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**SONJA CHERRY-PAUL**

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author



GRADES K-8

# ANTIRACIST READING REVOLUTION

A Framework  
for Teaching  
Beyond  
Representation  
Toward Liberation

Foreword by **YOLANDA SEALEY-RUIZ**

Art by **PORSCHÉ JOSEPH**

**CORWIN** Literacy

## Study Guide

Written by Keisha Smith-Carrington and Michelle Yang-Kaczmarek  
for Sonja Cherry-Paul's *Antiracist Reading Revolution*.

“The place to begin is with self-reflection around your own racial and cultural identity and how this shapes your instructional practices” (p. 17).  
Then, “enter into discussions with colleagues about ways this book may be affirming, challenging, and/or changing your ideas about antiracism and reading practices.” (p. 18).

## DEAR READER,

As you launch into the text of *Antiracist Reading Revolution: A Framework for Teaching Beyond Representation Toward Liberation*, it is important to engage in an exploration of yourself and the context in which you teach. Dig deeply into the experiences and emotions you bring to the reading and how your identities combine to create the you that shows up in your work with children and colleagues. This is the self-work that will move you **from a reader of this text to** an educator capable of *using the learning from this text* to develop or strengthen your ability to be an antiracist reading teacher. One of the truths about education is that there is often a gap between what educators know and what they do. Many times, this gap is due to the human propensity to fall back on habits and familiar patterns. Of many ways to interrupt this is the practice of intentionally reflecting on and interrogating our own schooling. Were we exposed to a curriculum that was “identity-inspiring” or “identity-silencing”? As Dr. Cherry-Paul states, “When teachers cling to their discomfort rather than interrogate it, teaching that silences identities and inequities is perpetuated” (p. 7).

One of the ways to avoid working toward an “identity-inspiring” curriculum in isolation is a key point you will take away from Dr. Cherry-Paul’s Antiracist Reading Framework—work in community with others. If you have not come to this reading with other colleagues with whom to discuss and process through the learning, it’s not too late. Please pause now to consider who might be part of a book study with you. Keep in mind that doing this work with others requires the development of agreed-upon ways of being in community with each other. **There will be times of discomfort** as members go deep into their beliefs and experience emotions from what they learn about themselves and others. While opportunities should be provided for all to share individual responses throughout the study, honor the need some may feel to keep responses to portions of the text private. At the same time, the group provides an opportunity for all to get stronger in their ability to engage in conversations about race. Therefore, all should share and honor the space.

At this moment in education, it is important to note the reframing of the dandelion that Dr. Cherry-Paul calls for us to do. Instead of seeing them as weeds to be destroyed, she suggests seeing dandelions as she now does—“strong, noble perennials concerned not only with their survival but also with helping other organisms around them to thrive” (p. xv). This means we should not be antiracist educators in isolation and must unite with others to form an interdependent collective. Amidst the current push for a singular interpretation of the science of reading, the Antiracist Reading Framework provides a call to action to push from a survivalist approach on one component of reading to a more purpose-oriented approach for reading that will help readers thrive. This approach involves the five characteristics and six lenses you will learn about in the pages of the *Antiracist Reading Revolution*. It is **not** antiracist fairy dust. There are no silver bullets for any issue in education. There is just collective work and accountability for putting what we know into action.

As you prepare to enter into the text, please know we are excited for the learning you (and your students) are about to experience. We hope you allow yourself to be vulnerable and extend grace as you learn and unlearn truths that may be revealed throughout this reading and application of Dr. Cherry-Paul’s work. Be mindful that vulnerability and grace are two of many components of self-care that are necessary to sustain you through the journey of being an antiracist reading teacher. Wherever you are in space and time, we are on the journey with you.

In solidarity,  
Keisha Smith-Carrington and Michelle Yang-Kaczmarek

## INTRODUCTION: THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS ANTIRACIST FAIRY DUST

“There’s no such thing as antiracist fairy dust, glittery sparkles we can blow into the air that can magically transform society. To be antiracist requires us to utilize our powers of ongoing commitment and action.” (p. 2)



In the Introduction, Dr. Cherry-Paul explains the origin of the book and begins describing moves that support teaching toward liberation. Each instructional move provides evidence of instruction that is represented on a continuum like the one below:

← destruction — representation — liberation →

As we move forward in our study of this text, there will be times we will ask you to revisit this continuum to assess your practice in a particular area. This exercise is intended to support you in honing your ability to accurately “align . . . words about equity and justice with . . . actions” (p. 16). The goal is to end this study with a plan of action for moving your reading instruction toward sustainable liberatory practices. With this in mind, take a moment to reflect on the current state of your reading instruction. Where would you place it on this continuum?

