

# Foreword

Curtis Linton is both an outsider and an insider. As an outsider, he observes educators through the lens of a camera and the pen of an author. He has no degree in education, yet he has been in more than two thousand classrooms and hundreds of schools to record what he finds. He has seen more than most educators.

As an insider, Curtis Linton is a White male who fits the norms of the middle-class, White person in our society. If you saw him in the halls of your school, you might assume he is a principal or a teacher. He appears a bit young to be a superintendent.

Yet, within his most intimate relationships, Curtis is again an outsider. He is a father of two children of Color, and he must watch them navigate experiences he will never have while he supports them from the outside. At the same time, Curtis possesses a unique view of race and racism since he views it through the prism of privilege while watching two beautiful children actualize the messages they receive from the media, their teachers, and their peers.

Curtis is both an outsider and an insider, and therein lies the uniqueness of his perspective in this book. Because Curtis views what occurs in classroom after classroom and school after school and district after district as an outsider, he brings a fresh perspective—a perspective of one who sees from both the outside and the inside. In this *Equity 101*, he offers that knowledge by presenting both a framework for the journey to understand equity and the tools with which to achieve it. According to Curtis, he is a White person who passionately believes we must “center ourselves in equity,” and create educational institutions where students “can self-actualize their own future success.”

In *Equity 101*, Curtis accomplishes many things; however, two things are especially meaningful for our understanding of how equity exists or does not exist in our schools. First, he looks at himself to understand better the role he plays in hindering or promoting equity in education. While documenting his own history, he digs deeply into the consciousness of the White male who is an insider in our society, yet who comes from a religious background, Mormonism, that has caused him to be perceived as an outsider. He shares his deepest fears, embarrassments, prejudices, and humiliations along with his greatest joys. In addition, he tells us how he and his wife transformed their daily experiences by bringing two children of Color into their lives. He shares his highest hopes and dreams for them—hopes and dreams not unlike those of any loving father who wants the best for his children. Once again, we learn about Curtis as both the outsider and the insider who has a reason for sharing his story. Curtis shares his personal story in order for us to engage in our own excavation of our deepest fears, embarrassments, prejudices, and humiliations centered upon race. This is a step in the process to understanding equity, and as White people in our society, if we never take this journey, we “deflect the conversation,” as Curtis says, and remain inured to our own complicity in the racial story of our society.

The second thing Curtis does in *Equity 101* is offer a foundation for change: an Equity Framework, an online community, and strategies proven in the schools to have closed the gap. *Equity 101* is the foundation and the first book in a series of four books to address this issue, provide a map for the journey to equity, and establish our work within a community where we can share our collective challenges and successes. This series provides us with support for closing the educational inequity gaps and creates a climate for equity in our school districts.

Curtis is committed to sharing the hard stuff that creates barriers between White folks of privilege and people of Color. He is committed to sharing the strategies that begin to break down barriers. He is committed to working with White people to further emphasize that we White people need to do our race work on ourselves; we should not expect people of Color to “fix” us. We need to not opt out when the work becomes uncomfortable, difficult, and bereft of progress. Instead, we must find ways to support each other as we dig deeper inside our psychic wounds and expose our roadblocks:

whether they be prejudices, racist thoughts and actions, or instances of our own privilege.

Curtis says “the purpose of engaging in this process of centering one’s self in equity is simple: if you do not understand deeply your own realities, it is very hard to help others—such as your students—successfully negotiate their own realities.” So much of it is about understanding our own realities, and Curtis not only models how to do that in *Equity 101*, but gives us the tools to go beyond the modeling and engage in the process.

Curtis clearly defines the purpose of this book: “to define equity, illustrate it clearly, and illuminate its impact on student learning through the stories of highly successful schools and school systems that are eliminating their achievement gaps and lifting all students to high levels of success.” Unlike other books focused solely on equity, *Equity 101* offers compelling evidence we can immediately see and hear through video, a framework to guide the work, and a community of learners with whom to learn. Each chapter offers descriptions of educators who are closing gaps and instituting equity in their schools. These are not composite descriptions from several schools; these are individual schools that have closed the gap and share how they achieved their goals. We engage with educators who have accomplished the task of lifting all students to high levels of success.

Curtis did not have to enter the field of education and focus on equity. Instead, he could have walked away, asserted his privilege, and denied the urgency of equity work for White people. However, while observing and interviewing and becoming part of so many classrooms’ stories, he realized he could not afford to walk away, and as a result, we have *Equity 101* as a map for our journey.

None of us can afford to walk away. Our children are filling too many prisons—prisons with bars, prisons of poverty, and prisons of potential not realized. For the sake of our children, we do not have the choice to deflect the conversation. We must center ourselves in equity, and in this book, *Equity 101*, we find a path that takes us through reflection, talk, and action, all modeled on equity actualized in numerous school communities, proving it can be done.

Curtis, you may have entered education as an outsider—but now you are a respected insider. Thank you for *Equity 101*.

—Bonnie M. Davis