"Yeah, But . . .": Common Rebuttals

"So, I have to watch everything I say?"

> *Based on our experiences teaching critical social justice in a variety of forums, we predict that readers will raise some common questions, objections, and critiques. This chapter addresses the most commonly raised issues and objections. Drawing on all that has been discussed in previous chapters, we briefly but explicitly speak again to these concerns.*

The primary goal of this book is to explain key concepts in critical social justice education in ways that deepen our readers' understanding. Deepening understanding is not dependent on agreement; the back-and-forth arguing inherent to winning or losing debates is not useful to this goal. We expect that some ideas will be new and difficult to understand. But struggling to understand and struggling to rebut are very different choices. Raising questions because you are working through an idea is important, and we encourage you to seek out critical social justice education well beyond this book. However, rebuttals that function to block out, cut off, and negate explanations are counter to the goals of education, be it critical social justice or any other kind. We ask our readers to reflect on whether the goals of their questions are greater clarity or greater protection of their existing worldview. Once a level of fluency has been gained, one is of course free to reject the arguments, but will be able to do so from a much more informed and nuanced position.

As we have explained, our socialization is the foundation of our identity. Thus to consider that we have been socialized to participate in systems of oppression that we don't condone is to challenge our very sense of who we are. But this socialization is not something we could choose or avoid, and doesn't make us bad people. It does, however, make us responsible for reeducating ourselves and working to change oppressive systems. This is unquestionably very challenging but can

also be personally rewarding as we gain insight, expand our perspectives, deepen our cross-group relationships, align what we *believe* and *say* with what we *do*, and increase our personal and political integrity.

Based on our experience teaching critical social justice to a wide range of people in a variety of forums, we can predict that certain rebuttals will be made. While we have discussed many of these issues in detail elsewhere, given their tenacity, we want to revisit the most common ones. In the examples below, when we refer to "students" we are referring primarily to our students in university and college classrooms. However, the objections, as well as our responses to them, should be familiar to people outside of these contexts and easily transferable.

Claiming That Schools Are Politically Neutral

- "Politics has no place in schools."
- "It's not a school's place to teach values."

Many people believe that schools are apolitical spaces and that the knowledge taught in them is neutral. However, schools have a very long history of political struggle. Specific debates such as whether creationism and/or evolution should be taught; legal cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* that ended legal segregation in schools; and residential schools for Aboriginal children are all examples that demonstrate the political and value-based nature of schooling. There is no neutral space and schools are not now, nor have they ever been, politically neutral.

If we believe in a just and democratic society (as the U.S. Constitution implies and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states), then we must recognize that politics have a central place in school. Citizens must be prepared to foster a healthy democracy, and preparing students for democratic citizenship is a key responsibility of public schools. To do so, schools have to educate students about the nation's social history; provide a multitude of perspectives; foster critical thinking and perspective taking; enhance students' stamina for engaging with challenging ideas; and improve students' ability to engage with research, raise critical questions, evaluate alternative explanations, tolerate ambiguity, and foster collaboration. Without these skills, young people are ill equipped to advance a socially just, democratic nation state.

All change for a more just society has come from great struggle. Enslaved Africans were not freed because White people overall thought it would be good to free them. Emancipation required decades of struggle, sacrifice, and activism including physical violence and a death toll in the hundreds of thousands. Residential schools weren't closed, Chinese workers weren't granted citizenship, and domestic violence against women wasn't made illegal because the dominant group thought it was a good idea; the dominant group was forced to change due to pressures that took decades to build and sustain.

We can take a basic level of acceptance for granted today because of the hard work and the activism of people before us: feminist, gay and lesbian, civil rights, Indigenous activists, and others. The capacity to recognize the need for and engage in social justice activism is part of what it means to participate in a healthy democracy, and public schools play a fundamental role in fostering this.

Dismissing Social Justice Scholarship as Merely the Radical and Personal Opinions of Individual Left Wing Professors

- "Your opinions are so strong."
- "These ideas are radical."
- "This is all so one-sided. I wish you would include the other side of the conversation."

The "radical scholars" objection reduces scholarship in critical social justice education to personal values and political correctness. But "radical" must have a referent; what knowledge is it radical *in contrast to*? When we object that social justice perspectives are radical and subjective, we are also saying that mainstream perspectives are neutral and objective.

