

Equity in the Classroom for Every Child

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By

Delia Robinson Richards

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I dedicate *Equity in the Classroom for Every Child* to my brother, Dr. James Fletcher Robinson, a phenomenal scholar, an astounding medical doctor, an inspirational leader and a believer of equitable practices and to our mother, Marian Van Horn Robinson, who always believed in us and encouraged us to strive to achieve our optimal potential.

“That's at the core of equity: **understanding who your kids are and how to meet their needs**. You are still focused on outcomes, but the path to get there may not be the same for each one.” (Pedro Noguera)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	x
Foreword	xi
Anika Spratley Burtin, Ph.D.	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	6
Time for Change	
Results of Research on the Achievement Gap	6
Success Stories that Narrowed or Closed the Achievement Gap	9
Overview of the Collaborative Effort in the Four Schools	12
Teacher Bias	14
Time Changes for Teachers	15
Chapter Summary	16
Chapter 2	19
Engaging Students	
Knowing Your Students and Their Families.....	19
The Students’ Skill Levels	22
Student Learning Styles	24
Resources for Each Student	26
Chapter Summary	27
Chapter 3	30
Appreciating Students’ Cultures	
Demonstrating an Appreciation for the Students’ Cultures	30
Appreciation and Self-Concept.....	35
Specific Appreciation Activities	38
Chapter Summary	40

Chapter 4	42
Communicating with Students	
Supporting Differentiated Instruction	42
Two-Way Communication—Teacher and Student	44
Teacher and Parents/Family Communication	47
The Teacher’s Attitude	49
Chapter Summary	51
 Chapter 5	 54
Helping Students	
Demonstration of Cultural Sensitivity	54
Scaffolding Instructions	56
Each Student Feels That They are Critical to the Learning Process ...	59
Motivation Techniques for the Teachers.....	61
Chapter Summary	64
 Chapter 6	 66
Equalizing Opportunities for Every Child	
Authentic Assessment and Students’ Academic Achievements	66
Equalizing Opportunities for Every Student	70
Treating Dual Language Learners (DLL) and Immigrant Children	
Equitably	72
Building on the Students’ Strengths is Fundamental to Building	
Equity	74
Chapter Summary	75
 Chapter 7	 77
Reflecting on Equitable Practices	
Daily Activities that Build on Students’ Strengths	77
Indicators of Equitable Classroom Activities	79
Using Families/Parents, the Community, and Administrators	
to Enable Every Student to Reach their Maximum Potential	81
The Teacher Develops the Reflective Journal.....	84
Chapter Summary	86
 Chapter 8	 88
Summary	

Appendix	93
Chapter Templates	
Template 1: The Blueprint for Education	93
Template 2: All About Me	94
Template 3: All About Me	95
Template 4: Child’s Picture Book.....	96
Template 5: Meet the Teacher	97
Template 6: Daily Quick Health Check.....	98
Template 7 Observational Tools.....	99
Template 8: Anecdotal Record	100
Template 9: Teaching Fractions Using Pizza.....	101
Template 10: Favorite Ice Cream Flavor	102
Template 11: Learning Styles	103
Template 12: Multiple Intelligences	104
Template 13 Job Chart.....	105
Template 14: Teacher’s Cultural Paradigm	106
Template 15: Field Trip	107
Index.....	108

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FOREWORD

My youngest son and I planted seven seeds in a paper cup. He carefully pressed the seeds into the soil, and we added just enough water to sufficiently dampen the soil. Then we placed the cup on a windowsill where the seeds could get good sunlight. About two weeks ago the first stalk began to poke its head through the soil. For the first few days just the one plant was visible. Each day we would excitedly check the plant's progression. Then seemingly overnight, additional stalks began to burst through the soil. Suddenly we were looking at six budding plants, each in various stages of growth, reaching new heights. We marveled at the plants and the workings of nature. Perhaps the most astonishing revelation occurred just the other day when the seventh seed, which we had long since forgotten, began to emerge. As this last tiny bud began its journey, I was reminded that seeds, like children, will bloom in their own time when given the right environment. This knowledge is reassuring as our country is currently navigating tumultuous times.

