

Preface to the Second Edition of *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There*

THE FIRST EDITION of *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today's Classrooms* was written and published in 2010 for pre- and in-service educators. By outlining what I called opportunity gaps, the book aimed to advance instructional and other educational practices that (better) meet the needs of students who are too often placed on the margins of schools and classrooms across the United States and beyond: Black and Brown students, students whose first language is not English, Muslim students, immigrant students, students with ability differences, LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans*, queer/questioning, intersex, agender/asexual) students, and students who live below the poverty line. I wanted to produce a text that supported teachers in more deeply developing the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, understandings, mind-sets, skills, and consequently practices necessary to meet the needs of all young people. As I have worked with teachers in different teacher education programs in the United States and Canada, and as I have studied educational contexts from prekindergarten

through high school, I attempted to capture what is essential to help educators address opportunity gaps.

As a former high school English teacher, I aspired to write the text that I wish had been available to me when I was in my own teacher education program and when I subsequently taught high school years ago. Moreover, as a teacher educator, I wrote in *Start Where You Are* what I believed to be foundational to educator learning and development across grade levels and subject areas. Ways to address gaps in opportunity were anchored in real-world classroom examples intended to increase teachers' understandings of themselves, others, and the places in which they would inevitably work. Many White teachers I worked with reported, for example, that they planned to return to their hometown with mostly White students to teach in the same schools they attended as students. These teachers did not necessarily understand how quickly school demographic trends are shifting across the United States. In short, schools as they were experienced by many teachers as students will no longer exist, at least in terms of their racial, linguistic, religious, and ethnic demographics.

But mostly, I wrote *Start Where You Are* to foster an ethos of studying, listening, and learning among teachers. A central theme of this book is that teachers can and do improve when they allow students to help them examine, reflect on, and improve their teaching practices. I wanted teachers to vicariously witness and experience other teachers—those both similar to and different from them in terms of gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, language, ethnicity, and cultural background—learning from their students, taking responsibility when conflicts and challenges emerge, and assertively addressing opportunity gaps. Indeed, even the most accomplished and successful teachers have challenges and struggles. But when they develop the capacity and the will to do better, our students have a fighting chance for an educational experience that (1) transforms instead of oppresses, (2) liberates instead of limits, (3) propels instead of stifles, and (4) accelerates rather than remediates.

While the book was designed to help newer educators build practices that better aligned with student needs and realities, as I have traveled

throughout the United States and beyond, more experienced educators, too, have consistently expressed to me the power of the book. For some educators, the book provides a much-needed reminder of what is necessary to improve their practices. For others, the book serves as a wake-up call that, as their students, families, and communities change, they—the schools—must shift as well. But I am perhaps most proud of the feedback that I receive from educators writ large (not only teachers) who share their appreciation for a text that describes the complexities and nuances of teaching and simultaneously provides examples of educators addressing gaps in opportunity. Addressing opportunity gaps is difficult work, and I hope this book provides good examples of teachers refusing to give up on students too often placed on the margins of teaching and learning. However, rather than a set of predetermined practices or prescriptions, the first edition provided insights into how educators think and how their mind-sets shaped their practices.

As I worked with educators over the years, I yearned for a text that captured the principles that I outline to address what I call opportunity gaps. The framework of the first edition and the new, second edition covers issues of (1) race and color blindness; (2) culture and conflict; (3) expectations and rigor; (4) meritocracy and socioeconomic status; and (5) context and place. I believe this book has been able to bring together in one volume essential features necessary to support teachers in closing opportunity gaps. Drawing from my own research and that of others, the framework has been adopted in courses, teacher education programs, and school districts inside and outside of the United States. Researchers and scholars, too, have adopted, adapted, and drawn from the framework to describe and make sense of their own empirical research.

While evidence would suggest that the first edition of the book has made an important contribution to the field of education, and particularly to professional development, I have been asked consistently by colleagues within and outside of higher education to revise the text. To be frank, I am hopeful that the book will be used to support the preparation and development of teachers for many years to come. Also, after ten years

of assigning the text and studying aspects of it that seem to be the most transformative as well as those that could use improvement, I offer here a revised book that maintains the assets of the first edition but also updates certain aspects to further support the learning of educators for the benefit of a dynamic group of students across different contexts: urban, suburban, rural, public, private, and otherwise.

FROM OPPORTUNITY GAPS TO OPPORTUNITY-CENTERED TEACHING: THE NEW EDITION

This new edition of *Start Where You Are* is a fully revised and updated version of the book I wrote more than ten years ago. Most important, in this new edition, I endeavor to expand my discussion and examples of opportunity gaps to those of *opportunity-centered teaching*. In other words, I demonstrate how opportunity-centered teaching addresses gaps in opportunity in schools, districts, and classrooms across the nation. Opportunity-centered teaching counters and disrupts gaps in opportunity in ways that can have a lasting impact on students, their families, and communities. Four interrelated principles shape the framework, which is designed to help teachers and other educators reimagine how they think about their students and build practices that advance student learning and development. Opportunity-centered teaching begins with and is grounded in the premise that relationship building and cultivation are essential to co-constructing a classroom environment that fosters excellence. A second tenet of opportunity-centered teaching concerns the importance of community knowledge and learning as ways to build alignment outside of school. A third tenet stresses the importance of understanding outside-of-school practices as well as those inside of school. In short, this tenet focuses on educators' considering how student engagements and interests outside of school should be drawn on inside of school to address opportunity gaps. In addition, opportunity-centered teaching insists that educators understand the psychological, social, emotional, and mental health of

both themselves and their students as necessary for teaching and learning success.

What do educators need to know to be able to more effectively meet the needs of students? Indeed, all communities—regardless of the zip code—are deeply rich in human capital. But educators in schools may struggle to understand how to build on the many talents and assets of a community—perhaps because in order to recognize and acknowledge expertise in the community, we (as educators) must see the brilliance of the students with whom we work. As an educator, I have heard teachers and administrators from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds talk about what their students, parents, and communities lack. But every single student in our schools should be viewed as a vessel of knowledge, knowing, and potential.

Finally, when I wrote the first edition of this book, I believed it would help the educators with whom I worked. Several thousand people have read the first edition; my hope now is that others will read this new edition and commit to building and improving their practices for the sake of students whose educational experiences fall far from what they should be. Indeed, as educators in the fight for social justice, equity, inclusion, and transformation, it is necessary for us to **START WHERE WE ARE BUT NOT STAY THERE**. Our students are counting on us.