Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: An Equity Literacy Approach

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REACHING AND TEACHING STUDENTS IN POVERTY

Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap

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Reflection

Why are poor people poor? Why are people who are in poverty in poverty?

Why do students experiencing poverty not do as well in school on average as their wealthier peers?
Reflection

Why are poor people poor? Why are people who are in poverty in poverty?

Why do students experiencing poverty not do as well in school on average as their wealthier peers?

Why are rich people rich? Why are people in wealth in wealth?
Warming Up:

A Short Quiz
Quiz

A majority of poor people in the U.S. live in:

0 Urban areas
0 Suburban areas
0 Rural areas
Quiz

Rural areas
Quiz

According to a national study of US parents (Noel, Stark, Redford, & Zukerberg, 2013), 66% of parents from families not experiencing poverty reported they always checked to ensure their children did their homework.

What percentage of parents from families experiencing poverty reported they always checked to ensure their children did their homework?

0 42%
0 72%
0 92%
Quiz

72% (compared with 66% of families not in poverty)
A Princeton study of elite universities found that legacy applicants—people, usually white and wealthy, with a parent or grandparent who attended the institution—are far more privileged by legacy status than applicants of color are by affirmative action policies. The study determined that legacy status was equivalent to how much of a boost to an applicant’s SAT score?

- 0 20 points
- 0 90 points
- 0 160 points
Quiz

160 points
Quiz

Who is more likely to shoplift?

0 Someone whose family income is less than $35,000?
0 Someone whose family income is between $35,000 and $70,000?
0 Someone whose family income is above $70,000?
Quiz

Someone whose family income is above $70,000
Quiz

“We have deluded ourselves into believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifices. Capitalism was built on the exploitation of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor, both black and white, both here and abroad.”

0 Bernie Sanders
0 Michael Moore
0 Martin Luther King, Jr.
Quiz

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Quiz

According to a study sponsored by the Pew Research Center, the median wealth of white households in the U.S. is how many times larger than that of African American households?

0 2 times
0 8 times
0 14 times
Quiz

14 times
Quiz

The three richest people in the world have as much wealth as:

0 the 8 poorest countries
0 the 48 poorest countries
0 the 308 poorest countries
Quiz

48 poorest countries

Note: There is a quiz you can print and use on pages 35-36.
Goal

Equity Literacy:

What are the knowledge and skills I need to be a threat to the existence of inequity in my sphere of influence?

Do I have the will to be that threat?

Note, this is not a list of practical implementations, but a lens.
Objectives

We will:

- Deepen our understandings about the barriers faced by families experiencing poverty;

- Consider how we can eliminate or mitigate those barriers;

- Learn strategies for engaging low-income students and families effectively.
The Three Ideologies

1. Deficit ideology*

2. “Grit” ideology*

3. Structural ideology
Deficit View Is...

0 Believing outcome inequalities are caused by moral, intellectual, and cultural deficiencies in low-income communities and individuals
  0 The “achievement gap” (or “opportunity gap”?)
  0 “Drop-outs” (or “push-outs”?)

0 Response: Fix poor people’s “cultures” (tendency to look down, down, down)
0 Ignores inequalities
"Grit" View Is...

Recognizing people in poverty have much to overcome in and out of schools in order to succeed.

Response: Make low-income students more “resilient” and “gritty” by cultivating their abilities to overcome it (still deficit-laden... and not entirely possible).

Ignores inequalities.
Structural View Is...

0 Recognizing people in poverty have much to overcome in and out of schools in order to succeed

0 Response: **Eliminate those barriers**
0 Acknowledges and addresses inequalities
How I Know “The Poor” Are Not “The Problem”
Taking the Equity View
From “Mindset of Poverty” to Equity Literacy: Principles

0 Outcome inequalities *do not result* from cultural defects (or absence or grit or growth mindset) in low-income families

0 Outcome inequalities *do result* from inequitable access to resources and experiences in and out of school

0 Our job as educators is to refuse to replicate that inequitable access in our spheres of influence—a matter of *equity*, not a matter of *culture* or *mindset*
What Is Inequity?