The global pandemic has forced us to reexamine the ways in which we interact with one another and our environment. What does it mean to have a society grounded in social justice and equity? What role do schools play in keeping our lives and our economy moving forward? Through all of this, teachers find themselves on the front lines. We ask ourselves how can we make the world a safer, more equitable and loving place for our students? How do we protect their futures so that they are given the opportunity to make the world a better place?

Delia Robinson Richards' handbook seeks to equip teachers with the tools they need to face the daunting challenges impacting our country and our classrooms. Her perspective as a seasoned early childhood educator and researcher provides a nuanced voice to the conversation. It is appropriate that we begin by thinking first about Early Childhood Education because this is where our children, our seeds if you will, are first planted and nurtured. We can learn from these practices, regardless of the age group we teach, how to bring our learners into full bloom. This book provides a framework for how teachers might create an equitable teaching and learning environment in which children can thrive.

Just as the seeds my son and I planted needed the essential elements of soil, sun, and water to survive, the seven core values outlined in these chapters are critical for the survival of our children as learners. Chapters 1 and 2, “Time for Change” and “Engaging Students” address the good soil that must be in place for seeds to take root. Teachers must recognize that the status quo is not working for *all* children and we must look for ways to elicit students’ active participation and engagement. Chapters 3 and 4, “Appreciating Students’ Culture” and “Communicating with Students” serve as the sun that encourages our children to break through the soil and reach new heights of their potential. Teachers are encouraged to recognize and leverage the knowledge students bring into the classroom, while simultaneously presenting them with new concepts and ideas that encourage productive struggle. Chapters 5 and 6, “Helping Students” and “Equalizing Opportunities for Every Child” speak to the necessary, live-giving water that constantly revives the budding plant and helps its root system take hold. Classrooms must be places where students have equal footing, regardless of their life circumstances outside of school. Finally, chapter 8, “Reflecting on Classroom Equity Implementation” focuses on the responsibility of the caretaker who is ever-present and vigilant. Like a skillful gardener, the teacher observes, reflects, and adjusts to maximize the growth and longevity of the budding learners in their care.

The core values discussed in these chapters purposely spell out the acrostic TEACHER. It is the teacher who must till the soil, plant the seeds, and nourish them so that they can grow to their full potential. Dr. Richards has provided a framework that clarifies this work and paves the way for a more equitable learning environment that allows each precious seed to bloom in its own time.

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook demonstrates creating equity in educating each child in the classroom. It is designed to benefit pre-service, novice, and tenured teachers. The purpose of the handbook is to generate support for diverse learners and to give teachers strategies to bridge the achievement gap. It presents a review of literature that supports equity in the classroom for diverse learners. It is focused primarily on the early childhood age group but could easily be adapted to all age groups from K–12th grade.

Teachers can use the handbook as a foundation for ensuring equity in the classroom and across the curriculum. Each chapter of the handbook begins with several questions. The chapter proceeds to answer the questions; however, these questions are a starting point and teachers can add more questions as situations arise or if they feel a need to elaborate on a specific situation.

This handbook consists of the following eight chapters:

Chapter 1 **T**ime for Change

Chapter 2 **E**ngaging Students

Chapter 3 **A**ppreciating Students' Cultures

Chapter 4 **C**ommunicating with Students

Chapter 5 **H**elping Students

Chapter 6 **E**qualizing Opportunities for Students

Chapter 7 **R**eflecting on Equitable Practices in the Classroom

Chapter 8 **S**ummary

The titles of Chapter 1 through Chapter 7 develop an acrostic that spells “TEACHER.” Each chapter title indicates a specific core value that should become a part of the teacher’s repertoire in the classroom. When these core values are implemented in the classroom, the needs of the diverse learners will be met in addition to empowering teachers and their students. These core values exhibit understanding, appreciation, and respect for diverse learners. The implementation of these core values will create The Blueprint Education Plan (Template 1: The Blueprint Education Plan). This plan will enable the teacher to demonstrate equity for every child in the classroom.