Please consider the following questions as you read the Introduction.

- Working toward liberation requires one to actively redress the consequences of inequities. In what ways have you been doing this work?
- Consider the teacher Dr. Cherry-Paul references who would “rather die than give up *The Giver*.” What have you held sacred and been unwilling to change?
  - What has your grade level team held sacred and been unwilling to change?
  - What have some parents or community members held sacred and been unwilling to change?
  - What role does love play in your pedagogy? Who is centered in your curriculum? If the answer isn’t students:
    - In what ways would it be different if students were centered?
    - Does not centering them demonstrate love for your students?
- Consider the quote: “An antiracist reading revolution takes root when students are able to fellowship with each other in ways that are validating, loving, healing, and joyful.” What are the implications when you replace the word “students” with **educators**? **Teachers**? **Principals and teachers**?
- How can the Antiracist Reading Framework be intentionally integrated into content areas beyond English Language Arts?
- On pages 20–22, Dr. Cherry-Paul provides examples of antiracist reading teaching that easily translate into ways adults can be in community with each other:
  1. Plan for places to prompt before you gather.
  2. Spotlight a text in the book and model the lesson that comes from one of the lenses. (This can be an activity that results in a lesson several of you might implement in the classroom, while others observe students’ engagement in the learning process.)

3. Stay engaged with the text. “Don’t become the kind of readers where texts just wash over them. . . If discussions seem to fade and fizzle, [educators] might lean into the six lenses to consider what they might add to their conversation in ways that help them to understand the work of antiracism in a text and in their lives.” (pp. 20–21)
  4. Read the text individually and collectively. As you read, “use the critical lenses.”
  5. Select a unit to which you will apply your learning along the way. Use the critical lenses to not only examine the texts already aligned to the unit but also select new texts.
- In the epilogue, Dr. Cherry-Paul makes suggestions for actions that will build the movement for liberation. We ask you to begin planning for that now. How will you avoid working in isolation? Who are/will be your people in this work? How will you prioritize this work?

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## CHAPTER 1: BE A DANDELION: A METAPHOR AND VISION FOR ANTIRACIST TEACHING

“Antiracist teaching is not a binary; it is layered, interconnected, and iterative.” (p. 41)



Please consider the following questions as you read Chapter 1:

- What have you been socialized to believe about people who hold identities that are different from yours? How have these beliefs affected your teaching and learning?
- Often, there is a push to move into action. This is one of the ways that educators have found themselves in a collection approach—to have representation of students in the texts in the classroom at a rate that exceeds the meaningful use of those texts for “truth-seeking and truth-telling” (p. 27). This results in an interruption to the process of understanding new learning deeply enough to impact not just an action but a practice. How can you push against the desire to jump to action so that you maintain a learning stance?
- The Antiracist Reading Framework identifies the following Five Characteristics of Antiracist Teaching. Which characteristics are most reflected in your classroom and in the school? About which characteristics do you—individually and collectively—need to learn more?

### FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF ANTIRACIST TEACHING

- **Center BIPOC in texts.** Antiracist educators select texts by and about BIPOC that reflect the fullness of their lives without exclusively locating their histories, experiences, and backgrounds in oppression.
- **Recognize cultural, community, and collective practices.** Antiracist educators highlight powerful ways of knowing and being in the world that are rooted in the knowledge of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups of people.
- **Shatter silences around racism.** Antiracist educators name racism, Whiteness, and White supremacy and help students recognize oppressive ideologies and how they function.
- **Teach racial literacy.** Antiracist educators provide opportunities for students to have critical and constructive conversations about race and racism where they develop their ability to apply language to examine racial and cultural identities; question ideas, assumptions, and the status quo; and work to resist racist ideas, practices, and policies.
- **Learn about community activists.** Antiracist educators provide opportunities for students to learn about, explore, and reference voices of color in their communities and activists in the world who are advancing the work of racial justice.

