

Preface

My teaching career, spanning four decades, has been a smorgasbord of educational environments. During these years, much good research and numerous theoretical and persuasive books that describe the urgent need for “multicultural” and “culturally responsive” pedagogies and curricula have arisen. I am thankful for these founding fathers and mothers of the movement for equity in education who have laid crucial groundwork. And I am also grateful for those who continue to refine and polish our understanding of what equitable education requires through their research and observations of children. You will find many of these respected names referenced throughout this book. In addition, there has been a vast proliferation of multicultural literature for children that became available in the last 40 years, much of which is offered in the Resources sections of *Bright Ribbons*.

However, in spite of a plethora of multicultural books, I wanted to take the excellent research, the requisite theory and rationale, and the good children’s literature to the next step. I needed ways to more thoroughly address the issues and needs of the broad range of culturally diverse students under my influence. My questions have been these: What do I do in the classroom? How do I apply all this important information on a daily basis? I wanted practical materials, processes, and activities to help me bring greater Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) knowledge and deeper ideals and ideas into a comprehensive approach with the elementary school children I taught—methodologies beyond the all-too-prevalent and superficial kind of practice that only focuses on cultural folklore, artifacts, and celebrations. I wanted to develop a way of teaching that would permeate and unify the entire educational experience, all day, every day. Teaching in such a variety of cultural settings, it was my growing passion for social justice and the educational rights of all children, as well as a commitment to develop the skills of global citizenship, that motivated me to continually seek and develop this kind of curriculum.

I found that the whole process of good CRT had to begin with me. As I developed greater self-reflective skills and knowledge about myself and

the conditioning of my own cultural background, I learned how many of my assumptions about children and schooling were due to unexamined cultural biases. By teaching in much the same way as I was taught, I discovered that in many ways, I was perpetuating racism and inequity without realizing it. Thus, I began a long process of educational “awakening.” As I became more open to learning from my students and their cultures, I grew more appreciative of their many diversities, more knowledgeable about how they learn, and more aware of how I can either be in the way of, or supportive of that. This “awakening” process, I discovered, never ends. I am awakening still. As much as this book is a compendium of ideas, activities, and inspirations, *Bright Ribbons* is also an invitation for your own self-reflection as you explore new avenues for accessing and developing the intelligence and success of your students.

This book is designed to help beginning as well as seasoned teachers, in both preservice and inservice courses, to make Culturally Responsive Teaching integral to their practice. The activities and approaches presented in this book are those that have proven most beneficial for me in teaching a broad panoply of ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse students. While these methods are essential in the movement toward greater inclusion and narrowing of “achievement gaps,” it is also my belief that *all* children, even those who are well-groomed for school success, benefit from a CRT approach. Such an approach incorporates a variety of learning modalities, many of which are common to other-than-Western cultures—modalities that markedly augment learning for everyone. In addition, a comprehensive approach to Culturally Responsive Teaching allows all students to gain the social and educational survival skills of deeper self-respect, coupled with tolerance, acceptance, appreciation, enjoyment, and even admiration for those who are different from them. This is the kind of global citizen I believe we, as educators, are responsible to produce. With these CRT methods coupled with deep reflection, I and my students grew more confident, happier, and more able to relate authentically to each other, which created a warm environment for students to thrive academically. We all became better learners and better people for having touched each others’ lives with the increasing respect and love that is at the heart of Culturally Responsive Teaching. I offer you these strategies as ways and means for going deeper and becoming more authentic as a learner in your own right and “awakening” into a highly proficient, culturally responsive teacher.