This handbook contributes to the teacher's scholarly and professional development; it can be used as part of the teaching and learning toolbox. Use of it will encourage, support, and impact the attitude and teaching strategies of K–12th grade teachers. It will enable teachers and other educators to support and engage diverse learners in the classroom by using the core values while implementing differentiated strategies that meet the needs of every child.

Today, the term, *Latinos*, is becoming more commonly used to designate a demographically growing group. Several researchers have defined what is meant by the term. Robles de Melendez and Beck¹ use the term Hispanic or Latino to denote an enormous range of people and cultures. Wood² refers to *Hispanic* as an umbrella term for anyone of Spanish or Portuguese descent in or outside the U.S. Throughout this book, both terms, Latino and Hispanic, will be used. The U.S. Census Bureau and others use these terms interchangeably although Hispanic refers to native speakers of Spanish or a person who has Spanish-speaking ancestry, whereas Latino refers to anyone of Latin American origin or ancestry.

Boutte³ suggests that educators should have some level of familiarity with their students' levels of ethnic awareness to better understand them. She describes the five ethnic groups in the US as follows:

- African American—not limited to Black as it also includes African, Caribbean, and Native African.
- Native American/Alaskan Native, which includes over 500 tribes; the largest tribes include Cherokee, Navajo, Sioux, Chippewa/Alout, and Eskimo.
- Asian/Pacific American-largest groups, which include Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, Filipino, Laotian, Lao-Hmong, Burmese, Samoan, Guamanian, Indonesian, East India, Pakistani, Saudi Arabian, Iranian, Iraqi, and other Arabic-speaking people.
- Latino/American Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American.

1. Wilma Robles de Melendez and Verna Beck, *Teaching Young Children in Multicultural Classrooms: Issues, Concepts, and Strategies*, 25.

2. Peter Wood, "Hispanics: To Be or Not to Be", 20.

3. Gloria Boutte, *Multicultural Education: Raising Consciousness*, 21.

- European American English, Welsh, Scottish, German, Dutch, Irish, French, Polish, Russian, Portuguese, Italian, Swiss, Danish, and other European groups.⁴

African American, Latino, Native American and other students have lagged behind their White and Asian peers in math and reading. Howe and Lisi⁵ state that, in many instances across the country, there are major discrepancies between the performances of Caucasian students and students of color, as well as between boys and girls. These discrepancies are referred to as the *achievement gap*. According to Irvine,⁶ the achievement gap between African American students and their White counterparts is due to a lack of focus on the influences of culture. After over 40 years of attempting to close the achievement gap, Black and Hispanic students still lag behind White and Asian students; the gap persists.⁷

In 2019 according to the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP),⁸ a comprehensive measurement of student performance (also known as “The Nation’s Report Card”), there was a regression in student proficiency levels in both math and reading in fourth and eighth grades except for a one-point increase in fourth grade math proficiency scores between 2017 and 2019. Students across all ethnic groups posted lower results than their White peers, with low proficiency levels particularly affecting students from low-income families, African American students, and Hispanic students. Nationally, on a scale from 0–500, White students scored 32 points higher (292) on the 2019 eighth grade math assessment than African American students (260). White students also scored 24 points higher than Hispanic students (268) on the same assessment. Among all the students, the average eighth grade math score on the 2019 assessment was 281, well above the average scores for African American and Hispanic students. On the fourth-grade reading assessment for 2019, White students (230) scored 26 points higher than African American students (204), and 21 points higher than Hispanic students (209). The average 2019 fourth grade

4. Algae Harrison et al., “Family Ecologies of Ethnic Minority Children”, 346-362.

5. William Howe and Penelope Lisi, *Becoming a Multicultural Educator: Developing Awareness, Gaining Skills and Taking Action*, 7.

6. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Seeing with a Cultural Eye*, 28-29.

7. Carrie Spector, Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis. “School poverty—Not Racial Composition—Limits Educational Opportunity, According to New Research From Stanford”.

8. National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). “The Results from the 2019 Math and Reading Assessments are Here”!

reading score among all students was 219, a slight drop from 221 in 2017 and higher than the averages posted by African- American and Hispanic students.

This handbook will meet three objectives for teachers in the classroom:

1. Review literature that supports equity in the classroom for diverse learners.
2. Define and apply the seven core values as a construct of the curriculum to support teachers and diverse students.
3. Demonstrate the effectiveness of the seven core values in bridging the achievement gap.

These three objectives will be interwoven with the mission statement.

This book is designed to provide teachers with information to help them create an environment that recognizes that every student is unique, and recognize, appreciate, and respect every student's different cultural background. As the teacher implements the core values from this handbook, the first premise of creating change in the classroom environment will be fulfilled. The school, the student, and the family are interwoven with the core values—the foundation of teaching that will enable each student to reach their optimal potential.

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<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.
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CHAPTER 1

TIME FOR CHANGE

The first core value represented in the TEACHER acrostic is *Time for Change*. The student achievement gap has been the same for nearly 50 years.¹ However, the American education system has attempted to bridge this education achievement gap for over four decades. Some questions come to mind as we continue to strive to end this achievement gap. These questions are necessary to move forward with this endeavor. These questions are related to research on the achievement gap and the critical role of the teacher in the classroom:

- What are the results from some of the research on bridging the achievement gap?
- How is the research addressing teachers in terms of bridging the achievement gap?
- How will teacher biases be addressed?
- How will teachers implement time changes?
- What changes will close the achievement gap?

Results of Research on the Achievement Gap

On April 14, 2008, Debra Viadero² researched the Black-White achievement gap in the United States and discovered the brightest African American children were losing academic ground. This loss indicated that, as students move from elementary and middle schools, the test-gap widens. Researchers who have studied the achievement gap were not surprised with this data outcome because, for a long time, research has shown this disparity.³ In

1. The Harvard Gazette, “Student Achievement Gap Same After Nearly 50 Years, Study Says”.

2. Debra Viadero, “Black-White Gap Widens Faster for High Achievers”.

3. National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), “School Composition and the Black–White Achievement Gap”.

addition to the achievement gap results, African American students are underrepresented among the top scorers on standardized tests.⁴

Sean F. Reardon from Stanford University analyzed the reading and math test scores of 7,000 elementary students from kindergarten to 5th grade.⁵ This research indicated the achievement gap grew twice as fast among the students who started out performing above the mean than among lower-performing children. Mr. Reardon concluded that if these gaps continue to grow throughout a child's schooling, even if the child demonstrates high levels of readiness in kindergarten, they will still end up falling below the high performing students.

In contrast, John B. Diamond, a Harvard Associate Professor who is not connected to the two studies, stated that "educational opportunities intertwine to reinforce the racial achievement gap".⁶ He explained that educational opportunities need to be identified to see the differences.

Howard⁷ noted that the U.S. demographic population is rapidly changing, and a variety of achievement indicators show that the teaching practices and procedures that seemed to work in the past with a predominately White student population are no longer appropriate for a more diverse student population. He continued to explain that indicators such as standardized test scores and graduation rates are lower among students who are poor, while dropout rates are higher. These students have lower grades and more failing grades on average than White students. Poor minority students tend to graduate in lower numbers and drop out of school in higher numbers. The gap or disparity in achievement has been a cause for alarm.⁸

According to the Harvard Civil Rights Project, Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield⁹ stated the widening achievement gap between White students and African-American and Latino students showed that the statistics about

4. National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), "Achievement Gaps".

5. Sean Reardon, "The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and the Poor: New Evidence and Possible Explanations".

