



THE  
**A** **B** **C**<sup>S</sup>  
OF  
**DIVERSITY**

*Helping Kids (and Ourselves!)  
Embrace Our Differences*

**CAROLYN B. HELSEL & Y. JOY HARRIS-SMITH**



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*Dedication*

*Carolyn: For Phil, the warmest chord I've ever heard.  
Y. Joy: For Leon, Asa and Eden, my beacons of light on  
this journey called life.*



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## Preface

This book will help you learn the language of difference and diversity. In it, we break down the complex concepts and ideas from the most recent scholarship on multicultural education, intercultural communication, and diversity and inclusion studies to help you use these concepts in your own life. We assume you are a busy person, without the time to read thousands of pages of books on these subjects. We, on the other hand, have the privilege of reading books for a living, and we want to share the knowledge we have gained over time through these books and through practice.

We are also both mothers, trying to teach our children the language of difference. Joy has two preschool-aged children, and Carolyn has an elementary-aged student and a middle-schooler. Carolyn is white and lives in Austin, Texas. Joy is black and lives in New York City.

Both of us teach for a living. We teach adults, so this book is written with adults in mind. Joy has taught junior high and high school in NYC public school, and Carolyn has volunteered as a Girl Scout troop leader, basketball coach, and Sunday School teacher, so both of us also know how to talk to children. Understanding the processes of learning has helped us come up with ways we hope will facilitate your learning—such as using acronyms to help you remember some of the core ideas, practical tips and advice for things you can say to your children and to others, and lists of additional resources to which you can turn if you want to learn more on a particular topic.



The book's strategy is threefold:

First, it offers information about the different kinds of diversity that we are already experiencing in our communities. Knowledge is one of the first ways we can begin building better tools for communicating with one another and growing in our ability to relate to others. This book deals with issues of *race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and politics, nationality, and culture*. There are many other forms of diversity that we could have included here, such as economics, learning styles, physical and mental abilities/disabilities, and language, but we have had to limit ourselves. Nonetheless, you will likely find some of the concepts and ideas presented to be helpful for thinking and talking about other kinds of difference.

Second, we offer our own stories as parents and teachers trying to learn more about the diverse world in which we are living, and we share our own experiences of trying to navigate this diverse world in the classroom and with our own children. We share out of a belief that we are all still learning and growing, and that many adults, like children, still need to learn the basics of how to communicate with persons who are different from themselves. While this is primarily a book to help you with raising your own children or teaching in a diverse setting, it is also a book to help you navigate this diverse world yourself.

Third, our focus is on being practical. So we include appendices of activities, books, and curriculum suggestions that you can use to talk with children at various ages and stages, as well as in discussions with other adults. For persons who are tired of the theoretical platitudes and big ideas that have no purchase in everyday reality, we offer you real tools to use: activities that help you foster conversations with young children or youth, scripts you can practice to help you respond when kids say things that reveal they are noticing the differences around them, and suggestions of books that can help kids learn by reading about people different from themselves.

We also realize that you are already doing amazing things in the world to advocate for diversity, and so we hope to hear from you. We hope this book will spark your imagination for community work that you can instigate to help bring about greater understanding among the people all around you. Perhaps you will be inspired to run storytelling events or communal get-togethers that invite shared hospitality and vulnerability. Perhaps you will want to offer workshops or book groups to other parents in your neighborhood to develop greater compassion and understanding. Tell us what you do! If you are a teacher, you probably have a lot of advice you can share with us regarding what you are already doing and saying in your classroom to help your students foster a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all learners. You can share your ideas with us and other readers at our website, [abcsofdiversity.com](http://abcsofdiversity.com).

To live together in the world house that we are building, we need to understand the foundations that will help sustain a healthy community. We hope this book gives you a theoretical framework for understanding our differences so that you can think through other major decisions and potential conflicts that may not be covered explicitly in this book. We also hope to encourage you on the journey by helping you understand your own emotions and processes about diversity, so that you are more likely to stay engaged for the long haul.