- It is important to note the following facts:
  - All people socialized in this nation have learned beliefs that uphold White supremacy. Some people are aware of this and actively seek to interrupt these beliefs. Others are unaware. Still others are aware and actively seek to uphold these beliefs.
  - All people can have gaps in their knowledge of history.

Based on these facts, there should be no embarrassment or shame when internalized oppression shows up in reflections on beliefs or in interrogation of practices. Finding internalized supremacy or inferiority should just be evidence compelling you to continue learning and pushing toward liberation—both for yourself and your students. With this in mind, consider the steps below:

- Sort through your text collection to pull 10 titles that center BIPOC people or characters.
- Of the 10, how many locate the story in oppression resulting from the character’s racial and/or ethnic identity?

- What do you know about the ways of knowing and being in the world that are connected with these identities?
- What steps can you take to develop depth?

After reflecting on these steps, consider the following questions:

- How comfortable are you with naming racism, Whiteness, and White supremacy? Are there oppressive ideologies about which you don't know or need to learn more? When you consider the learning you have done in these areas, do you also have experience holding critical and constructive conversations with other adults/educators OR are you only finding yourself engaged in this with students?
  - What do you know about the forms of oppression currently (and historically) impacting the community in which you work? Who are the activists working to advance racial justice in that community?
  - How do your students' personal and social identities inform your teaching and learning?
  - "Racism is entrenched in institutions and systems such as education, housing, health care, media, government, law enforcement, and more . . ." (p. 31). How does racism show up in your educational setting? How can it be dismantled?
  - Dr. Cherry-Paul's framework is predicated on an understanding of antiracist teaching resulting from the research of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, Dr. Barbara Love, and Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz. Before reading this chapter, were you aware of and familiar with the work of these researchers? If not, how will you learn more about their work to better ground your implementation of the Antiracist Reading Framework?
  - The Antiracist Reading Framework functions through the application of six critical lenses to reading instruction. Of the six, affirmation and awareness are highlighted as "cornerstone concepts" (p. 36). Select two of the 10 titles you identified earlier. As you read (or re-read) the description for these two lenses, consider these books through those lenses, asking the questions Dr. Cherry-Paul poses (p. 37):
    - Affirmation: Does each book make children feel seen, valued, cherished, loved, and that they matter? In what ways do they accomplish this?
    - Awareness: In what ways is each book a truth-teller about racism? White supremacy? Collective struggle? Laboring for freedom together? Being antiracist?
- How can you use the resulting data from answering the questions for these and the remaining four lenses?

## Reflection Toward Implementation of A Sustainable Antiracist Reading Framework

Harkening back to the Introduction and your overall assessment of your reading instruction, where along the continuum would you now place your reading instruction based on the information you've learned in this chapter?

← destruction – representation – liberation →

Remember, this exercise is intended to support you in honing your ability to accurately "align . . . words about equity and justice with . . . actions" (p. 16).

## CHAPTER 2: CENTER BIPOC IN TEXTS

“Like dandelion seeds, young people have the ability to go the distance. When readers see themselves and others in powerful ways, they move through the world upright, conscientious, and justice-centered. Be the wind that carries them forth.” (p. 49)



Please consider the following questions as you read Chapter 2:

- Reflect on the “Recalling Reading Experiences in School” grid (pp. 47–48) and your own book collage. What do you notice about your reading experiences at school? Are you able to locate yourself in the books that were centered in reading instruction and available in the classroom library? Do tensions exist between your identities and your book collage? If so, what tensions?
- Dr. Cherry-Paul states that “BIPOC students learn that their culture, their histories, are irrelevant” when the approach to curriculum lacks cultural competence (p. 48). How is cultural competence integrated into your reading instruction? How might you need to strengthen your own cultural competence so that you can better center BIPOC students and their full lived experiences?
- Take a moment to think about the texts that are part of your pedagogy.
  - First, reflect upon the books that are centered in your reading instruction. Which books do you highlight and celebrate in your curriculum? Why? Who is and is not represented in your instruction? What patterns and truths are revealed as you look at the books you use for instruction?
  - Then, reflect on your classroom library. What types of books are currently represented in your classroom library? Are there books in which children can view their lived experiences framed by love and joy? Who is and is not represented in your classroom library? What patterns and truths are revealed as you look at the books in your classroom library?
- Dr. Cherry-Paul states that “Antiracist teaching, however, isn’t just about the books we make available to students but also about our stance as antiracist educators.” How can you go beyond the idea of just providing books, to develop an antiracist stance that centers the full humanity of Black and Brown people?

