

Thank you

FOR YOUR
INTEREST IN
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from
Collective Equity, by Sonja Hollins-Alexander and
Nicole Law.

LEARN MORE about this title!

CORWIN

Introduction



Can we breathe, can we talk, can we protest, can we have simultaneous truths, can we display anger, and can we admit to the crippling effects of inequity? The three words “I can’t breathe” have echoed in the hearts, minds, and ears of Black Americans who fear being the next hashtag. This continues to fuel an outpouring of protests, an overwhelming cry for action, and urgent calls for social change. The asphyxiation of Black America has led to civic unrest. The unjust killings of Javier Ambler, Manuel Ellis, Elijah McClain, Eric Garner, and George Floyd as well as 70 other victims (Baker, Valentino-DeVries, Fernandez, & LaForgia, 2020) amount to a miscarriage of justice and a smothering of the human spirit.

If we can solve the inequities and the injustices in our society, then the knee that is on our necks will be lifted so we can show up in the fullness of who we are as a contributor to the beauty of the human race—the human race that collectively represents diversity, the ability to create social networks, and the capacity to love and care for others.

Schools are a microcosm of society, reflecting historical inequities and systemic structures of oppression. We must interrogate existing structures as well as systems, policies, and practices that suffocate the cultural excellence of all individuals. This is the premise of a free and public education.

There are 50.8 million students in American public schools; of these 50.8 million, white students represent 47 percent, Hispanic students represent 27 percent, Black students represent 15 percent, Asian students represent 5 percent, American Indian/Alaska Native students represent 1 percent, Pacific Islander students represent 0.4 percent, and students of two or more races represent 4 percent (Education Week Research Center, 2019).

Although the disparities that exist among Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have endured for generations, they have been revealed with painful clarity in our schools today. Do our schools display the readiness to disrupt the barriers that have a significant impact on teaching and learning? We believe in the capacity of educators to address these staggering problems, but we must first come to terms with the sobering reality of disparity in our schools. Such disparities surface in the disproportionate representation of Black students in high-poverty schools, lack of access to college-ready courses such as Algebra II for BIPOC students, and lack of BIPOC representation in advanced placement (AP) courses (National School Boards Association, 2020; de Brey et al., 2019). The following data delineate disparities in American schools.

AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES (de Brey et al., 2019)	
Math and science disparities by race	<p>One-quarter of high schools with the highest percentage of Black and Latino students do not offer Algebra II; a third of these schools do not offer Chemistry.</p> <p>Fewer than half of American Indian and Native Alaskan high school students have access to the full range of math and science courses in their high school.</p>
Gifted and talented disparities by race	<p>There is a growing opportunity gap in gifted and talented education; Black and Latino students represent only 26 percent of the students enrolled in gifted and talented education programs.</p>
Advanced placement course disparities by race, language, and ability	<p>Twenty-seven percent of Black and Latino students in our nation’s high schools are enrolled in at least one AP course.</p> <p>English learners represent 5 percent of high school students. A mere 2 percent of these students are enrolled in at least one AP course.</p> <p>Students with disabilities served by IDEA represent 12 percent of high school students, whereas 2 percent of these students are enrolled in an AP course.</p>
High school completion by immigration and socioeconomic status	<p>On average, immigrant students and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged families receive fewer degrees, and a greater number display academic skills below grade level than do their more privileged peers (Gamoran, 2001).</p>

Every state has a public school system and is accountable for providing a free education to every child. However, free for all does not mean subpar for some! Schools seek to promote diversity and disrupt discriminatory practices that benefit some and asphyxiate others in the process of schooling. We begin our book with a provocative question:

Are we empowered and equipped to have a fighting chance of disrupting the known atrocities that happen under the guise of a “free” public education?

If we are, then why was it a surprise at the start of the pandemic to realize our schools were ill-prepared to address the racial, social, and economic disparities that continue to crush our human spirit? “We cannot afford to wallow in our discomfort regarding issues of race and equity” (Simmons, 2019).

Through the widespread coverage of human stories, statistics, and current realities, we are recognizing and acknowledging that something must change. This unveiling has confirmed that the current crisis of inequity in communities has less to do with the symptoms—which include lack of materials, inconsistent resources, the digital abyss, unattended children, food insecurities, homelessness, unprepared teachers and families, frustrated parents, disengaged students, and school closures—than with the larger problem: a system that lacks collective accountability for being our “brother’s keeper.”