With those primary goals in mind, you will see that the chapters are laid out thematically. In the Introduction, we share with you some of our personal goals and trepidations around this book, naming our assumptions and hopes for what you might get out of it.

Chapter 1 provides the context for this book: what we mean by the ABCs of diversity and how those letters can be an acronym for helping us be mindful of our own responses. There are three incrementally more involved ways that we conceive of the ABCs of diversity:

- #1. *Afraid, Back away, and Control*: our automatic ABCs
- #2. *Acknowledge, Be present, and Come closer*: the ABCs of intentional engagement
- #3. *Access, Build, and Cultivate*: the ABCs of a more just society

Chapter 2 looks at the earliest forms of identity that children begin to inhabit: race and gender. This chapter unpacks some of the meanings of “identity” and how that word can be both something we assign to others and something we claim for ourselves. In addition, this chapter explores the ramifications of identity on both marginalized and privileged persons. Identity, whether by choice or assigned, affects us all.

Chapter 3 looks at the multiracial world in which we live and the statistics around growing diversity in the United States. Thinking about the world our children are entering, even before they are born, heightens our awareness of what is happening in the society they will inherit. We are going through a painful growth spurt as a nation, and we need to understand why that is and how we can respond to mitigate the pain.

Chapter 4 takes a deeper dive into the ideas of gender and sexuality. It looks at current research behind the variety of ways in which people experience themselves as male or female, or as non-binary, and how our gender identity is not the same as our sexual orientation.

Chapter 5 looks at the importance of naming racial difference as a means to help kids develop positive ways to view themselves in a society that still racializes people into categories, whether or not we accept those categories.

Chapter 6 focuses on religious diversity and the ways that we can learn from one another by sharing our values and our deeply held commitments to care for one another.

Chapter 7 both affirms and challenges the ways we use social media, and how it can be used to drive us further apart. As with each of these chapters, we show how to engage differences by returning

to the chapter 1 ABCs about intentionally cultivating relationships with persons different from yourself and building communities of diversity both online and in person.

Finally, chapter 8 looks at how even as adults we need to be learning and growing, since without such growth we still tend to hurt one another with our comments and attitudes. We all operate with some kind of a code of ethics or moral philosophy. This chapter asks you to go deeper and reflect critically about what you say you believe and what you actually do, inviting you to consider, “How well does what I say and what I do line up?”

Through further reading and curriculum suggestions, in the appendices we offer concrete suggestions for how parents can help their own children and the children for whom they care. We hope these resources will help you bring to life the ideas of the book. Perhaps you will find yourself engaging your own family members or friends or community, helping others to better understand these categories of diversity. These activities and curriculum suggestions are just a start. No doubt you have others, and we hope you will share some of them on our website, [abcsofdiversity.com](http://abcsofdiversity.com).

Thanks for joining us. We are glad to be on this journey with you!



# Introduction

Do you have any doubts or insecurities when it comes to talking about issues of “diversity”? Are you unsure what the word even means? Are you afraid of the conflict that might underlie diversity? Do you consciously or subconsciously walk away from the subject or situations of diversity because you avoid stirring things up, or do you prefer to stick to situations and areas of discussion in which you feel more comfortable?

Yes? Then you’re in good company. We are Carolyn Helsel and Y. Joy Harris-Smith, and we are both moms and professors. Joy’s kids are currently preschoolers, and Carolyn’s kids are in elementary and middle school, and we both teach adults of all ages who are interested in working in non-profits or churches. Carolyn is white, and though she has written books on talking about racism with white people, talking about issues of diversity *still* makes her feel insecure and a bit nervous. Joy, on the other hand, *lives* diversity everyday as a black woman, married to a man from a culture different from the one in which she grew up. With experience teaching in the New York City school system and doctoral work in communication and culture, Joy knows well the challenges inherent in these kinds of conversations.

So why are we writing a book about issues of diversity and race, especially when these conversations cause us angst? For one simple reason: love.