### Reflection Toward Implementation of A Sustainable Antiracist Reading Framework

Harkening back to the Introduction and your overall assessment of your reading instruction, where along the continuum would you now place the collection used in your reading instruction based on the information you’ve learned in this chapter?

← destruction – representation – liberation →

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## CHAPTER 3: RECOGNIZE CULTURAL, COMMUNITY, AND COLLECTIVE PRACTICES

“Try pulling a dandelion out of the ground and you’ll discover it’s not so easy. . . . Having done the difficult work of breaking through dry, compact earth, the taproot and its offshoot roots transport water from the surface to other plants and insects beneath the ground. They become lifelines that help other organisms survive.” (p. 99)



Please consider the following questions as you read Chapter 3:

- Discuss the importance of interdependence. In what ways do you cultivate interdependence to truly establish a classroom community? How does your community become a source of strength for children? What collectivist practices do you prioritize? What ways do you cultivate communal experiences? How are students’ home cultures and funds of knowledge centered in the classroom community?
- Before you can interrogate your historical and sociopolitical understandings, you must identify how they developed. Reflect back on your childhood to answer the questions below that Dr. Cherry-Paul asks (p. 101):
  - What “people and activities were a significant part of your world”?
  - “What historical, sociocultural commitments were you rooted in?”
  - How have you been “shaped by cultural understanding, experiences, and expressions?”
  - “What symbols, structures, and patterns emerge as you reflect?”
  - “Which ideas were cornerstones of your PreK-12 grade educational experiences and beyond?”
- Reflect on your responses to the “Historical and Cultural Understandings” chart (p. 102).
  - What do you notice? What is resonating with you? Do you notice a connection between your current historical and sociopolitical understandings and your reflections on your childhood?
  - What steps can you take to go beyond the archetypes in your reading instruction?
  - How can you interrogate the dominant ideologies and Eurocentrism enmeshed in curriculum and teaching? How does linguistic racism show up in your reading instruction? How will you learn more about these concepts to better interrogate your practices?
  - How might you start to use Black gaze as a stance?

### Reflection Toward Implementation of A Sustainable Antiracist Reading Framework

Harkening back to the Introduction and your overall assessment of your reading instruction, where along the continuum would you now place the practices used in your reading instruction based on the information you’ve learned in this chapter?

← destruction – representation – liberation →

Remember, this exercise is intended to support you in honing your ability to accurately “align . . . words about equity and justice with . . . actions” (p. 16).

## CHAPTER 4: SHATTER SILENCES AROUND RACISM

“The onus to address racism rests on the shoulders of all educators, and it’s important that a proactive approach is taken.” (p. 156)



Please consider the following questions as you read Chapter 4:

- Is your school/classroom safe? Do all of your students belong, regardless of the identities they hold? Does your instruction include discussions about race and racism?
- When racialized issues occur, do you feel equipped to respond? What PD or other resources have you been given to support you with responding?
- Revisit the 10 titles you selected and analyzed in Chapter 1. Do any contain “misrepresentations and distortions of BIPOC and their lives” (p. 157)? If so, how might this/these text(s) be used to teach about race and racism?
- As you complete the “Every Book Is About Race” chart on p. 158, note the emotions that arise. Look up an Emotions Wheel to help with your thinking. Do you feel surprised, happy, sad, disgusted, angry, fearful, bad, or something else? Where do you feel the emotion in your body? How can you release any emotions that stop you from moving forward?
- On p. 161, Dr. Cherry-Paul writes, “It can be tempting to cast aside everything you’ve just read and to instead hold on dearly to texts that are beloved to you. . . Antiracist teaching challenges us to move differently in the world rather than perpetuating ideas and practices that are psychologically violent to students.”
  - For which books do you experience nostalgia?
  - How can you push through the urge to select texts from this stance?
- On p. 163, Dr. Cherry-Paul suggests several ways to think about texts being used “with students in a unit or as a read-aloud.” How can you regularly schedule time to use these questions to critically evaluate texts individually and collectively?

