



# Equity Literacy:

## An Introduction

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### Defining Equity Literacy

Equity Literacy refers to the knowledge and skills that enable us to recognize, respond to, and redress conditions that deny some students access to educational and other opportunities enjoyed by their peers. The Equity Literacy framework was constructed with an acknowledgement of both the strengths and limitations of existing frameworks for engaging the full diversity of youth in schools. Most particularly, it was constructed out of concerns with frameworks, such as “cultural competence,” that focus on “culture” instead of “equity” and as a result mask the inequities that plague schools and other organizations. It is based on the reality that equitable educators must be proficient, not just with culture, but with the skills necessary to be a threat to the existence of inequity in their spheres of influence.

#### Equity Literacy Abilities

#### Examples of Associated Skills and Dispositions

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| <p>1. Ability to <b>Recognize</b> biases and inequities, including subtle biases and inequities</p> | <p>Equity literate educators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• notice even subtle bias in materials, classroom interactions, and school policies;</li> <li>• know and teach about how notable people in their content disciplines used their knowledge to advocate for just or unjust actions or policies; and</li> <li>• reject deficit views that locate the sources of outcome inequalities (like test score disparities) as existing within the cultures of, rather than as pressing upon, low-income families.</li> </ul> |
| <p>2. Ability to <b>Respond to</b> biases and inequities in the immediate term</p>                  | <p>Equity literate educators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have the facilitation skills and content knowledge necessary to intervene effectively when biases or inequities arise in a classroom or school;</li> <li>• cultivate in students the ability to analyze bias in classroom materials, classroom interactions, and school policies; and</li> <li>• foster conversations with colleagues about equity concerns at their schools.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>3. Ability to <b>Redress</b> biases and inequities in the long term</p>                          | <p>Equity literate educators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advocate against inequitable school practices, such as racially or economically biased tracking, and advocate for equitable school practices;</li> <li>• never confuse <i>celebrating diversity with equity</i>, such as by responding to racial conflict with cultural celebrations; and</li> <li>• teach, in relevant and age-appropriate ways, about issues like sexism, poverty, and homophobia.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>4. Ability to <b>Create and Sustain</b> a bias-free and equitable learning environment</p>       | <p>Equity literate educators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• express high expectations for all students through higher-order pedagogies and curricula;</li> <li>• consider how they assign homework and communicate with families, understanding that students have different levels of access to resources like computers and the Internet; and</li> <li>• cultivate a classroom environment in which students feel free to express themselves openly and honestly.</li> </ul>  |

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

# Eleven Things YOU Can Do to Bring Class Equity to School

1. Remember that there exists no set of teaching strategies that work for all, or even most, low-income students (or for any group that we define based on a single identity dimension). The range of ways in which low-income students prefer to learn is *exactly the same* as the range of ways in which wealthy students prefer to learn.
2. Fight to keep low-income students from being placed unfairly into lower academic tracks. Fight to get low-income students into gifted and talented programs. Or, better yet, fight to eliminate tracking altogether.
3. Teach about class and poverty both locally and globally. Teach about the lack of living wage jobs, the dissolution of labor unions, the growing wealth gap, hunger, and other topics related to class and poverty.
4. Teach, as well, about the important anti-poverty work and ideas of people whose activism in this area has been erased from mainstream history: Martin Luther King, Jr., Helen Keller, Mark Twain, the Black Panthers, and so on. Also teach about why their anti-poverty work has been erased from mainstream history.
5. Keep extra coats, school supplies, and snacks around for students who might need them. But distribute these resources quietly to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to low-income students.
6. Help make family involvement accessible to low-income families, who, due to a lack of living-wage jobs, often work multiple jobs (including evening and night hours), don't have paid leave, and may not be able to afford public transportation or childcare.
7. Keep in mind that many low-income students do not have easy access to computers and the Internet. Be thoughtful about the homework you assign.
8. Similarly, many of their families do not have easy access to computers and the Internet, either. Some might lack telephone service. Be thoughtful about how you communicate with families and how you make information available. Never make information available only in electronic (online) form.
9. Have high expectations for low-income students. Give them access to the types of higher-order thinking curricula and pedagogies usually reserved for their wealthier peers. Poverty is not a disability—it's a social condition.
10. Make sure curriculum content, illustrations, and examples are relevant to the lives of low-income students.
11. Continue reaching out to low-income families, even if you experience them as unresponsive. Remember that it can take more than a call or two to help low-income families trust a system that historically has been inequitable, or even hostile, to them.