Love makes us write. As moms, we love our kids. Getting to interact with our kids and their friends through after-school

activities, we begin to love their friends. Teaching adults from different walks of life in our jobs, we come across those who have different opinions about issues of sexuality and politics. We fall in love with them as well (ok, not every single one, but even those hard-to-love students are still teaching us in some ways, and we are grateful for that).

And love makes us notice things. We notice white children on the playground being rude to children of color, and parents remaining silent. We notice youth being teased for being different. We notice young adults struggling with their identity as gay or lesbian or bisexual—especially in the context of religion, since many of them come from backgrounds where religious leaders have taught them that who they love makes them an abomination. We notice straight people who come from religious communities where people still believe that being gay will send you to hell, who are themselves struggling to reconcile these deeply held religious beliefs with their own relationships with friends and co-workers who are gay.

Are you feeling uncomfortable yet? We are too. We do not want to offend anyone. We worry about what you, the reader, are thinking right now. We are afraid you will put this book down, assuming this book is not speaking to you because it is too liberal, or too conservative.

See? Already we have put each other into boxes. “Liberal.” “Conservative.” And we walk away. If we don’t want to talk to someone who doesn’t think like us or vote like us, then we don’t have to. We can cloister ourselves with like-minded folk and stay on our separate sides.

But we do not want to live like this.

And we have a feeling that you don’t either.

You may work with people who have different opinions about politics, or who come from different cultural backgrounds or ethnicities. Perhaps you work with people from around the world. You may have someone in your own family who has a different take on things than you do, and you love this person even though you have differences.

Our kids are growing up in a world of greater diversity than ever before. They may know kids who have two moms or two dads, come from seven different countries, and speak four different languages.

Friends of our children may have different religions they celebrate, or no religious background whatsoever.

Kids may not learn the language of race in their classroom curriculum, but soon enough news and media about racism and “white people” and “black people” and “Latinx” filter into their world, and our kids may or may not see how these terms relate to them, if at all.

Kids who have a mom from Nigeria and a dad from France may grow up knowing two different cultures by visiting their parents’ home countries, identify as much with their French relatives as their Nigerian family, and be baffled why others view them simply as “black” in America.

Children of Korean American parents who have been in the United States for several generations may not understand why people say they are “Asian,” when they have never stepped foot on the Asian continent.

You may have a child in your family or in your kid’s school whom everyone calls “David,” but who in preschool was known as “Tessa.”

But what if this all sounds like too much political correctness, like there is pressure on us to check all the boxes and say all the right things? What if these differences make us more than a little nervous ourselves, since we may never have interacted with people from backgrounds that our kids are getting to know?

It does not feel good to know less than our kids do, and as they get older, they remind us just how much we do not know.

But if they are already learning about all of this by interacting with their peers, then why should we grown-ups have to learn about it, too? Can’t we just leave it to our kids to sort out our differences? They already seem to be a lot more accepting of different kinds of people than we and our parents are.



If you have any of these impulses, you are not alone. We feel them too. We want to believe our kids are smart enough and kind enough to learn how to build a better society than the one in which we are living now. We want to trust that their future is going to have greater peace and understanding than the world they inhabit today. And not knowing enough about people who are different from us makes us afraid of getting it wrong. Of passing along stereotypes. Of offending someone.

So we avoid talking about differences altogether.

But that feels a lot like abdicating our responsibility as parents to teach our children how to be good citizens and how to contribute positively to society.

We want our kids to live long, healthy, and happy lives, and for us that means that they are able to be in good relationships with persons from different backgrounds whose different life experiences can greatly enhance our own kids' knowledge and understanding of the world. We want them to be kind and to learn to live with people who are different from themselves, because that is our world now, and we want them to thrive in it.

We think you want the same for your kids, too.

Dear reader, at any point that you feel challenged or uncomfortable by the words that are expressed here—don't quit. Pause, take a break, go for a walk, or just close your eyes and breathe—but come back. Please. You are making good progress. Keep going! We are all in this together.

