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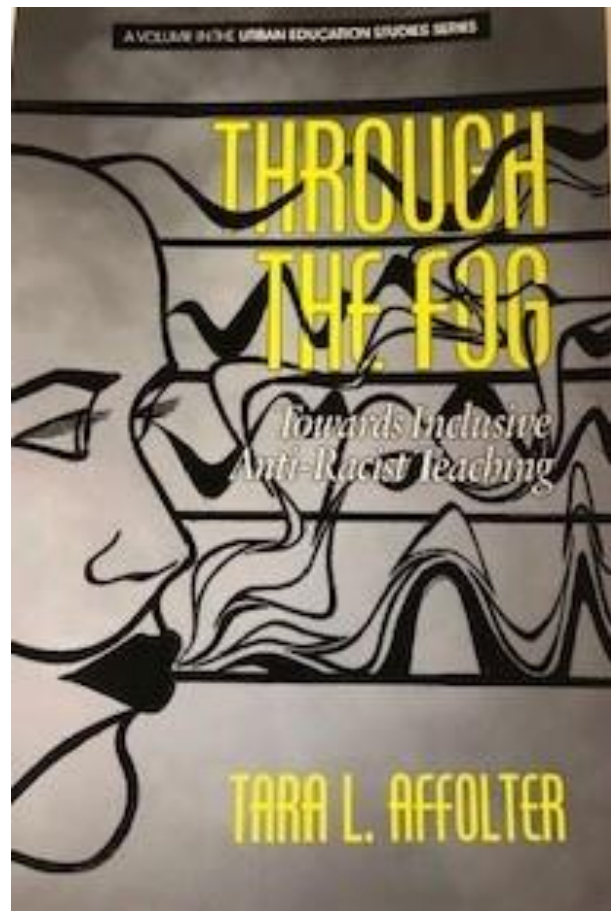
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Through the Fog: Towards Inclusive Anti-Racist Teaching is a timely book for America's teachers due to the systemic nature of racism that lingers in society today. As a professor at Middlebury College, Tara Affolter brings a variety of experiences and insight to a book geared towards practicing teachers. With experience as a classroom teacher, professor, and researcher of anti-racist teaching practices, she is a highly credible source from which teachers can learn.

The topic of racism in America is often met with resistance. However, Affolter strikes a balance, offering teachers a safe place to engage in this work while also providing a realistic picture of the harsh realities of systemic racism in our country and the need for change. Affolter defines inclusive anti-racist teaching as “engaging students where they are and providing opportunities for all in the class community to learn, grow, and change” (p. xxiv). She further defines inclusive anti-racist pedagogy as “teaching against oppression in all forms” with a specific focus on race because it “is ever present in our world and is enmeshed with



other issues” (p. xxiv). Affolter walks readers through some of America’s dark historical truths, beliefs, and biases, all the while encouraging readers to act on their new knowledge. This book is a penetrating glimpse into the complexities of anti-racist teaching and a great starting point for teachers who are concerned with creating equitable school experiences and outcomes for all students.

Drawing on examples from her personal life, the K-12 classroom, and her experiences in the professoriate, Affolter issues a call to action for all teachers. As a white woman, she acknowledges her own privilege and failures. Through her writing, Affolter shows her vulnerability, exposing her own shortcomings and relating the times when she too has missed the mark by silently benefiting from the privilege that she possesses as a white woman. This vulnerability is a great example for readers who want to engage in the battle against systemic racism. To engage in this work requires an open mind and the ability to look inward to expose deep-seated biases that have taken root due to the socialization that individuals undergo in society. Affolter’s transparency is likely to encourage readers to let down their own guards and engage in the deep inward reflection necessary of anti-racist teachers.

The early chapters of this book provide readers with a historical foundation on which later chapters build. Given that the white perspective has dominated the social studies curriculum, there is a need to expose readers to some truths in our nation’s racist history that have been overlooked or omitted from the curriculum. In her discussion of curriculum, Affolter argues that “schools cater to white middle and upper-class students’ speech, habits, and basic dispositions” (p. 102). Given that teachers were most likely exposed to this same curriculum, Affolter does not assume that readers already possess this knowledge. She takes the space at the beginning of her book to correct misconceptions and fill in gaps in knowledge

that are the result of the K-12 schooling experience. Drawing on a variety of credible sources, the author stresses that the pursuit of the often-romanticized American Dream has allowed systemic inequities to be overlooked and attributed to individual shortcomings. In covering this history, Affolter sets the purpose for her writing and establishes a need for anti-racist teaching.

Affolter’s work aligns with much of the literature and research pertaining to critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and multicultural education. However, a common problem in the field of education is finding tangible ways to act on empirical research within the classroom. Teachers are often left asking: “Okay, so now what?” Affolter responds to this need by providing practical examples of what anti-racist teaching looks like through powerful stories from real teachers and her own experiences, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice. One example comes from a veteran teacher, Tracy Wilson, who employs various teaching strategies to help her African American students cope with their day-to-day experiences with racism, and to encourage white students to engage in reflection and discussion about racism in the United States. In sharing Ms. Wilson’s personal experiences as an African American, Affolter applauds her strength in reliving some of her more painful experiences to bring comfort to young students navigating similar situations. Ms. Wilson also demonstrates great skill in encouraging white students to engage in discussions about racism through a disclaimer that she presents at the beginning of class discussions: “None of us were there during slavery” (p. 35). In making this statement, Ms. Wilson is opening the door for all students to engage in needed conversations about race, bringing white students into a conversation that they might have been initially resistant to. These examples offer teachers tangible, replicable strategies that they can take back to their classroom.

