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Equity Literacy Principles for Educators of Students in Poverty

By Paul C. Gorski for EdChange

Principle 1 The right to equitable educational opportunity is universal.

Commitments for Equity Literate Educators

Equity literate educators believe that every student has an inalienable right to equitable educational opportunity.

Principle 2 Poverty and class are intersectional in nature.

Commitments for Equity Literate Educators

Equity literate educators understand that class is an intersectional experience for students, so we cannot understand how class inequities operate, even in our own classrooms, without also understanding how inequities related to race, gender, language, immigrant status, disability and other identities operate.

Principle 3 People in poverty are diverse.

Commitments for Equity Literate Educators

Equity literate educators recognize that poor and working-class people are infinitely diverse, so that studying a singular “culture of poverty” will not help us understand individual low-income students or families better, and might strengthen our stereotypes.

Principle 4 What we believe about people in poverty, including our biases and prejudices, informs how we teach and relate to people in poverty.

Commitments for Equity Literate Educators

Equity literature educators know that our teaching philosophies and practices are driven at least in part by our belief systems, so in addition to relying on practical strategies for teaching low-income students, we become equitable educators when we are willing to change fundamentally what we believe about poverty and the families that experience it.

Principle 5 We cannot understand the relationship between poverty and education without understanding the biases and inequities experienced by people in poverty.

Commitments for Equity Literate Educators

Equity literate educators, in addition to changing what we believe about low-income students, are committed to developing deeper understandings of the biases and inequities faced by low-income families both in and out of school, and how these biases and inequities affect student performance and engagement in school.

Principle 6 Test scores are inadequate measures of equity.*Commitments for Equity Literate Educators*

Equity literate educators are aware that equity or its absence cannot be captured by standardized test scores because test scores, which in essence measure levels of prior access to educational opportunity, cannot capture student experience. Raising test scores is not the same thing as creating an equitable learning environment.

Principle 7 Class disparities in education are the result of [structural] inequities, not the result of cultures.*Commitments for Equity Literate Educators*

Equity literate educators understand that educational outcome disparities are the result, not of cultural conflicts or a deficient “culture of poverty,” but rather from the unequal distribution of access and opportunity, so that eliminating disparities requires us to eliminate inequities rather than change students’ cultures.

Principle 8 Equitable educators adopt a structural rather than a deficit view of educational disparities.*Commitments for Equity Literate Educators*

Equity literate educators recognize and draw upon the resiliencies and other funds of knowledge accumulated by poor and working class communities, reject deficit views that focus on fixing marginalized students rather than fixing the conditions that marginalize students, and understand the structural barriers that cheat some people out of the opportunities enjoyed by other people.

Principle 9 Strategies for bolstering school engagement and learning must be based on evidence for what works.*Commitments for Equity Literate Educators*

Equity literate educators, aware of the magnitude of societal bias against economically disadvantaged people, are committed to basing instructional and policy decisions, not on what’s popular or what bias might dictate, but on evidence of what works.

Principle 10 The inalienable right to equitable educational opportunity includes the right to high expectations, higher-order pedagogies, and engaging curricula.*Commitments for Equity Literate Educators*

Equity literate educators demonstrate high expectations for *all* students, including low-income students, in part by offering them the same sorts of higher-order pedagogies and engaging curricula usually found in classrooms or schools with few or no low-income students.

Excerpted for EdChange.org from Paul C. Gorski’s book, Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap (New York City: Teachers College Press, 2014).

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