### Reflection Toward Implementation of A Sustainable Antiracist Reading Framework

Harkening back to the Introduction and your overall assessment of your reading instruction, where along the continuum would you now place the ways you address racism in your reading instruction based on the information you’ve learned in this chapter?

← destruction – representation – liberation →

Remember, this exercise is intended to support you in honing your ability to accurately “align . . . words about equity and justice with . . . actions” (p. 16).

## CHAPTER 5: HELP STUDENTS ACQUIRE RACIAL LITERACY

“Teaching students to be racially literate requires students having access to information, ideas, and teaching that help them to acquire language to recognize, analyze, and discuss race and racism. . . . Racial literacy makes it possible for students to bridge connections between past and contemporary issues.” (p. 194)



Please consider the following questions as you read Chapter 5:

- Where are you—individually and collectively—on the path to racial literacy? Are you actually working on a plan or do you need to start one? If you need to start one, how will you access information, ideas, and texts that will help you to “acquire language to recognize, analyze, and discuss race and racism” (p. 194)?
- Consider the unit you selected to revise (or create) for number 5 in the Introduction as you respond to the following:
  - Which texts are (or will be) “etched in stone” (p. 191)? Which identities are represented in these texts? Why are these the identities that are memorialized in a permanent manner?
  - Which texts are (or will be) “painted on canvas” (p. 191)? Which identities are represented in these texts? Why are these the identities that are memorialized in a temporary manner?
  - Which of the six components of racial literacy, as designated by France Winddance Twine and listed in the “Racial Literacy Development and Reading Instruction” chart on p. 195, exist in the unit? Which needs to be added to the unit?
  - How prepared do you feel to teach the components that exist in the unit? What will you do to become more prepared?
  - How will you add the components missing from the unit and ensure you are prepared to teach them?
  - How will you support each other in this work?

### Reflection Toward Implementation of A Sustainable Antiracist Reading Framework

Harkening back to the Introduction and your overall assessment of your reading instruction, where along the continuum would you now place the ways you teach racial literacy in your reading instruction based on the information you’ve learned in this chapter?

← destruction – representation – liberation →

Remember, this exercise is intended to support you in honing your ability to accurately “align . . . words about equity and justice with . . . actions” (p. 16).

## CHAPTER 6: LEARN ABOUT COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS

“Antiracist teaching branches out beyond classrooms and schools and into communities, transforming students’ lives.”  
(p. 225)



Please consider the following questions as you read Chapter 6:

- Who were the activists you learned about in school?
  - What did you learn about them?
  - How did you learn about them?
  - What time of year did you learn about them?
  - Why do you think these specific activists were chosen?
- Now take some time to complete the “Considering Curriculum, Books, and Activism” chart (p. 222).
  - What do you notice?
  - Are any of the issues of oppression that these activists are fighting against reflected in your school community?
    - If the issues are present, who are the local activists engaged in improving conditions for those most impacted?
    - If the issues are not present, what are the issues of oppression in your school community and who are the local activists engaged in improving conditions for those most impacted?
  - How can you raise children’s sociopolitical consciousness so that they can identify, question, challenge, and confront issues that matter to them?
  - How can you equip children with the skills and knowledge needed to take action?

### Reflection Toward Implementation of A Sustainable Antiracist Reading Framework

Harkening back to the Introduction and your overall assessment of your reading instruction, where along the continuum would you now place the approach you take to integrate community activists into your reading instruction based on the information you’ve learned in this chapter?

← destruction – representation – liberation →

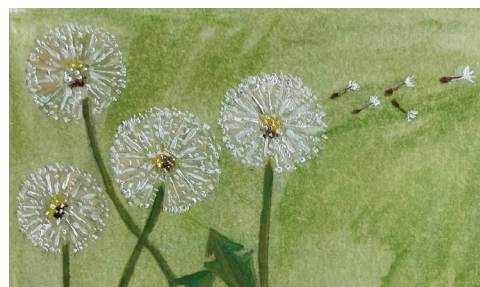
Remember, this exercise is intended to support you in honing your ability to accurately “align . . . words about equity and justice with . . . actions” (p. 16).