When the scholarship that professors are drawing upon is reduced to subjective and biased personal opinions, that scholarship is transformed from a highly complex and informed body of knowledge into the personal opinions of a single professor. The effect of this is that all opinions become equally valid and therefore the scholarship, now reduced to opinion, can simply be dismissed. This strategy effectively positions social justice classrooms as places of ideology, opinion, and subjectivity, while simultaneously positioning other kinds of classrooms—those in which allegedly neutral or "transparent" frameworks are taught— as objective spaces of real and preferred knowledge.

Critical theory challenges the claim that any knowledge is neutral or objective, and outside of humanly constructed meanings and interests. Yet ironically, only forms of knowledge that name their perspective are perceived as biased and open to debate; in other words, only when someone *acknowledges* their subjectivity are they seen as having subjectivity. Accusations that professors have a liberal bias ("radical" or "Marxist" or "socialist" or "left wing") typically emerge in courses that attempt to challenge the idea of neutral knowledge.

Citing Exceptions to the Rule

- "Barack Obama was president so racism has ended in the United States."
- "I have a friend who's Latina and she's the CEO of the company."
- "My professor is openly gay and he still got tenure."

There are two types of exceptions that people commonly raise. One type is citing examples of public figures from minoritized groups who have "made it." The second type is giving personal or anecdotal examples. In both cases—one that we *all* know and one that only *you* know—the goal is to prove that anyone can make it if they try and that there are no structural barriers. We are not arguing that the system is inflexible and cannot allow for a single exception, or that people don't have agency to challenge oppressive systems. Of course there are exceptions to every rule, but the exceptions also prove the rule. Why are these examples so notable that we know them by name?

Take the commonly cited public example of the presidency of Barack Obama. This was indeed a highly symbolic milestone in U.S. history and worthy of celebration. However, racism is very complex and can't be corrected when an individual person of Color succeeds. The system can accommodate some exceptions, but these exceptions don't actually change the system overall. In many ways Obama's presidency surfaced a great deal of racism while simultaneously allowing dominant society to deny it. Obama's presidency, for example, did nothing to affect increasing racial segregation. This segregation is more powerful because it occurs at the ground level—how we *actually* live our lives.

The personal example ("There was one Asian guy at my school and no one saw him as different") is problematic in that it is very difficult to engage with; we are only hearing the dominant member's necessarily limited perception. The personal example is almost impossible to question with and thus works to cut off, rather than expand, exploration. The public example is at least familiar and we have had the opportunity to hear a range of perceptions on it. Either way, while there are always exceptions, the patterns of oppression are consistent and well documented.

Arguing That Oppression Is Just Human Nature

- "Injustice exists in every society—it's just human nature."
- "Somebody has to be on top."

Because it's virtually impossible to separate nature (biology) from nurture (culture), claims that specific human dynamics are natural are very difficult to substantiate. There is no line at which we can say that some pattern of human relations occurs before or beyond the forces of socialization. Even patterns we observe in infants can only be interpreted through our cultural lenses. The more useful question for our purposes is, *whom does it serve to say that oppressing others is natural?* In other words, who is more likely to say that oppressing is human nature: those on the top doing the oppressing, or those on the bottom being oppressed? This argument always serves to support the dominant group and not the minoritized group.

The human nature argument also demonstrates how oppression changes and adapts over time. While it would no longer be acceptable in mainstream society to justify some oppressions as natural (for example, racial), it is still acceptable to justify other oppressions this way (such as gender). A more constructive and ethical use of a human nature argument is to notice that, throughout history, humans have strived to overcome oppression and make society more just.

Appealing to a Universalized Humanity

- "Why can't we all just be humans?"
- "We all bleed red."
- "It's focusing on difference that divides us."

Biologically we are all humans, of course. But socially we are members of hierarchically organized groups. Where we are in dominant groups, we are taught to see our perspectives as neutral, objective, and representative of a universal reality; our group is the standard for what it means to be normal or "just human." Thus dominant group members have the privilege of seeing themselves as outside of any group, and thus able to represent all of human experience. However, when we are in a minoritized group, our group is almost always named. Continually limited to our group identification, we are perceived as capable of speaking only for that particular group; where a "guy" can speak for all guys, a "gay guy" can't speak for all guys, he is seen to be able to speak only for/about other gay men.

Further, because dominant group members are taught to see themselves as normal, we assume that people in the minoritized group share our reality. This assumption imposes our reality on them, prevents us from learning more about their perspectives, and invalidates the oppression they experience. Insisting that "we are all just human" in response to evidence of oppression is a way to deny that oppression exists at all and to end any further discussion.