—Carolyn and Joy



## The ABCs of Diversity

The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in 1967 that we are living in a world house with all of humanity and that in order to sustain our civilization we need to be able to work together and support one another. King wrote:

Our hope for creative living in this world house that we have inherited lies in our ability to reestablish the moral ends of our lives in personal character and social justice. Without this spiritual and moral reawakening we shall destroy ourselves in the misuse of our own instruments.<sup>1</sup>

Learning how to live with one another on this planet is more than a matter of political correctness or naïve optimism: it is a matter of humanity's survival. We need a spiritual and moral reawakening in order to live peacefully together in this world house. We also need to be willing to roll up our sleeves and help build or restore this world house.

So what does it take to build community? How do we communicate across the enormous cultural divides that are a part of every nation, race, region, religion, community, and family? How do we relate to the many different cultures with which we come into contact on a daily basis?

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 183.

## The Language of Difference

To help our children and to live as better citizens in our diverse society, we need to learn a new language. The “language of diversity” is not strictly a spoken language, such as English or Spanish, but rather an awareness of the challenges present today and a fluency in being able to talk with people who have different opinions than us on important issues. The language of diversity is not about facts of cultural etiquette or food and festivals from people and cultures around the world, but rather about the mindset it takes to engage in relationships with others.

Learning to embrace the differences all around us requires knowing how to speak this language. When you are with someone who is different from you, you are learning a new kind of language—even if you both speak English. When talking across our differences—whether difference of gender, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, or simply talking to a family member in the Northeast when you have been raised in the South—we are talking through cultural filters and assumptions that shape the way we speak to and with one another.

This sounds complicated, and it is. But just as infants learn the highly complicated language of their parents through being around them, so too you have picked up how to speak to others based on cultural messages. It is both a conscious and a subconscious skill. You are constantly “reading” other people and figuring out what’s the appropriate way to communicate.

What happens when we are proficient in one language and we come across someone speaking a different one? We get confused, and we may feel a little lost. When we are in spaces where there are a lot of cultural differences, it may feel as if others are speaking an unfamiliar language, and we may feel uncertain and wonder, What’s the right thing to say?

All of us learn by doing and making mistakes along the way. We watch children develop and try out words and phrases they hear from other members of the family. Through the media, we pick up on new uses of language and learn new words to describe our own experiences. Language itself is constantly evolving and changing,

and youth are among the first to pick up new forms of slang until it becomes standard.

If language is so easy to absorb, then why do we need to learn it? We learn language in school to communicate better with a wider audience. The more adept we are at a language, the greater our capacity to speak, write, and read it—and chances are we will be able to communicate more effectively. Language learning is both simple and complex, challenging and rewarding. We learn to speak a language by conversing with others.

The language of diversity is similar to the language we learn at home and at school. Language is dynamic. It is constantly evolving; new words and ideas come into use to help us better describe our experiences. And language is something we need to continue to learn. Some ideas and the words that go with them we typically learn through additional education—they're ones we would not just pick up on our own.

When we learn to speak the “language” of diversity, we are better able to communicate with a wider array of others. When we learn to “read” the language of diversity, we can more easily understand complex human interactions at home, at work, and in society. When we learn to use the language of diversity with our children, then they, too, can be better citizens in our increasingly diverse society.

*How* do we learn this language of diversity? Just like we learn other kinds of languages. In addition to learning through practice, we learn through picking apart the language into its smallest parts—the language’s alphabet. Teachers introduce language to children through the alphabet and by helping children make connections between the letters they see and the sounds they hear. A visual aid to a child’s learning might include a poster with a single letter, with pictures of some of the words that begin with that letter. In addition to having a visual representation of the letter “A,” for instance, a child sees a picture of apples. On a poster with the letter “B,” a child might see a picture of a banana, and so forth. Children learn letters by connecting the concept of a single letter to another concept, like a food they know by name. They know the sound of the name of

the food or other object, and this helps them remember the sound that the letter makes.

In learning the language of diversity, we authors want to try and break down into smaller components the larger ideas surrounding intercultural communication. We also want to show you how you can help your children learn this language alongside you, because just like you, they need to learn the language of difference.

