



Cornelius Minor during his ILA 2018 General Session keynote



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FIVE THINGS WE LOVE ABOUT **CORNELIUS MINOR**

Shining a spotlight on the ILA Intensive keynote's dedication to equity in literacy

By **Bailee Formon**

educator and author Cornelius Minor, an ILA 2018 General Session speaker, returns to the ILA stage again this year—this time as a keynote speaker at ILA Intensive: Nevada. A well-known advocate for equity in literacy education, Minor works with teachers and school leaders across the globe to help them reflect on their practices and grow alongside their students.

Minor, a lead staff developer for Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, uses his many professional platforms—social media, podcasts, workshops, and conference presentations—to encourage improvements in the classroom from the point of view of both an educator and a parent. One such platform is his new book, *We Got This: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be* (Heinemann), which describes his teaching experiences and the ways those experiences have shaped his current ideologies and practices.

Minor is a perennial favorite at ILA events. His insights and bold actions make him an admirable and sincere role model, and his unique way of helping teachers lean into discomfort and feel confident discussing difficult topics has impacted educators around the world—and inspired us as well.

Here are just five of the many things we love about Cornelius Minor and his passionate work for equity in education.

He gets the conversation started.

By facilitating an impromptu space for discussion at the ILA 2016 Conference, Minor was able to initiate conversation on subjects that educators might be hesitant to acknowledge in the classroom. Minor put together this last-minute session as a response to the police-involved shooting death of Alton Sterling in Louisiana and the shooting of Dallas, Texas, police officers that killed five and injured nine, both of which had occurred the week before the conference. Minor modeled for educators how to not shy away from having critical conversations with students about tragic events, and he stressed that discussing difficult topics with students is an educator's responsibility. "If we can't use literacy to build understanding, then we've got nothing," he said.

His family sets an example.

Minor and his wife, Kass—advocates who together form The Minor Collective—use their social media platforms to set positive examples as both educators and parents, showing how they live as inclusive, affirming educators and individuals. Whether sharing calls to

action for disrupting the education status quo or posting new favorite read-alouds with their young daughters, their online presence overflows with inspiration and ideas for incorporating literacy practices into classrooms and homes alike. If they aren't already part of your professional learning network, you need to add them. They're a literacy power couple.

He challenges our thinking.

In his presentation at the Sparks Lunch at the ILA 2017 Conference, Minor asked educators to reflect on their teaching methods and ask themselves how their lessons relate to students' communities outside of the classroom. "If something that I teach a kid works only in the classroom, then it's not worth teaching," he said. "It has to work in the real world." In addition, he discussed literacy as a social and political tool, stressing the importance of applied knowledge. His presentation prompted many attendees to take a closer look at their curriculum and the way they engage their students.

He's all about empowerment.

Between The Minor Collective and Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, Minor puts his powerful rhetoric into action through hands-on professional development offerings rooted in improving equity and access. No matter what the topic, be it digital literacy or writing workshops, inclusive classrooms or design thinking, Minor aims to empower educators to be the change agents their students need them to be. During his ILA 2018 General Session keynote, Minor urged attendees to practice "disruptive kindness" as a form of advocacy work that *all* can participate in: "Being nice in the face of oppression is not enough. Nice does not create change—kindness does," he said. "Kindness means I care enough about you to call you out and help you learn and change." He continued by saying that, although educators might not be



Minor leading a workshop session with teachers

able to dismantle the discriminatory systems in government, they can—and should—change the discriminatory systems that govern classrooms, districts, and schools.

He's "got this."

Minor's new book, *We Got This*, highlights the importance of listening to students and acknowledging that their education should be relevant to their reality. Minor draws on his experiences and conversations with students to show that there is more to education than the standard math and English curriculum, and there are steps all educators can take to play a role in equity work by confronting the issues of racism, sexism, ableism, and classism that students live with each day. He shows readers that the responsibility to be present, to improve access, and to make education authentic and relevant to students' lives is critical, referring to the closest thing to a superpower that educators have today—the ability to truly listen to their students. ■

ILA Intensive: Nevada

Cornelius Minor will be a keynote speaker at ILA Intensive: Nevada, a special two-day event focusing on equity and access to literacy taking place June 21–22, 2019, in Las Vegas, NV. For more information, visit literacyworldwide.org/nevada.