Inequity = unfair or inequitable distribution of (material and non-material) access and opportunity

Equity = redistribution of (material and non-material) access and opportunity
Don’t just tell a different version of the same story. Change The Story!
Equity Literacy Skills

- **Recognize** inequity (knowing how to see)
- **Respond** to inequity (knowing what to do in the moment)
- **Redress** inequity (knowing how to abolish)
- **Sustain** equity (knowing how to stay equitable)

(See chapter 2, p. 21.)
Equity literacy exercise

Name a policy, practice, or initiative in your school or the district that reflects a deficit or grit ideology—that focuses on fixing marginalized people instead of the fixing the conditions that marginalize people.

How can you rethink this policy, practice, or initiative through a structural lens?
The Trouble with the “Culture of Poverty” or “Mindsets of Poverty”

(more on this in Chapter 4)
Analysis of Resources

Hidden rules of class handout – Ruby Payne

Reflections on Hurricane Katrina – Ruby Payne
Consider...

Are you merely trying to “save” marginalized students one by one, or are you willing to transform conditions so that students no longer are marginalized?
Consider...

Are we using our energies and resources wisely?
Barriers to Eliminate or Mitigate

- Challenges low-income students and families experience **outside schools** that affect their experiences in schools;

- Challenges low-income students and families experiences **in schools**.

(Detailed in chapters 5 and 6.)
Out-of-School Barriers

- Living wage work
- Transportation
- Child care
- Healthy food
- Affordability of “shadow” education
- Housing stability
- Preventive healthcare

Note none of these is related to grittiness or mindset or culture, only to access and opportunity.
In School, the “Great Equalizer”:

This opportunity gap is characterized by the lack of access to:

- Quality preschool
- Adequately funded schools
- School nurses, counselors, and other school support services
- Affirming school environments (bullying)
- High academic expectations
- Higher-order, engaging pedagogies
- Opportunities for family engagement
Case Study: Family Involvement

Fact: low-income families show up less often than wealthier families for in-school opportunities for family engagement.

The question for us: Why? How is this fact interpreted?

Once we interpret correctly, we can respond appropriately.
Focusing on Barriers

What are the barriers that might make doing the following more difficult for students experiencing poverty than for other students?

0 Completing homework

0 Participating in extra-curricular activities

0 Maintaining a perfect attendance record
Instructional Strategies
(more in Chapter 8)
Strategies and Equitable Practice

**Prioritize literacy** across the curriculum (Milner, 2015; Reed, 2015).

- Every teacher should see her- or himself as a literacy teacher
- Most studies of high-achieving high-poverty school showed schools that do well have this as a centerpiece
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Integrate music, art, and theater across the curriculum (Holtzman & Susholtz, 2011; Pogrow, 2006) whenever possible.

- Less likely to have access out of school
- Improves engagement and performance across subjects
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Have and communicate high expectations (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2012; Milner, 2015) for economically disadvantaged students.

- Pedagogically, especially
Strategies and Equitable Practice

**Adopt higher-order, learner-centered, rigorous pedagogies** (Dudley-Marling, 2015; Shields, 2014).

- Collaborative and cooperative learning
- Interactive and dialogic teaching
- High levels of student participation
Strategies and Equitable Practice

**Make curricula relevant** to the lives of low-income students (Duke et al, 2006; Haberman, 1991; Sanchez, 2014).

0 Increases student engagement
0 “Portage”
Relational Strategies
(more in Chapter 9)
Strategies and Equitable Practice

**Develop strong relationships** with low-income students. This means:

0 Addressing bias when it happens.
0 Adopting a structural view, not a deficit view.
0 Never demeaning people’s families, purposefully or not. (Example: language.)
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Never force students to “perform” their poverty publicly.

0 Let’s go around and share we did on our summer vacations...
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Analyze learning materials for bias
(Jones, 2008; Sano, 2009)

Often very subtle
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Make opportunities for family engagement accessible to low-income families

0 Remember challenges: time (multiple and evening jobs), paid leave, transportation, child care, hostile environment
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Engage in *persistent* family outreach efforts.