Since our children are growing up amidst greater cultural diversity than previous generations, won't they inherently or automatically know this language of difference? No. Why? Because of shifts in language and culture. Just as there have been shifts in language and its use, so too there have been shifts in the world and across cultures. So we can't assume that our children can figure out such things on their own.

Children do not automatically learn the language of difference. They absorb the same cultural biases and messages the rest of us receive, and those biases and cultural filters prevent them from being able to engage thoughtfully with persons who are different from them. They may learn language about what is "for boys" or "for girls," but this does not help them to speak about how girls and boys can be very different from those stereotypes or norms. They need adults who can help them speak a new language, one that does not rely on old scripts to tell them what distinguishes boys from girls, persons of different religions, people from different races or ethnicities, and other differences they will encounter. We all need to learn this language, and because the language continually changes and evolves, we need to keep on learning.

To assist you in learning the language of difference, we have come up with three ways of conceptualizing some of its basic building blocks. One of the ways we want to help you learn the language of difference is to be able to read your own language. So the first set of ABCs focuses on some of the predictable patterns that may prevent us from engaging with people and ideas that are different or unfamiliar. The second set of ABCs looks at how we can change our individual responses. The third set looks at the issue of diversity more broadly and how each of us can engage this language

on a systemic level. These three ABCs build on one another, helping us to notice in which patterns we are already engaging, moving toward a commitment to engage with difference, and then following through with a larger-scale discussion of how each of us can make our diverse society work for everyone. We hope these frameworks can help you discover what gift you have to bring.

### ***#1 Our Automatic ABCs: Afraid, Back away, Control***

What are the messages you already are communicating about difference? What are the physical ways you respond to bodies that are different from your own? What are your emotional or affective responses when you encounter diversity day to day?

There may be many ways that you respond, and how you respond will depend upon the kind of difference you encounter. Next time you are in a place in which you are surrounded by people who are different from you—maybe it is a group of people with ethnic or racial difference, maybe it is a room full of people from a different political party—observe how you react. What goes on in your body? When we are in unfamiliar settings, or when we encounter differences that make us uncomfortable, we tend to respond in ways that make it harder for us to learn.

These predictable patterns of unhelpful responses can be remembered with the acronym ABC: we may feel *Afraid*, we may physically *Back away*, and we may have the impulse to *Control* the situation in some way. Afraid, Back away, Control: Do you recognize these reactions in yourself?

Being *afraid* of difference is a common feeling. We fear the unfamiliar, afraid of saying the wrong thing, making a mistake, being rejected. If we have been part of conversations about diversity and difference in the past and that have not gone well, we may be afraid of repeating a negative experience. We might fear hurting another person's feelings.

But fear might only be a momentary reaction. It may not even register consciously on our emotional radar. But look at your body language. What is your body saying in this moment? We're guessing you observe yourself *backing away*. If you are in a room

with persons who are different from you, we imagine you stepping back from the group or staying on the periphery. Maybe you avoid making eye contact. A more extreme example is removing yourself from the space altogether. Perhaps your response is a verbal rather than physical one. Perhaps you back away from conversation by avoiding making conversation altogether. Backing away can include the ways we try to avoid diversity altogether, by staying in groups of like-minded people or by sticking with people we perceive as being like us.

Third, we all tend to react out of a desire to *control* the situation. Observe yourself as you respond to experiences with different people. Do you try to expose yourself to differences regularly? Or do you control your environment by making sure you are surrounded only by people with whom you share things in common?

Control as a response to difference can be seen societally as well, by looking at how at different points in history our society has responded to diversity. When we see whole neighborhoods segregated by race or class, this is control at a governmental and local level to maintain similarity among neighborhood residents. Such control usually takes the form of discrimination. Looking at the history of race in the United States, we can see how certain ethnic groups and people of color were forced to live in parts of the city that were separate from those where wealthier whites lived.

But even without these more blatant forms of discrimination, our need for control comes out in smaller ways: with whom we choose to sit, to whom we say hello, which person becomes our friend and which one remains an acquaintance. Control can be a subtle way in which we isolate ourselves from people who are different from us.