As for insisting that addressing difference is what divides us, dominant and minoritized groups are already divided from one another by virtually every measure, both physically and in life outcomes. In a society in which group difference clearly matters, we suggest that *not* addressing our differences and pretending that they have no significance serves to hold them in place.

Insisting on Immunity from Socialization

- "I was taught to treat everybody the same."
- "My parents raised me to believe that it didn't matter that I was a girl, I could be anything I wanted."
- "That's not my experience."

In addressing the claim that one has been immune to the forces of socialization, we offer the following reminders:

- Our families are not the sole forces of our socialization.
- Our families are themselves not free from socialization.
- We consistently receive many contradictory messages from a multitude of sources.
- It is impossible not to be affected by these mixed messages.
- We cannot simply decide that these messages have no effect; it takes conscious and ongoing effort to challenge them.
- Our experiences occur within a socially stratified society and must be contextualized as such.

Hopefully by this point our readers understand that they cannot be immune from the larger forces of socialization and that they couldn't avoid having been socialized into groups that are positioned hierarchically in relation to each other.

Ignoring Intersectionality

- "I am oppressed as a lesbian, so I might be White but I have no privilege."
- "I think the true oppression is classism. If we address class, all the other oppressions will disappear."

People who raise this kind of objection have usually spent a lot of time thinking about their own oppression. This is understandable; the currents we swim against are often clear to us and it is much more difficult to identify the currents we swim with. Yet identifying all of the currents we swim in is a powerful next step in our growth.

Someone who is of Asian heritage, while experiencing racism, may simultaneously have several other forms of privilege if, for example, that person is heterosexual, able-bodied, and male. Of course racism will affect how he experiences these privileges; for example, racist stereotypes about Asian men often undercut how they experience male privilege. But while the dominant White culture may diminish Asian male masculinity, he will still experience male privilege in relation to Asian women, and he will still have the right to marry the woman of his choice.

The dynamics of intersectionality are deeply significant and it is impossible to develop critical social justice literacy without an ability to grapple with their complexities. For example, in addition to other intersecting oppressions, classism and racism affect the gay community; racism and heterosexism affect people with disabilities; heterosexism and sexism affect people who are poor or working class; heterosexism and classism affect peoples of Color. Rather than rejecting the

possibility that we can have any privilege if we experience oppression somewhere in our lives, the more constructive approach is to work to unravel these intersections to see how we may be upholding someone else's oppression.

Refusing to Recognize Structural and Institutional Power

- "Women are just as sexist as men."
- "I'm the only male in my group so I am oppressed."
- "People of Color are racist too."

Given the deeply embedded patterns that develop from our group identities, simply being the only dominant member in a given setting will not be a reversal of oppression. Dominant group members bring their patterns of privilege with them. For example, men in relation to women (and White men in particular) are socialized *overall* to take up more physical and social space than others. Men will tend to talk first, last, and most often; set the tone and the agenda of meetings; have a disproportionate effect on decisions; and be perceived as (and presume themselves to be) leaders in almost every context (internalized dominance).

STOP: Remember that this book is an introduction to complex ideas. While men are socialized into norms of masculinity and women into norms of femininity, we acknowledge that gender identities are not so clear-cut. For instance, many women have interests, characteristics, and mannerisms that would be labeled "masculine," and many men have those that would be labeled "feminine." The next level of analysis would be to explore how masculinity and femininity are socially constructed through norms and expectations that shape what it means to "act like a man" or "act like a woman."

Conversely, minoritized group members also have conditioned patterns (internalized oppression) that predispose them to defer to the dominant member. Women *overall* will talk less when men are present and defer to men's presumed leadership (or risk being perceived as overbearing if they do not). These patterns and relations do not reverse or change based on the ratio of dominant to minoritized members present. Without intentionality and skills of alliance, the group members will enact the inequitable relationship. The new member will not be suddenly "oppressed" or have a "minority" experience because he is the only man in a workgroup. Of greater importance, then, are the skills and perspectives the dominant group member brings.

Another common objection is that of numbers. Statements such as "We don't have much racial diversity here because we don't have very many people of Color in our area" or conversely, "We are doing well because we have a lot of people of Color

in our department" are often heard in response to questions of racial diversity in the workplace. There are a few important dynamics to notice about these statements:

- They reflect the dominant perspective; for example, a workplace that seems racially diverse to White people may not seem diverse to peoples of Color.
- They assume that all that is needed to interrupt inequality is the presence of the minoritized group.
- Both of these statements defend and rationalize the situation in question and thereby limit, rather than expand, further action.