0 Remember low-income parents often have experienced schools as hostile environments.
0 Reach out consistently, not just when there’s bad news.
0 Never assume you know what a lack of responsiveness means; remember evening work, etc.
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Train staff to **treat low-income families with respect and dignity.**

0 One primary reason low-income families avoid coming to schools for events is the implicit hostility they have experienced in the past.
Strategies and Equitable Practice

Recognize students have different levels of access to material resources

0 Do not assign homework that requires access to resources some students don’t have
0 Be mindful about who has access to technology, in particular
Leadership Strategies Parts I-III
Leadership Commitments:

Part I:

Shaping Institutional Culture Around an Ethic of Equity
Shaping institutional culture

Visibly and vocally embrace equity

• Don’t hand it off
• Be the most active proponent
• Seek feedback from the most marginalized families – even when that critical feedback that is difficult to hear
Shaping institutional culture

Publicly support those students, staff, and community members fighting for equity

- Are they at the center of your culture or on the margins of your culture?
- Who gets a faster response time—wealthier parents who are worried about their kids or parents from lower income worried about their kids?
- Must celebrate the most vigorous equity voices
Shaping institutional culture

Challenge deficit views directly

• Must root these views out of the school culture
• Replace deficit/grit views with a structural view
• Use “I wonder” comments to call people in
Shaping institutional culture

Hire with equity literacy in mind

• Ask questions that get at candidates’ thinking (e.g., “Why, on average, do students experiencing poverty not do as well in school as wealthier students?”)
• The people doing the hiring must have equity literacy for this to work
Shaping institutional culture

Prioritize needs and interests of the most marginalized students and families

• Should be part of every policy conversation: “How will this affect our most marginalized families?”
• Policies that do damage should be eliminated right now. The longevity or a practice does not make it equitable.
Leadership Commitments:

Part II:

Cultivating Equity Literacy in All Staff
Cultivating equity literacy

Build PD around equity literacy knowledge and skills, not around cultures or mindsets or grittiness of people experiencing poverty

1. Ability to recognize inequity
2. Ability to respond to inequity
3. Ability to redress inequity
4. Ability to sustain equity

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Cultivating equity literacy

**Strengthen structural ideology** to foster responsiveness to big social conditions

- Where we can’t transform or eliminate, mitigate
Cultivating equity literacy

Practice identifying policies that stigmatize, humiliate, or punish students for ways they’re already marginalized

• Examples?
Leadership Commitments:

Part III:

Creating Policies and Practices that Redistribute Access and Opportunity
Creating redistributive policies

Distribute teachers and resources equitably

• Work on shifting culture in education that prizes jobs at whitest, wealthiest schools
• Mitchell’s story (Chapter 10)
Creating redistributive policies

Partner for wrap-around services

• Healthcare
• Healthy food
• Others
Creating redistributive policies

Eliminate pay-to-play learning opportunities

• Why offering financial “help” is not adequate
Creating redistributive policies

Learn to interpret data through an equity lens

• Test scores
• Behavior referrals
• Etc.
Assessing Programs and Initiatives
Question 1

Where are you locating the problem?

Are your efforts designed to fix people experiencing poverty or to fix the conditions that marginalize people experiencing poverty?

If it’s the former, start over.
Question 1

Are you mitigating or transforming?

Are your efforts designed root out inequitable policy and practice or leave inequity in place and help low-income families “survive” it?

If it’s the latter, start over.
Question 1

Is it real change or the illusion of change?

Are your efforts resulting in the permanent redistribution of access and opportunity or in minor adjustments?

If it’s the latter, start over.
Question 1

What is your priority?

Are your efforts prioritizing test scores over learning and engagement or are they prioritizing equitable access and opportunity?

If it’s the former, start over.
Who are the experts?

Are your efforts based on a recognition that people are the experts of their own experience? Are you working on economically marginalized people or working with economically marginalized people, acknowledging their expertise?

If it’s the former, start over.
Questions and Discussion!

Thanks!

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