So if these three tendencies—being *Afraid*, *Backing away*, and *Control*—are *unhelpful* responses to learning the language of diversity, how can we train ourselves to react differently and be more effective in our communication, responding with a greater sense of compassion and inclusivity toward others?

## ***#2 The ABCs of Intentional Engagement: Acknowledge, Be Present, Come Closer***

We suggest a second ABC: *Acknowledge, Be present, and Come closer*. These three responses can help you stay engaged in the process of learning more about diversity and can help you model embracing differences for your children.

*Acknowledging, Being present, and Coming closer* together form the initial steps we can all take toward greater intercultural understanding.

To *acknowledge* means that our first reaction should be to recognize the presence of diversity. When we start to feel uncomfortable, we can acknowledge the source of our discomfort. We can say to ourselves, "I am learning the language of difference. I am learning something new. I am not familiar with this setting or with persons from this particular background, and I am learning how to be in relationship with them." Acknowledge that there is something new happening in you and around you, and that this opportunity can be a gift. Acknowledge that this is hard for you, that you may make a mistake, and that you are somewhat afraid of the situation. Acknowledge that you have a reason to be learning the language of difference: to become more connected to the human family and to grow in community with others. Acknowledge that you are setting an example for your own children in learning this language for yourself.

To *be present* also means to be curious, to be open, to be willing to try and make mistakes. Being present means that you have acknowledged the opportunity to learn something new and you are being present or available and open to that opportunity. Having acknowledged the challenges you may have in learning about people different from yourself, you are able to be present to those feelings of discomfort. You are also able to turn that discomfort into curiosity. Be curious, and ask yourself, What can I learn from this experience? What are the messages I am receiving from this other person? Being present also means being willing to make



mistakes, recognizing when you may be misreading the situation. You can ask yourself, In what ways might I be misunderstanding this person?

Third, a better response to learn the language of diversity is to *come closer*. Coming closer means physically remaining in spaces in which you are uncomfortable. Coming closer means actually moving closer toward persons who are different from you, rather than staying away or avoiding them. Choose to sit next to someone you do not know. Make eye contact and say hello to a stranger. In coming closer, you open yourself to learning about others through proximity. It means you extend the olive branch. It means you be the change you wish to see in the world. It means you become a bridge without expectation. It means you initiate action. You can learn a language from a distance, but you cannot speak a language fluently unless you begin speaking with other people in that language.

*Acknowledging* difference, *Being present* to the diversity around you, and *Coming closer* to persons who are not like you are three ways you can begin to learn the language of difference. If you want to help yourself become a better communicator, to have deeper relationships with persons around you, and to be more effective as a citizen in a diverse society, you will benefit from starting with these ABCs. And if you want to help your own children grow up as compassionate and kind people, able to overcome their own discomfort in new situations, then you need to be able to model this for them in your own behavior.

### ***#3 The ABCs of a More Just Society: Access, Build, Cultivate***

So far, our ABCs have focused only on the inward experience of diversity, your own individual reaction to people who are different from you. But given the history of discrimination in this country, it is important that we also move towards interpersonal engagement and looking at a broader perspective for addressing diversity. For instance, given the policies and practices that keep people of color in disadvantaged contexts, simply treating individual people better does not address the systemic challenges—the problems that

pervade our systems, our institutions, our laws, our community practices. To do this, we need another set of ABCs.

### **Enter Access, Build, and Cultivate (ABC)!**

*Access* refers to your ability to connect to knowledge, resources, and people. Accessing knowledge refers to your responsibility to learn more on your own. It refers to using information that you can find in libraries, studying the history of policies and institutions in your community, and engaging in workshops and professional developments that address diversity.

Access also refers to being the one to provide entry into a place or space that another person might not otherwise be able to enter. This is what is meant by accessing “resources.” Each person has their own area of privilege and influence, and accessing resources means using what we have to benefit someone else, enabling them the same access we ourselves have. By providing access, you are also being an ally.