As for the claim that peoples of Color are just as racist as White people, this is to confuse discrimination with racism. We are all just as prejudiced as the next person, and we all discriminate. But when we use the "ism" words, we are describing a dynamic of historical, institutional, cultural, and ideological oppression. Without the language to describe structural oppression, we continue to hide and deny its existence. Using the terms interchangeably obscures the reality that discrimination across race is not the same in its effects, because only the discrimination of White people is backed by historical, institutional, cultural, ideological, and social power and thus has far-reaching and collective impact on the lives of peoples of Color. A more interesting and fruitful line of inquiry might be why so many people are so invested in insisting that the minoritized group is "just as" prejudiced or oppressive as the dominant group. What does this insistence rationalize or excuse? What is served by the refusal to acknowledge institutional power?

Rejecting the Politics of Language

- "What do they want us to call them now?"
- "You mean I have to watch everything I say?"

Language is a form of knowledge construction; the language we use to name a social group shapes the way we think about that group. To think critically about language is to think critically about power and ideology. Take the example of homelessness. Just 20 or so years ago, the term *homeless* was not common. The terms we used at that time for people we would now term homeless included *bums, derelicts, tramps, transients, hobos,* and *winos.* These are clearly negative terms that conjure negative images and are all typically associated with men. Over time, advocates came to realize that many women and children were also homeless, and that women and children had different issues and needs because of their gender and age. In other words, the kinds of challenges that a single man living on the street might have are different from those that a single woman living on the street might have, and different still from those of a single woman living with children.

Advocates realized that they had to change the public perception of this population in order to increase the resources available to them; few people were interested in helping "bums" and "winos" (notice how some people are perceived as worthy of resources and others are not). There was a deliberate political effort to introduce the term *homeless* in order to change the public perceptions of this diverse population. When the language changed, so did the perception; this change enabled greater access to resources, illustrating the political power of language.

The traditional names that dominant groups use for minoritized groups have their roots in racist history and were not chosen by the minoritized group (such as "Colored People" "Oriental" or "Eskimo", which are all terms that should be avoided). Further, it really isn't that difficult to keep up with changes in language. Many of us manage to keep up with popular language of the day, whether it was slang like "groovy" and "cool" in the past or "OMG" and "LOL" more recently. It is easy for us to keep up with language when we are invested in the social context. To choose not to be aware of changes in language regarding minoritized groups indicates that we may be living in a great deal of segregation from them. It is also an indication of a lack of interest that is not accidental. On the other hand, to be aware of changes in language yet still insist that we have the right to say anything we want is willful irresponsibility. Of course we all have the right to say whatever we want, but there are consequences for what we say.

In a pluralistic society that claims to uphold the ideals of equality, speech must be chosen in ways that are cognizant of the context. We wouldn't speak to our boss the way we might to our friends. These are choices of context-appropriate speech, and we all conform to these speech considerations on a daily basis. Rather than feeling resentful (an indicator that our internalized dominance is being challenged), we might consider our ability to adapt to changes in language as an indicator that we are growing in our critical social justice literacy.

Invalidating Claims of Oppression as Oversensitivity

- "People just need to lighten up."
- "Why don't you people just get over it?"
- "I didn't mean it that way; can't you take a joke?"

This objection is a variation on the "political correctness" objection, which implies that whenever minoritized groups and their allies speak to oppression they are just being oversensitive and taking things too seriously. There are several problematic dynamics in this dismissal. First, the arrogance of someone in the dominant group feeling qualified to determine the legitimacy of a minoritized group member's reaction to oppression. Remember that for many of us in the dominant group, our socialization is invisible, and so we often assume that others will share our frames

of reference and see a situation the same way that we do. If we are committed to critical social justice, then we recognize that the burden of understanding should rest with the dominant group.

Another problematic dynamic is that dominant group members often do not understand the collective weight of oppression. What is "just a comment" for us is one of a thousand daily microaggressions for the minoritized group. That someone from the minoritized group would be willing to let us know how oppression impacts them takes a lot of courage, given how freely dominant groups tend to trivialize this information. Dismissing the feedback as oversensitivity conveys that we are not open to or interested in understanding the impact of our behavior on others. A more constructive use of this feedback is to use it as an entry point to consider what understanding *we* are lacking.