Schools may be physically safe, have updated resources, be in the “best neighborhoods,” and be aesthetically appealing with all of the appropriate building codes to be structurally sound, but they are void of the emotional safety that is needed for students and educators to flourish as individuals who are valued, seen, heard, validated, loved, understood, and cared for in the school community. Billions of Title I funds have been spent in the interest of ensuring that resources are distributed in an equal manner to our schools. However, equality isn’t the same as equity. Equality is about distributing resources so that everyone has the same, whereas equity is about providing people with what they need.

Too often in schools, we confuse these two terms and use them synonymously. We have taken steps in our journey toward equality in schools. The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine of the Jim Crow era and launched a movement to desegregate our schools was a monumental turning point that changed the educational trajectory for millions of US students. Despite this historic precedent, the large gaps and disparities in education that we have alluded to still exist. Some might argue that *Brown* applied a “technical fix” to an adaptive challenge (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). It has also been stated that desegregation had a destructive impact on the careers and livelihood of many talented Black American educators. As excellent as Black educators were, they were never viewed as good enough.

In 1970 and beyond, America settled for a quiet kind of desegregation compromise between advocates for integration and

defenders of segregation that allowed black bodies into white schools, but failed to fully address the actual educational interests of black children. Unreprimanded by a federal government that was no longer committed to full equality but just needed the language of equality for international standing, southern school boards that were opposed to integration fired black teachers and hired white teachers in their place. They closed black schools or demoted them to middle or elementary schools. Because white school boards seemed to believe that black principals did not have the educational capacity to run a school, especially a school in which they would supervise white teachers and oversee the education of white children, black principals were often forced to forfeit their leadership positions. (ASCD, 2019)

Equality is not enough; we desire equity. They sound similar but result in dramatic disparities for BIPOC. Equality is giving everybody the same things. Equity, in contrast, is giving individuals what they need to survive and thrive in our society.

Figure 0.1 depicts dimensions of power, privilege, and oppression. You will notice that privilege and power rests with identities above the dotted line, while systems of oppression are directed at those identities below the line. As a result of the systems of power, privilege, and oppression, some individuals and communities will always be positioned to thrive. Others will only survive, and in some instances, actually perish.



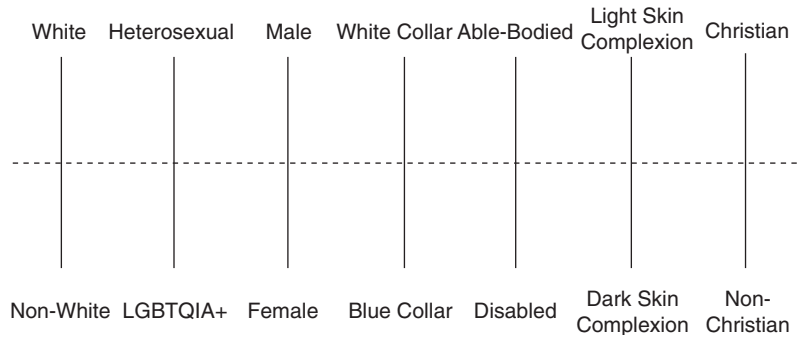
Shared Experience

Questions to Consider

1. Define dimensions of power and privilege based on the image in Figure 0.1.
2. Define dimensions of oppression based on the image in Figure 0.1.
3. Is this an accurate depiction of dimensions of power and privilege and dimensions of oppression?
4. How do dimensions of power and privilege show up in your organization?
5. How do dimensions of oppression show up in your organization?

FIGURE 0.1 Dimensions of Power, Privilege, and Oppression

Dimensions of Power Privilege



Source: Adapted from Race Matters Institute (2014).

Dimensions of Oppression

DIMENSIONS OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE	DIMENSIONS OF OPPRESSION
white	non-white
heterosexual	LGBTQIA+
male	female
white collar	blue collar
able-bodied	disabled
light skin complexion	dark skin complexion
citizen	non-citizen
Christian	non-Christian
traditional family	nontraditional family
never incarcerated	incarcerated
literate	illiterate
English as a first language	English as an additional language
below average or average weight	above average weight
middle to high income	low to no income
old/older	young

Source: Adapted from Race Matters Institute (2014).

