

How are you teaching on the right side of change?

“It would be a betrayal of everything Reverend Pinckney stood for . . . if we allowed ourselves to slip into a comfortable silence again” - President Barack Obama, 2015

HOW MANY DEATHS MUST BE ENDURED BEFORE WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATORS’ ROLE IN CHANGE? COMFORTABLE SILENCE INDEED.

October 24, 2018, Vickie Lee Jones and Maurice Stallard were murdered point blank by a gunman who had first tried to enter a nearby church attended by a largely African American population in Louisville, KY.

October 27, 2018, Joyce Fienberg, Richard Gottfried, Rose Mallinger, Jerry Rabinowitz, Cecil Rosenthal, David Rosenthal, Bernice Simon, Sylvan Simon, Daniel Stein, Melvin Wax, Irving Younger were brutally murdered in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA. The perpetrator’s anti-semitism was overtly represented in his fatal actions coupled with his rant, “All Jews must die”. He specifically targeted a synagogue and sent social media messages that revealed his hatred for HIAS, a nonprofit Jewish organization that advocates for and assists refugees, including, most recently, those coming across the US-Mexico border.

The Early Childhood Education Assembly of National Council of Teachers of English has offered statements year after year as racist, homophobic, and religious bias leads to massacres of the greatest brutality <https://www.earlychildhoodeducationassembly.com/ecea-position-statements.html>. Yet we continue to neglect our *responsibility as educators* to challenge - through our teaching and our activism at the voting booth and elsewhere - narrow cultural, social, and institutional norms that communicate that one group matters more than others. Brutalities and racial profiling have gone on for centuries but we find ourselves now in a time when “hate has gone mainstream.” So we call on teachers to commit to a new stance by focusing not merely on loving our neighbors but on teaching students to *recognize injustices and macro- and microaggressions in every corner of institutions in which they learn and play and to take action against them*. This means standing up, in and out of schools, firmly and loudly against those who demean and degrade women; dehumanize immigrants and refugees; describe white supremacists as “very fine people”; ignore the deadly racial profiling of Black men, women, and children; and promote a righteousness of one religion over all others.

It means instituting curricula and institutional policies that normalize the many ways of being across our country and the world so that we can walk into classrooms of every demographic and feel the richness of multiple languages, belief systems, ways to be family, and racial and ethnic groups as central to learning and teaching. It means rejecting what Asante (2017) called “white esteem curriculum” to engage in a complete pedagogical overhaul that insists on teaching all

children to respect and stand up for their own cultures as well as those of every other child. We urge educators to ask how schooling would look if every teacher centered histories of Africans as kings and queens, scientists, explorers, poets, and mathematicians rather than as enslaved people. We ask how teaching about Central and South American caring cultures might disrupt lies perpetuated that they are drug dealers and rapists? How would teaching about love as the foundation of diverse belief systems - Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity - help to raise new generations who cherish rather than fear each other?

This culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) teaching should take place in classrooms of every demographic (Baines, Tisdale, & Long, 2018; Boutte, Johnson, Wynter-Hoyte, & Uyoata, 2017). After all, our students grow up to be the White men who mail pipe bombs, police and kill unarmed Black bodies, and murder Jews and Christians in their places of worship or White women who call law enforcement on Black people for barbequing, cutting the grass, selling water bottles, babysitting, entering their own homes, leaving their own AirBnB, and the list goes on. Either we take a stand to engage in this overhaul or we are complicit in the perpetuation of narrow views of-who matters as well as the horrors that come with those beliefs. And so we ask, as did primary grades teacher, Carmen Tisdale (Baines, Tisdale, & Long, 2018), *“How are you teaching on the right side of change?”*

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Boutte, G., Johnson, G., Wynter-Hoyte, K., & Uyoata, U. E. (2017). Using African diaspora literacy to heal and restore the souls of young Black children. *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies*, 6(1), 66–79.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

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