Focusing on intentions is another way we often dismiss the impact of our behavior. Common dominant group reasoning is that as long as we didn't *intend* to perpetuate oppression, then our actions don't count as oppressive and we don't need to take responsibility for them. We then tend to spend a great deal of energy explaining to the minoritized group why our behavior is not oppressive at all. This invalidates minoritized experiences while enabling us to deny responsibility for the impact of our behavior in both the immediate interaction and the broader, historical context.

Finally, this dismissal allows dominant group members to project the problem outward onto minoritized groups and their allies while simultaneously minimizing it—the problem now belongs to the minoritized group and they themselves create it by taking life too seriously. According to this reasoning, it isn't really an issue at all; the minoritized group itself could easily solve oppression by simply getting over it and moving on. From a critical social justice perspective, this is the equivalent of the dominant group telling the minoritized group to accept their oppression.

The life and activism of Nora Bernard (Figure 11.1) illustrate the impact of oppression and minoritized groups' struggles for justice.

Reasoning That If Choice Is Involved It Can't Be Oppression

- "It's not oppression if people choose to participate."
- "Women in those videos could just say no; they're getting paid and choose to enact those scenes."

The discourse of choice is pervasive in dominant society. Much like individualism, *choice* claims that we are each free to participate in any opportunities made available to us. In the example of music videos, this argument claims that the women in the videos are adults, they are getting paid, and they could choose not to participate if they had a problem with the videos. Further, we can just choose not to watch the video if *we* have a problem with it.

Figure 11.1. Nora Bernard (1935–2007)

Nora Bernard was a Canadian Mi'kmaq activist, member of the Millbrook First Nation, and survivor of the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia.

She testified before a House of Commons Committee in 2005 saying, "Sexual and physical abuse was not the only abuse that the survivors experienced in these institutions. Abuses included such things as being incarcerated through no fault of their own; the introduction of child labor; the withholding of proper food, clothing, and proper education; the loss of language and culture; and no proper medical attention."

She initiated and won the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history, on behalf of over 80,000 survivors of the Canadian residential school system. After 12 years of tireless activism on the part of Bernard and others, the federal government settled the suit, conservatively estimated at between 3 and 5 billion dollars. She received her compensation check for $14,000 in 2007.

Nora Bernard was posthumously awarded the Order of Nova Scotia in 2008.

Source: www.danielnpaul.com/scan_image/NoraBernard.jpg

While choice is important in all social exchanges, the choice discourse shifts the focus away from a big-picture understanding of injustice and toward an individual one. Were we instead to account for the structural forces shaping what choices are available to us, we might ask questions such as: What *other* opportunities to earn a living wage in the music industry do young women have? What opportunities do young women have to participate in this industry without furthering the same sexist plots? In other words, if they choose to say no, could they still work? The discourse of choice diverts our attention away from structural oppression by placing responsibility wholly in the hands of (in this example) individual young women. And when there are rewards for conformity (such as conform and earn a salary, or don't conform and don't earn a salary), how much choice is really on the table? Further, only a very limited pool of women who are considered highly attractive have the choice to star in these videos at all.

It may be worthy of reflection to consider in which contexts we see women's choices about how to use their bodies as free, and in which contexts we see those choices as up for debate. For example, in the context of music or porn videos, many argue that a woman has the right to use her body in any way that she chooses. In this context, the politics surrounding her choice (such as limited economic

opportunities for women) are made irrelevant. But in the context of other kinds of choices, such as reproductive health, it is often argued that a woman should *not* have choice. What is considered her individual choice over her body in one context is considered open for public debate in another. This indicates that there are more institutional interests surrounding how women make choices around their bodies than mere individual freedom would imply. Still, regardless of the choices of the individual women that star in them, the industry markets these videos to all of us, and we are all affected by their virtually unavoidable circulation throughout the culture.

Positioning Social Justice Education as Something "Extra"

- "We have to prepare students for the test; that's just the way it is."
- "Dealing with social justice in the classroom (or workplace) takes time away from the real work we have to do."

We often hear this rationale for inaction in school (or workplace) contexts wherein teachers (or leaders) explain that they wish they had time to deal with social justice but they have to deal with the curriculum (or the bottom line) first, and there just isn't time in the day to do everything. Because dominant institutions in society are positioned as being neutral, challenging social injustice within them seems to be an extra task in addition to our actual tasks.