As a result of the systems of power, privilege, and oppression, some individuals and communities will always be positioned to thrive. Others will only survive, and in some instances, actually perish.

Should we settle for the equality provisions of desegregation legislation? In other words, should we applaud the mere fact that we have access to programs that were once only available to white students? Should we commend the aesthetics of physical school environments that are appealing to the eye? Should we praise the fact that, at least in some schools, digital technologies are in the hands of our learners? Should we extol that schools hire multilingual educators? Civil rights legislation like *Brown* has done some good, but after more than 60 years of de facto segregation and countless other barriers to access for BIPOC students, we must conclude it is not enough. It does not address the specific systems of oppression and societal disparities that get in the way of a quality education and enhanced opportunities in life. “The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally,” says the Race Matters Institute (2014). “It will be achieved by treating everyone equitably, or justly according to their circumstances.”

Bryan Stevenson has said the great evil of American slavery wasn’t limited to the involuntary servitude that began more than 400 years ago; “it was the fiction that Black people aren’t as good as white people, and aren’t the equals of white people, and are less evolved, less human, less capable, less worthy, less deserving than white people” (Chotiner, 2020). How does this show up in our schools? In our experiences, we see systems of oppression in school communities across America. There are a multitude of examples including inferior facilities, lack of equitable funding, underprepared educators, curriculum mismatches, and limited extracurriculars and student services. On an even greater scale, we have seen that too few students have been nourished by rigorous and relevant instruction and assessments. Such intellectual malnourishment all too often results in emotionally and physically depleted members of our learning communities. However, despite these formidable obstacles, we have no doubt that the pursuit of educational equity is still worth the effort. But, before taking hold of this challenge, ask yourself, *What will it take and who will get it done?*

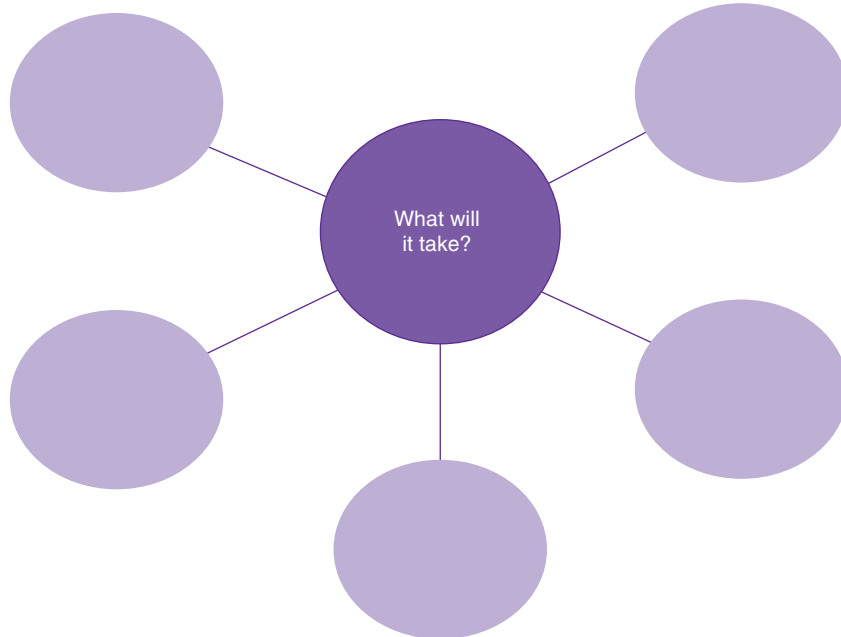
Although we are grateful for the impactful and important steps that have been taken to transform and change an educational system that still does not recognize or acknowledge the daily pains and oppressions that are experienced by people of color, we must also ask ourselves, *are these steps enough?* We have a long road ahead of us and an urgency to get to our destination. If we truly share a collective commitment to



Jot Thought

The Pursuit of Educational Equity

In the graphic organizer below, respond to the question, What will it take?



economic, social, and racial justice in our communities, we must conclude that such steps have been insufficient.