Access also means initiating an interaction between persons in your network and connections to which others may not have access. It means taking the initiative to be a bridge, rather than expecting someone else to be the bridge.

*Build* refers to the development of networks and frameworks based upon what has been accessed. It means not only allowing others access, but following through to see the establishment of those relationships. Building means being aware that society as we know it has already been *built* to be the way it is now, and that if we want our social structures to change, we need to build new forms of social connections. This way, the learning we do about diversity is not just learning for learning’s sake, but to use that learning to build something for others, particularly structures from which those who are marginalized can finally also benefit.

*Cultivate* refers to generating something new with what has been accessed and built upon. Cultivate also refers to the fact that although processes and methods developed at one time may have worked at that time, cultivating something new recognizes that we need new methods and processes as we move into the future.

Cultivate is also a gardening word. It's knowing that you can eat the beet greens as well as the beet root. It's knowing how to put your garden bed to sleep—covering it with mulch, allowing the soil to rest—and then, when you're ready to plant again, knowing how to dig up the soil and plant or sow something new.

To cultivate is a life work—a work about tending to life, helping it flourish, and recognizing our own needs for nourishment along the way. Such work, such cultivation, requires critical self-reflection, digging deep within ourselves to find out what our beliefs are about ourselves and about others. It requires not just assuming that our work in accessing and building has made us immune from making mistakes, but being willing to cultivate a spirit of humility open to ongoing learning. It requires cultivating a healthy respect for the flourishing of all life and seeing how our own thriving is necessarily connected to the thriving of all living beings.

As you think about ways to teach and engage difference, remember to *Access*, *Build*, and *Cultivate*. Access the information and the people near you; build upon what you have accessed; and don't forget to cultivate the new relationships, networks, and opportunities to nourish life all around you, particularly those whose lives are the most threatened. When you access, build, and cultivate, there is always a refreshing that happens. The conversations do not get old and stale.

### Summary Table of the ABCs

Notice the ABCs that you may be experiencing as you read this book.

#### #1: *Automatic ABCs (Unhelpful but Predictable Responses)*

<b>A—Afraid</b>	If you are <i>afraid</i> , ask yourself what makes you feel afraid in this space?
<b>B—Back away</b>	If you notice yourself physically wanting to <i>back away</i> , figure out why.

<b>C—Control</b>	If you notice the impulse in yourself to control the circumstances, figure out why. Observe your reactions. Write them down, rather than running away from them.
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### **#2: Intentional ABCs (Personal Introspection to Stay Engaged)**

<b>A—Acknowledge</b>	What happens when you <i>acknowledge</i> the diversity around you?
<b>B—Be present</b>	Notice how you can sit with the feeling of being uncomfortable, and <i>be present</i> to this opportunity.
<b>C—Come closer</b>	In what way could you physically <i>come closer</i> to someone and begin a conversation?

### **#3: Interpersonal ABCs (Building a More Just Society)**

<b>A—Access</b>	What information do you have at your disposal for the interpersonal or social dynamics going on around you? To what resources (networks of relationships or skills) can you give others <i>access</i> to help them better navigate this situation?
<b>B—Build</b>	How can you <i>build</i> upon what you already know—or the resources you can access or the people you know—to build a deeper connection with others in this space?
<b>C—Cultivate</b>	What can you contribute to the mutual flourishing of yourself and the people you are getting to know? How can you <i>cultivate</i> within yourself a capacity for lifelong learning and adjusting to the new?

## Chapter 1 Activity for Self-Reflection

### Who Are the People in Your Neighborhood?

What are the places (religious institutions, neighborhoods, restaurants, shops) to which you can go to experience people who are different from you? It can be intimidating to go a place where you are the only person who looks like you or sounds like you or believes the way you do. However, go and try it. Sit in a space where there is a language you do not understand, for example. Walk through the ABCs above, noting your own automatic responses as well as what your intentional or interpersonal responses might entail. Write about the experience and then share it in a group or class or with those who are interested in developing better relationships with others.