"I Don't See Color, Kids Are Just Kids"

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I have heard this statement over and over in my years of education, and quite frankly, I'm terrified rather than being impressed. Educators tell me this continually, and I believe they want me to be impressed with their color-blind philosophy, but I am not. Let me tell you why.

When you say you do not see color, you are telling me that you do not see me. So, if you say you don't see color and kids are just kids, you are telling me that you are ignoring specific details that comprise the character and being of individual children. Each child comes into your classroom with different experiences, needs, thoughts, and perspective. That child's color has a great deal to do with their experiences, needs, thoughts, and perspective. Take me for instance; I have many identities that make me who I am. I am black, I'm a woman, and I'm an educator, just to list a few. Black is the most essential identity because it is the one element that I am judged on every single day of my life. Before society sees a woman, they see a black woman; before society sees an educator, they see a black educator. With both positive and negative implications alike, it is how I am viewed once I step outside of my home each day.

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If I am being judged day to day by the color of my skin, how can we ignore the color of our students? When we teach, we must realize that the students coming into our classrooms have not necessarily had the exact same experiences that we may have had. Judging those students on our own experiences and biases leads to institutionalized racism, so I ask you, how can you not see color? I am not asking you to allow the color differences to prevent you from being a thoughtful educator, I am simply asking you to be aware of those differences and allow yourself to live in "awareness." Living in awareness simply means that you realize the differences, you don't feel compelled to apologize for the differences, and that you consider those differences when you are working with all students.

Please do not read my message and confuse the term *color* with *low-income*. The two are not the same. *Low-income children* does not equal *children of color*. I am stating this for my colleagues teaching in private schools and privileged neighborhoods. Just because a student of color comes from a middle-class family, does not mean that student is now "raceless." No disrespect to Ruby Payne, but we educators tend to hide behind the poverty issue when speaking on racism and the two are different entities. Each adds to the disproportionate circumstances in our nation's school buildings, but they are not the same.

I get discouraged at the end of our trainings when participants make comments like, **"I like the training, but leave the equity stuff out, kids are just kids."** I'm even more discouraged when I realize these educators are teaching children, and I'm not sure I have succeeded in my goal of energizing them about CFG work. To me, CFGs give us a tool to live in "awareness," so if a participant in my training still feels that "kids are just kids" at the end of the week, I feel as though I have failed that educator, but most importantly, I have failed their students. ■

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