



I began teaching high school English almost 20 years ago. I guess I have been a teacher longer than that if I include former swim instructor, camp counselor, and arts and crafts director. Suffice it to say, I am about teaching/guiding others. Most of my earlier experiences had little to no diversity. In fact, it wasn't something I thought about because it didn't, at least in my world, exist. Any ethnic diversity had diluted itself so that most of the kids in my neighborhood looked, talked, and acted pretty much the same. The dads held a variety of jobs, and the moms were at home. Racial diversity in my school was limited to one bi-racial family whose only child was "light skinned." And, "gay" still meant happy. In fact, my awareness of anyone unlike me didn't come about until college, and even then, I had little real interaction with anyone unlike myself. Come forward 30 years, and here I am writing an "Afterword" to a book about diversity.

My pathway to this point did not come about through some conscious effort on my part to become more sensitive toward or enlightened about others unlike myself.

Honestly, throughout most of my teaching experience, my classrooms have been fairly homogeneous. At least that has been my assumption; I really didn't consider any other possibilities. I believed that I made everyone feel welcome and celebrated all our differences. I believed that I responded quickly and fairly to instances of intolerance or bullying. I believed I provided a safe classroom. It wasn't until I got to know Joseph and was asked to read this text and work through the exercises, that I began to acknowledge what I

needed to do to truly provide a safe environment for all my students. Uncovering my own biases and examining how those attitudes were formed, forced me to confront my established classroom practices and even my personal theories about learning and student achievement.

Understanding where we are with our personal journeys toward creating safe environments for all our students, cannot be accomplished without deliberate thinking about our attitudes and beliefs toward others. It is not enough to believe our classrooms and schools are safe places because we follow a system of rules and proscribed consequences. It is imperative that we challenge ourselves first to grow and accept all forms of diversity so that students are indeed safe in the classroom, the school, and by extension, the community. Therefore, with no particular qualifications other than a deep examination of my personal beliefs and scrutiny of my classroom practices, I am now qualified to challenge others to embark on a similar journey. What you discover about yourself will change you, and that change will benefit your students.

—Allyson S. Linn