As an additional resource, related activities are provided in each chapter and in the appendix. For example, in one activity, readers are encouraged to watch “Chimamanda Adichie – The Danger of a Single Story,” which emphasizes the issue of attributing homogeneity to certain groups of people rather than acknowledging the complexity that lies within all of us due to our multiple identities. Affolter provides questions that could serve as discussion starters or writing prompts after the video, as well as different formats for discussion, such as the Talking Wheel. These activities could be conducted individually or in a group during professional development exercises, making this book helpful to teachers who are seeking to improve their own practice or conduct trainings centered around anti-racist teaching.

One striking feature of this text is Affolter’s ability to connect historical events to contemporary issues. By showing how what are perceived to be problems of the past manifest in modern times, Affolter dispels the myth that racism is not a contemporary issue. Drawing on historical examples of ableism and the imagined disabilities assigned to African American individuals to rationalize slavery, Affolter connects what is thought to be a “thing of the past” to the overrepresentation of African American children in special education today. Affolter points out that this history has made critical race theorists hesitant to make CRT more encompassing the intersection of racial identities with other identities, especially disability.

Real accounts demonstrating the social injustice that some have experienced due to both race and disability strengthen Affolter’s claim that intersectionality cannot be ignored. Building on Subani Annamma’s (2013) Discredit theory that acknowledges the intersectionality of race and disability, the stories within this book highlight how the intersection of identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and the like can create

complexities when met with social injustice. One such example Affolter provides is the story of Junius Wilson, an African American male who became deaf as a young child. Although, Junius did learn Raleigh Sign at the Colored Deaf and Blind School in Raleigh, North Carolina, he was not afforded many of the opportunities that other white, deaf individuals would have been given. One such opportunity denied to him was the chance to learn to read and write, making it difficult for him to communicate with those in the town where he grew up. Because of this, Junius relied on touch to get the attention of individuals, which ultimately resulted in him being accused of assault. Affolter’s inclusion of Junius’s story and that of others, illustrates the complexities that arise at the intersection of disability and race, especially given the heightened oppression occurring at the time of Jim Crow segregation. Other accounts demonstrating the complexity of intersectionality are portrayed in the stories of John Williams and Arnaldo Rios-Santos.

Affolter does not just leave readers with a problem but rather provides a way for teachers to combat the issue. For example, she promotes a mindset, first proposed by Donnellan’s (1984) “Least Dangerous Assumption” (p. 55). This mindset moves teachers away from deficit thinking and towards high expectations for all students. When looked at in light of the inequitable opportunities that often exist for students who don’t fit the mainstream norms, this way of thinking “forces decisions to be made in such a way that if one is wrong the *least dangerous* consequences result” (p. 57).

In addition, Affolter clearly supports and assumes the best in teachers. With this foundation of respect, she delves into tough conversations about when teachers get it wrong, such as remaining silent when a racist comment is made or when activities are employed that uphold whiteness. As a teacher, this would be a difficult chapter to read if one was not open-minded regarding one’s own

biases; however, the preceding chapters ease readers into the hard discussions centered around whiteness that so often result in resistance.

Affolter provides counterarguments to some of the resistance she commonly encounters when facilitating anti-racist professional development, such as an all-too-familiar comment, “But what if we are all white?” (p. 77). Affolter builds the case that anti-racist teaching is imperative for all students:

To deny white students access to the tools to effectively reflect on race, racial identity, and racism builds more walls of distortions between people groups; promotes an unnamed but ever-present state of false superiority whiteness; and denies white students opportunities to examine and explore their own racial identity. (p. 79)

Some critics of Affolter’s work might take issue with her politics. She references the Trump administration on several occasions as a force that has upheld and even encouraged racism in the United States. For example, Affolter writes that “daily we see the Trump administration injecting more hate and exclusion into our country through legislation and executive action” (p. 69). Some may call for a more politically balanced look into anti-

racist teaching. However, given Affolter’s message is to speak out against racism, a politically balanced book is not really an option if she is to adhere to the principles that she promotes. She states, “sustaining hope and demanding change in these times is difficult but necessary; it requires resisting the push to normalize xenophobia, racism, ableism, and misogyny and taking action” (p. 69). Given the current political climate, a book of this nature has the moral obligation to speak out against present social injustices, even if that means taking a political stance.

Through the Fog is a commendable book that unifies anti-racism research and practical advice for today’s teachers. The personal anecdotes and the stories of real teachers bring the ideas of anti-racist teaching to life and create an engaging read that some teachers will have difficulty putting down. It fills a void commonly acknowledged in education, the theory-to-practice gap, making this work a significant contribution to the field. Affolter guides readers through the processes of acknowledging racism, past and present, reflecting on personal biases, and then acting on the newly acquired knowledge to affect change. This book would be an excellent starting place for preservice and veteran teachers to learn more about anti-racist teaching.

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About the Reviewer


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