 44–50)

What are some examples of deficit mindsets and low expectations that prevent teachers from addressing Opportunity Gaps? Explain. What are some specific classroom and school practices that reproduce and perpetuate deficit mindsets and low expectations? How can educators

address these mindsets and practices for the benefit of student learning and development? Explain. (see pages 50–54)

How might understanding the context in which students live and learn influence educator practices? How do educators avoid deficit views of students' communities to support their curriculum, assessment, relational, and pedagogical practices? (see pages 55–60)

What is essential for educators to do to learn from and with communities to support student learning and development over time? Be specific. (see pages 55–60)

Study the summative table on pages 61–63. What instructional consequences resonate most with your experiences as a student and/or educator? Which instructional consequence do you believe you are most capable of addressing and how? What instructional consequence would you add to the table based on the tenet and explanation of it? Explain.

How do educators work with policy makers and administrators to address Opportunity Gaps and instructional consequences that they believe to be outside of their individual control as an educator? Explain. (see pages 61–63)

Chapter 2

In order to address and potentially avoid Opportunity Gaps in the classroom, what did Mr. Hall learn early in his career? (see page 66)

What particular moves did Mr. Hall make to get to know his students? How did he leverage his knowledge of his subject (science) in his journey to learn about his students? (see pages 69–74)

How did Mr. Hall leverage his own experiences living in poverty to build relationships with his students? (see pages 74–78)

How did Mr. Hall do “more” with “fewer” resources? What did he do to address the meager educational resources available to his students? (see pages 78–80)

How did Mr. Hall work with students who he interpreted as disruptive in the learning environment? How did he practice “equity in practice?” What are some potential benefits to his decisions and what are some challenges to giving students multiple chances to succeed and responding to each student differently? (see pages 81–86)

How do you respond to “disruptive” students in your own classroom? What elements of Mr. Hall’s practices are potentially transferable to your own practices with your own students? Explain. (see pages 81–86)

What cultural conflicts emerge between Mr. Hall and his students, and how did Mr. Hall respond to them? (see pages 86–87)

Why did Mr. Hall’s students call him racist? How did Mr. Hall respond to this accusation? Do you agree or disagree with how Mr. Hall responded? What would you have done if your students called you racist as an educator? (see pages 96–99)

How did Mr. Hall “sow seeds” with his students? What were some practices that Mr. Hall adopted inside and outside of the classroom to cultivate and sustain relationships with his students? Explain. (see pages 88–92)

According to Milner, why is storytelling so important for teachers—particularly first-person accounts of their own lives and experiences? How might storytelling enhance and propel learning opportunities and relationship building? (see pages 92–94)

Take time to study and answer the questions in the tables about Race and Teaching on pages 98–99. Consider answering the questions individually and collectively—with colleagues for instance. Consider using the questions to reimagine what you do and how you engage students, families, and communities.

According to Milner, why is it necessary for a science teacher to think about issues of race, racism, injustice, and gaps in opportunity? (see pages 65–101)

Chapter 3

According to Milner’s research, why do some educators/people believe issues of equity, justice, and race are inconsequential to their work in mostly white schools? Explain. What are some “unsettling” situations that lead some in mostly white spaces to decide to interrogate these issues? (see pages 104–105)

How does Dr. Johnson’s identity as a Black woman influence her decision-making and overall work in her mostly white teaching context? (see pages 107–112)

On what does Dr. Johnson reflect in her practices to maximize student learning opportunities? (see pages 107–112)

What cultural conflicts does Dr. Johnson encounter at her school and in her practices? How does Dr. Johnson address cultural conflicts that emerge at her school? (see pages 112–115)

How (and why) does Dr. Johnson create safe, open dialogue in the classroom with her students? Explain. (see pages 116–118)

What happens when students call Dr. Johnson racist due to what she taught and how she taught lessons with her high school students? What administrative actions are taken against Dr. Johnson? Explain. Do you agree with the administrative actions? Why or why not? What could/should Dr. Johnson do to potentially combat these decisions in your view? If you agree

with Dr. Johnson's pedagogical and curriculum decisions, how would you build support of her and her practices? Explain. (see pages 127–129)

What lesson does Dr. Johnson advance about immigration and language learners in the classroom with students? What are some other implications of her discussion with Dan and other students about being open and accepting differences? (see pages 123–124)

According to Milner, why is it so important to understand the social context in which you are teaching and/or leading? (see pages 103–133)

Chapter 4

How does Mr. Jackson explain the significance and insignificance of race according to his own experiences as an educator? Explain. (see pages 139–141)

Why was it important for Mr. Jackson to explicitly focus on the value of learning with his students and in what ways does his build a classroom ethos that stressed learning as a value of relevance? (see pages 141–143)

How does Milner describe power structures among students at Bridge Middle School? Why is understanding and building knowledge about student power structures relevant to teaching and learning? (see pages 143–146)

In what ways does Mr. Jackson immerse himself into his students' inside and outside of school realities? Explain. What are the potential benefits to this learning and immersion? How might such immersion impact curriculum, instructional, relational, and assessment practices with students in science and other subjects? Explain. (see pages 149–152)

What are some potential connections between and among music, hip hop culture, and learning as described in Chapter 4? (see pages 152–154)

On pages 155–156, examine the examples of popular culture in which many students are engaged. Which of these practices can be used to build interest in school curriculum? How can your own knowledge about and engagement in these practices contribute to your own planning and practices with students to address Opportunity Gaps? Explain. (see pages 155–164)

Building on the scholarship of J. Gee on pages 158–159, Milner explains the potential benefits and transferable features of students' engagement with video games. How might you build on students' gaming practices in your own practices with students? Explain.

