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?

How I Know "The Poor" Are Not "The Problem"

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 strategies, but a lens.

Equity Literacy Equation

Good will (desire for justice)

+

Depth of knowledge (understanding how inequity operates and how to cultivate equity)

+

Will (commitment to action, not just belief)

=

The possibility of **equity**

Taking the Equity View

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

The Troubles

o The tendency to detour around equity by implementing "equity" initiatives that have nothing to do with equity

o Prioritizing the optics of equity over actual equity efforts

From "Mindset of Poverty" to Equity Literacy

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 (or ***to poverty itself***)

0 Our job: refuse to replicate that inequitable access in our spheres of influence

Equity Literacy Skills

O Recognize inequity (knowing how to see)

O Respond to inequity (knowing what to do)

O Redress inequity (knowing how to abolish)

O Sustain equity (knowing how to stay equitable)

I GOT SKILLS

Learning to "Recognize"

O Gender and compliments

O Race and informal interaction

O **Poverty and Micro-humiliations**
   O Book fair
   O Chocolate bar fundraiser

Equity Literacy Exercise

(1) What is an example of a policy and practice you have observed in schools that could unintentionally humiliate or embarrass students or families experiencing poverty?

(2) What would you do differently to avoid humiliating or embarrassing students of families experiencing poverty?

Quick Equity Literacy Exercise

(1) "Required" costs and expenses for families with children in public schools

(2) Non-required costs and expenses that will get kids access to more learning and other opportunities

(3) "Socially pressured" costs and expenses for families with children in public schools

(Note difference between noticing individual instances and noticing the accumulation of expenses.)

Two Helpful Concepts

1. Poverty ideologies

2. Mitigative vs. transformative change

The Three Ideologies

1. Deficit ideology

2. "Grit" ideology

3. Structural ideology

Why ideology is important

A study by the Department of Education found that Black students were disciplined at far higher rates than white students.

It found that Black students were much more likely to be suspended or expelled.

Our Question: Why?

Deficit → Structural (Ideology, Interpretation, Solution)

Deficit View Is...

0 Believing outcome inequalities are caused by moral, intellectual, and cultural deficiencies in low-income communities and individuals

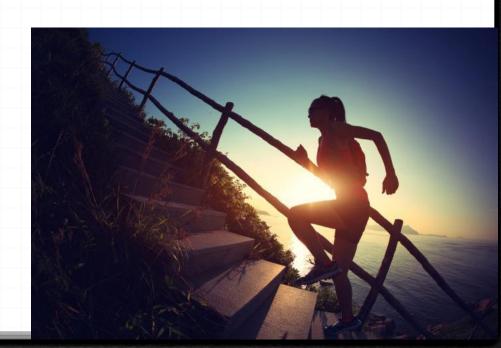0 Response: fix poor people's "mindsets" or "cultures"

0 Ignore inequalities

Grit View Is…

o Recognizing barriers, but focusing on cultivating resilience against the barriers rather than *removing the barriers*

o Sexual assault example

Structural View Is…

O Recognizing people in poverty have much to overcome in and out of schools in order to succeed and eliminating those barriers

O Example of "family involvement"

Recognizing Deficit View

0 "Hidden Rules of Class"

0 Reflections on Hurricane Katrina

Focusing on Barriers

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

O Completing homework

O Participating in extra-curricular activities

O Maintaining a perfect attendance record

2.Transformative Change

o Mitigation: Starfish parable (and "starfish initiatives"

o Transformation: Baby in river parable

Popular & Troubling Mitigations

o Grit (Duckworth)
o Growth mindset (Dweck)
o Narrow "brain" focus (Jensen)
o Many "behavior modification" approaches

Not that some of this can't play a role, but that they often are implemented in place of equity initiatives. *These are not equity frameworks or initiatives because they do not confront inequities.*

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STUDY FINDS POPULAR 'GROWTH MINDSET' EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS AREN'T VERY EFFECTIVE

By: Madeline Kelly

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A new study co-authored by researchers at Michigan State University and Case Western Reserve University found that "growth mindset interventions," or programs that teach students they can improve their intelligence with effort – and therefore improve grades and test scores – don't work for students in most circumstances.

"This research is important because millions of dollars have been spent on growth mindset interventions in schools," said Alex Burgoyne, a Ph.D. student studying cognition and cognitive neuroscience. "Our

Principles for Equity Literacy

Direct Confrontation Principle

The only path toward equity progress requires **_direct confrontations with inequity_**. We have to be able to recognize it, name it, understand it, and eliminate it.

Redistribution Principle

Equity initiatives should **redistribute access and opportunity**. If your equity initiatives are not doing this, they should be reconsidered.

Prioritization Principle

Equity requires a reimagining of policy and practice in ways that ***actively prioritize*** the interests of historically and presently marginalized students.

Ideology Principle

Equity can be achieved only through *ideological shifts* that inform policy and practice decisions. Implementing strategies without these shifts has never worked, so why do we keep doing it?

#FixInjusticeNotKids Principle

No amount of our equity efforts should be spent on initiatives designed to fix students experiencing poverty. All of our equity efforts should be spent on initiatives *that transform the conditions* that marginalize students experiencing poverty.

Evidence-Based Actions You Can Take Right Now

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Evidence-Based Equity

Train all leaders to identify and respond to deficit ideology in all its forms. Deficit ideology is the most consistent barrier to equity progress. It cannot be allowed to live in any form in any school.

Evidence-Based Equity

De-track and rethink ability grouping.

Evidence-Based Equity

Hire with equity literacy in mind.

"Why do students experiencing poverty not do as well in school on average as their white classmates?"

Evidence-Based Equity

Eliminate all fees attached to learning opportunities.

Evidence-Based Equity

Never, for any reason, allow students to be pulled out of art and do not allow teachers to pull students out of recess for punishment.

Evidence-Based Equity

Analyze building- and district-level policies and practices for bias. A great place to start is to look at school policy handbooks.

Evidence-Based Equity

Identify and eliminate policies, programs, and initiatives that punish marginalized students for ways they're already marginalized or that humiliate students based on what they can't afford

- *0* How we weigh homework in grades
- *0* How we respond to tardies and absences
- *0* How we raise money (selling stuff)
- *0* The Book Fair example

Evidence-Based Equity

Never force students to **"perform" their poverty** publicly.

0 Let's go around and share what we did on our summer vacations…

Expanding Our Spheres of Influence

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Evidence-Based Equity

Fight for higher minimum wages, more living wage jobs and, if you're really interested in justice, more income and wealth equality.

Evidence-Based Equity

Advocate for affordable housing and tenants' rights.

Evidence-Based Equity

In the United States, advocate for universal healthcare and more of a focus on preventative healthcare.

Evidence-Based Equity

Consider how other challenges impact families:

- Food deserts and food insecurity
- "Time" poverty
- Gentrification
- More…

MLK:

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; ***who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice***; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; …

MLK:

… who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; …who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.' ***Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will***. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

Questions and Discussion!

Thanks!

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