In this book, we will identify a learning community that is built upon shared accountability, in which truths are explored and validated and individual cultural experiences are valued through a process called collective equity. The ultimate objective of collective equity is to catalyze the members of the learning community around the work of repairing the damage that has been caused by inequitable systems across generations and create conditions in which we all can thrive on our own terms.

Our Why, Our Conviction, Our Movement

Our (Sonja and Nicole's) heads, hearts, and hands have been connected for more than 20 years and it was unknown to both of us. When our paths crossed in 2017, our gifts collided. We quickly realized that it was our destiny to tell the story of our journey toward creating a better world for ourselves, the young people that we serve, and all humankind. This book is a representation of our newfound simultaneous truths as leaders of equity. Sonja, a social worker, teacher, principal, K–12 district leader

in a Southern urban community, a consultant and a director of professional learning for a global solution provider, *embraces communal and collective ways of engaging, empowering, and motivating others for the betterment of all people*. Similarly, Nicole, a teacher, principal, K–12 district leader in a Midwestern urban community, educational consulting business owner, and professional consultant for a global solution provider, *cultivates collaborative atmospheres and contributes to the uplifting of individual voices and communities so that they are empowered and inspired to show up without giving up*.

This work has been burning within us for more than two decades in personal, professional, organizational, and societal levels of engagement. This fire is now ignited and can no longer be contained. There is a sense of urgency (and also sadness) during these tumultuous and destructive times in our world's history. Yet, it has invigorated us to light the darkness of disparities that have plagued our schools throughout centuries, especially for marginalized, ignored, and underserved members of society.

In coming together, we realized that we are more alike than we are different in our philosophy and the ways in which we engage and view the world. And our shared truths revealed that we believe the following:

- Our collective strength and courage gives us the resilience to interrupt the barriers and the beasts of racial and cultural inequities in organizations
- Humility is fundamental in building thriving learning communities that fulfill the promises of equity for all
- A shared sense of accountability for dismantling systems and structures of oppression is created through a Collective Equity Framework

What Is Collective Equity?

Collective refers to collaborative actions, relational interdependence, shared wisdom, and common ambitions. A collective is a group that prioritizes the good of the society over the welfare of the individual. *Equity* refers to teaching, learning, leading, and convening so that biases and inequities are addressed, educational disparities are reduced and eliminated, and policies and practices meet the needs of the members of the learning community, to ensure educational excellence.

Collective equity is a shared responsibility for the social, cultural, academic, and emotional fortification of students and adults that enables everyone to achieve their goals and aspirations on their own terms. It addresses systemic barriers, historic racism, educational disparities, and levels of oppression by fostering culturally fortifying experiences (see Figure 0.2).

How does collective equity show up in our learning communities? We must be vulnerable, take risks, and cultivate an environment of safety to experiment with new or unfamiliar practices, in order to demonstrate relational trust. Relational trust creates the pathway for the community to display a cultural humility that rests upon self- and social awareness, exploration and deep reflection, and the appreciation of diverse perspectives that offer grace. There is a focus on being proactive: considering what is needed before there is a need. These intertwined actions create a natural lift for the entire community that is normalized throughout the organization. It is the culture of the way we collectively show up! When a group works together to elevate and enhance positive outcomes for the learning community, guided by a shared motivation to achieve educational equity, we look beyond our own self-interest and become accountable to one another.

Figure 0.2 What Collective Equity Is and Is Not

WHAT COLLECTIVE EQUITY IS	WHAT COLLECTIVE EQUITY IS NOT
Speaking up for equity, identifying opportunity gaps, and taking ownership for equity transformation	Relying solely on our existing mental models that shape our expectations and efficacy in removing equity barriers
Sharing accountability for disrupting educational disparities that we identify in our organizational system, structures, and practices	Personal accountability for dismantling inequities
Challenging the deficit thinking that exist and replacing it with asset-based actions	Normalizing biased behaviors, language, and practices
Embracing the diverse cultural representations of the members of our learning community	Believing that the members of the learning community must conform to the “way of school”
Building partnerships with families and other members of the community based on shared interests	Designing traditional parent-student activities without including the voices of all members of the community
Cultivating opportunities to accelerate learning by removing barriers that produce learning gaps	Remediating learning by focusing on the gaps and not the strengths of the students