Ms. Shaw saw her teaching as a mission and responsibility. How did she demonstrate her commitment and responsibility to her students? Explain. (see pages 166–180)

Read the interaction between Ms. Shaw and Christine. How does Ms. Shaw demonstrate her commitment to Christine? What else could Ms. Shaw have done to support her? How would you have handled the situation with the upset student? Explain. (see pages 166–167)

How does Ms. Shaw “remember race” in her work at Bridge Middle School, in the classroom, and in the broader school context? (see pages 167–169)

In what ways does Ms. Shaw accept, adopt, and enact multiple roles at her school? (see pages 172–176)

Examine the figures on pages 180–181. Which practices do you believe to be the most important in addressing, countering, and disrupting Opportunity Gaps in schools and classrooms? Which of the elements do you believe to be the most difficult to cultivate? What would you contribute to the features outlined in the figures? In other words, what is missing as essential to addressing Opportunity Gaps?

Although both effective in their own ways, how are Mr. Jackson and Ms. Shaw similar and different in their curriculum, pedagogy, relational, and assessment practices? Explain. (see pages 135–181)

Chapter 5

Why is teacher education so important in helping teachers build the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, mindsets, beliefs, and consequently, practices to address Opportunity Gaps inside of schools? (see pages 183–217)

What are some of the “backward” lessons that you have learned throughout chapters 1–4 that might support teacher learning in teacher education and beyond? Be specific.

What are some challenges teacher educators faces in their work? (see page 185)

Why did some of the white teachers with whom Milner worked want to avoid issues of diversity and equity in their work? Explain. (see pages 187–192)

How do teachers’ historical roots influence their knowledge, beliefs, mindsets, and attitudes? (see pages 194–197)

What does Milner learn about the promise of teaching a bilingual text from a teacher with whom he was working? Explain. (see pages 199–200)

In what ways are stereotypes and low expectations stifling for student learning and development? Explain. (see pages 200–202)

How can teacher educators build their own knowledge to support teachers in the fight to address Opportunity Gaps? Explain. (see pages 202–207)

What are some structural and systemic concerns in teacher education that should be considered? How might we address these concerns? (see pages 207–209)

Review the summary of the themes that emerged in Chapter 5 and among the six white teachers in the Chapter. Which of the themes resonate with you the most and why? What are the implications of these findings in your own work? Explain. (see pages 215–217)

Chapter 6

What is Opportunity-Centered Teaching? (see pages 219–221)

Describe and discuss the four tenets of Opportunity-Centered Teaching: (1) Opportunity-Centered Teaching is about Building and Cultivating Relationships, (2) Opportunity-Centered Teaching is about Developing Community Knowledge to Inform Practice, (3) Opportunity-Centered Teaching is about Curriculum Convergence, and (4) Opportunity-Centered Teaching is about Understanding and Addressing Psychological and Emotional Health and Wellbeing among Educators and Students. (see pages 221–249)

How might Opportunity-Centered Teaching address Opportunity Gaps in schools and classrooms? Explain. (see pages 219–221)

Examine the tables on pages 228–229. What are the potential benefits of the classroom-level practices and schoolwide-level practices that could help connect with and build relationships? Explain. What would you add to the list? What practices have you found to be most effective in your own practices either as a student or educator?

Examine the table on page 237. Describe each of the four practices that Milner identifies as essential to building community knowledge to inform practice. Which practices do you believe to have the most potential impact in teacher learning? Why? Explain.

How can educators build curriculum convergence to address Opportunity Gaps? (see pages 239–242)

What are some of the psychological and mental health challenges that students and teachers face? From where do these challenges emerge? Explain. (see pages 243–249)

What role might racism play in the psychological health of young people and educators? Explain. (see pages 243–249)

How can educators work with mental health providers and counselors to support themselves and their students' mental health? (see pages 243–249)

Examine the tables on pages 252–253. How might Opportunity-Centered Teaching address Opportunity Gaps and especially—what Milner describes as—instructional consequences?

What does Milner describe as the danger of neutral space in the fight to address Opportunity Gaps? Explain. (see page 255)

Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice

After reading the “Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice,” what are ten conclusions that resonate with you about Opportunity Gaps and Opportunity-Centered Teaching? Explain. (see pages 257–275)

After reading the “Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice,” what are ten recommendations that you will adopt to improve your curriculum, pedagogical, relational, and assessment practices? Explain. (see pages 257–275)

How can (and should) educators (especially teachers, community members, families, community members, policymakers, school leaders, counselors, and psychologists) “get fired up” in their work to address Opportunity Gaps? What are you most “fired up” about in your own work personally and/or as a department/school/district? Explain. (see pages 267–273)