Yet, as we have argued, the way we act in the world is based on how we perceive the world. Our worldviews are not neutral; they are shaped by particular ideas about how the world is or ought to be. For example, if you believe that we are all unique human beings, that our group memberships are irrelevant, and that the best remedy for injustice is to attempt to see everyone as an individual, then that perspective will be visible in everything you do and how you do it.

If, on the other hand, you believe that our group memberships are important, that different groups have different levels of access to resources, that this inequitable access is shaped by institutional forces, and that we have agency to positively influence those institutions for the betterment of everyone, then that too will be evident in everything you do.

Although it does take ongoing study and practice before a social justice framework will fundamentally shape your work, to decide not to take on this commitment does not mean you are being neutral. Indeed, to decide not to take on this commitment is to actively support and reproduce the inequitable status quo. When we have developed a critical social justice consciousness, it is evident in all that we do and no longer seen as outside our job description.

Being Paralyzed by Guilt

- "I feel so bad and I don't know what to do."
- "This is all just a guilt trip."

When we begin to realize that contrary to what we have always believed, categories of difference (such as gender, race, class, and ability), rather than merit alone, *do* matter and significantly shape our perspectives, experiences, opportunities, and outcomes, we can feel overwhelmed. These feelings are part of the process of understanding oppression and injustice, and it's normal to feel frustrated when answers don't come easily. But it's important

> 🤚 **STOP:** Remember that it isn't actually possible to see everyone as an individual and thus to treat them as one. From a critical social justice perspective we understand that we are all socialized to see people from groups other than our own in particular and often problematic ways.

that these feelings be only temporary and don't become an excuse to avoid action, because when we are in the dominant group, guilt is rooted in privilege and functions to legitimize inaction on equity. In other words, paralysis due to guilt ultimately protects our positions and holds existing oppressions in place. Consider the collective impact of wealthy people who benefit from classism claiming, "I feel so overwhelmed by my wealth, I don't know what to do," or of men who benefit from sexism claiming, "I feel so overwhelmed by men's domination of every institution, I don't know what to do," or of White people who benefit from racism claiming, "I feel so overwhelmed by my unearned privileges, I don't know what to do."

Another way that paralysis manifests is by waiting for instructions before acting. Our students often lament that they are being told about all of the problems but not given any solutions. Yet the desire to jump to the "end" or to the answers can be a way to avoid the hard work of self-reflection and reeducation that is required of us.

This lament can also work as a way to rationalize inaction: "If you can't tell me what to do, then I don't have to do anything." But the solutions are not simple formulas that can be applied by any person in any situation; they are dependent upon the specific context and social position of the person undertaking them. Knowing the privileges and limitations afforded by your group positions is the most powerful first step in evaluating how you might act. Further, it is also important that we don't focus solely on an individualistic approach; critical social justice action is already underway and we need to take the initiative to find out what is happening in our community (schools, workplaces, nonprofit organizations) and get involved.

In the concluding chapter we offer some concrete suggestions for what one can do, but we encourage our readers to remember that the best antidote to guilt is action.

Discussion Questions

1. How would the authors respond to the rebuttal, "So, I have to watch everything I say?"
2. Which of the rebuttals have you felt yourself (or perhaps still feel)? Which is the most challenging for you and why? If you could speak back to yourself with the voice of the authors, how would you counter the rebuttal?
3. Pick two rebuttals and discuss the contexts in which you have heard or used them (or variations of them). Using the concepts explained in this book, how might you respond to this rebuttal were it to be raised again in your presence? What challenges might there be in responding in a public context (such as a meeting at school or in the workplace), and how will you meet these challenges?

Extension Activities

1. a. The following are common suggestions people make for achieving an equitable climate:

    » Respect people
    » Treat everyone equally
    » Don't take things personally
    » Don't judge anyone
    » Don't see color

    In small groups, see if you can come to consensus on describing what each of these would look like in action. Be sure that your description includes indicators that would allow anyone to know it when they saw it in action.

    b. What were the challenges of this activity? How might we understand these challenges from a critical social justice lens?
2. a. Working with a partner with whom you share a dominant group identity, identify a local organization that works from a critical social justice framework, such as Black Lives Matter, Idle No More; Showing Up for Racial Justice; Occupy. Attend a meeting or event.
    b. Write talking notes to explain the position that we cannot ignore the past if we want to move forward in the present (in other words, it's not as simple as "just getting over it"). Come up with at least three strong reasons for this position, using information from the organization that you chose above.