## CHAPTER 7: SUSTAINING THE REVOLUTION

“Antiracist teaching is radical love.” (p. 254)

Please consider the following questions as you read Chapter 7:

- On p. 255, Dr. Cherry-Paul notes “the real risk in the work of antiracism is in doing nothing.” Return to the Emotions Wheel and note how you are feeling at this point. An important act of self-care as you implement the Antiracist Reading Framework will be to note how you are feeling along the way. Being mindful of your feelings will help you manage your emotions, which is necessary if you are to avoid stopping the work you have begun.
- In this chapter, Dr. Cherry-Paul includes toolkits for older readers, younger readers, and educators. One way to strengthen your antiracist teaching is employing critical lenses for antiracist reading yourself. As you read—both for leisure and for professional purposes—challenge yourself to use the “Student Toolkit of Critical Lenses for Antiracist Reading for Older Readers” (p. 257). To practice, apply this toolkit as you reread one of the 10 titles you selected in Chapter 1.
- To view students as changemakers, one must view them as whole, capable, agentic beings. How do you push against ageism, especially when working with younger children, to maintain this stance toward the learners you teach?



### Reflection Toward Implementation of A Sustainable Antiracist Reading Framework

Harkening back to the Introduction and your overall assessment of your reading instruction, what steps do you need to take to move your reading instruction toward sustainable liberatory practices, based on the information you’ve learned in this chapter?

← destruction – representation – liberation →

Remember, this exercise is intended to support you in honing your ability to accurately “align . . . words about equity and justice with . . . actions” (p. 16).

How will you extend this work deep into the practices in your classroom or school to nurture an antiracist reading revolution? Determining this requires you to look back over each of your assessments to determine which antiracist characteristics are more liberatory in your practice and which may be more destructive.

- How will you maintain, sustain, and strengthen the areas which are more liberatory?
- How will you move the areas in which your reading instruction is more destructive or representative toward more liberatory practices? How will you maintain, sustain, and strengthen these new practices?
- Considering the importance of doing this work in community with others, how will you remain part of a collective as you implement this antiracist reading revolution?
- Remember the question we encouraged you to reflect on for the Introduction: What are the implications when you replace the word “students,” in the quote below, with **educators? Teachers? Principals and teachers?**
  - “An antiracist reading revolution takes root when **students** are able to fellowship with each other in ways that are validating, loving, healing, and joyful.”
  - How will you work, individually and collectively, “to fellowship with each other in ways that are validating, loving, healing, and joyful”? Planning this is a proactive way to ensure sustainability when implementation challenges arise . . . and they **will** arise.

**As expressed by Dr. Cherry-Paul:**

. . . be like dandelions. Abundant. Unmovable. Resilient. Refuse to allow anyone to dismiss this work as weeds. Like a dandelion seed, allow a gust of wind to carry you to fertile ground and take root, believing firmly that antiracist teaching is not about uniformity; it's about possibility. There are seeds of hope we can plant everyday through intentional antiracist reading instruction practices. (p. 23)



## ABOUT THE STUDY GUIDE AUTHORS



**Keisha Smith-Carrington** is an administrator for a public school district in New Jersey. For 27 years, she has worked in community with others to transform classrooms and schools into the inclusive and responsive spaces of learning and belonging that children deserve. She began this mission as a teacher assistant and became a classroom teacher, before responding to calls to benefit more children as a facilitator of adult learning at the state and then district level. Across all spaces her favorite remain those with children, who help her maintain critical hope for humanity. She is a co-author of K-2 and 3-5 versions of *Read-Alouds with Heart: Literacy Lessons That Build Community, Comprehension, and Cultural Competency*.



**Michelle Yang-Kaczmarek** has been an educator for over thirty years and is currently the K-8 Literacy Coordinator and the K-12 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Teacher Leader for a public school in Westchester County, New York. Her love for children and the way they learn started her educational journey as an elementary educator in New York City. She continued to work on her craft as an educator in other school districts in New York where she created responsive and inclusive spaces for children to learn and thrive. Pursuing her passion for teaching literacy, she became a facilitator of adult learning at the state, district and national level knowing she would be able to benefit more children. She has taught graduate and pre-service courses and continues to offer professional development opportunities around literacy and diversity,

equity and inclusion through the Edith Winthrop Teacher Center, in which she is also the Policy Board Chairperson. Her biggest joy has been the spaces she has been able to create for children as the co-advisor for the Introduction to Social Justice Club at the elementary school and the Social Justice Alliance Club at the middle school.