6. John Diamond, "Still Separate and Unequal: Examining Race, Opportunity and School Achievement in Integrated Schools".

7. Tyrone Howard, *Why Race and Culture Matters in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms*, 134.

8. Linda Darling-Hammond and John Bransford (eds.), *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do*.

9. Erica Frankenberg, Chungmei Lee, and Gary Orfield, *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?*, 11-12.

achievement test results, dropout rates, and the growing school violence indicate that a different approach to the process of teaching and learning must be instituted to benefit all students. Pertinent insights into the impact of the achievement gap from the Harvard Civil Rights Project include the following:

- Minority children are overrepresented in special education.
- African American and Native American students in affluent White districts are labelled as mentally retarded more than their White counterparts.
- There is a higher incidence of suspensions among African American students than among their White counterparts.
- Dropout rates are distinctly higher among urban students of color.
- High school graduation rates are distinctly lower among urban students of color.

Some of the key findings were that extremely disadvantaged students are three to four years behind their more affluent peers. Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield¹⁰ continue stating that standardized test scores were lower among African American, Latino, and Native American than their White counterparts. Going to college and graduating were also lower. In addition, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancies, incarceration, hate crimes, bias, prejudice, and discrimination were high among African Americans, Latinos, and Native American students. This list is alarming: the project was compiled in 2003 and the state of education has not improved 16 years later as education in the United States is still facing the same concerns.

An article dated March 19, 2019, titled “Student Achievement Gap Same After Nearly 50 Years”, reviewing national and world affairs, stated that the achievement gap for math, reading, and science tests between disadvantaged and well-off students is as wide as it was in 1954.¹¹ Paul E. Peterson, Professor of Government at Harvard and a member of the research team, collected data on four national assessments, which included 98 tests administered over 47 years to more than 2.7 million students between 14 and 17 years old. Some of the key findings¹² indicated:

10. Erica Frankenberg, Chungmei Lee, and Gary Orfield, *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools*, 11-12.

11. The Harvard Gazette, “Student Achievement Gap Same After Nearly 50 Years, Study Says”.

12. The Harvard Gazette, “Student Achievement Gap Same After Nearly 50 Years”.

- extremely disadvantaged students were three to four years behind their more affluent peers;
- the opportunity gap has not wavered over the last half-century; and
- the gaps between other student subgroups also remain nearly constant (i.e., race remains a factor, as the Black-White achievement gap has plateaued for the past quarter-century).

Overall performance improves among 14-year-old students over time, but these gains fade by age 17. However, there have been some success stories in schools attempting to close the achievement gap.

Success Stories that Narrowed or Closed the Achievement Gap

The U.S. Department of Education¹³ reported some lessons from successful schools regarding closing the achievement gap. The four study schools across the US included:

- Del Valle High School in El Paso, Texas, which had a 97% Hispanic population. Staff closed the achievement gap in mathematics by ensuring that the Hispanic students at the school passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in 2002 at the same rate as White students.
- El Camino High School in Oceanside, California, which had a population of 3,000 students. Staff were able to narrow the achievement gap for Hispanic students in mathematics and reading with a 24-percentage point reduction in the mathematics achievement gap and a 14-percentage point decrease in reading.
- Florin High School in Sacramento, California, which narrowed the achievement gap in reading by 10 percentage points for African American students and 14 percentage points for Hispanic students.
- North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, which narrowed its achievement gap in English, languages, and the arts by 10 percentage points and in mathematics by 15 percentage points for African American students.

13. Shelley Billig et al., "Closing the Achievement Gap: Lessons from Successful Schools".

The U.S. Department of Education¹⁴ held a focus group with administrators and teachers to discuss how they managed to close or narrow the achievement gap. The common themes related to school culture, curriculum and instruction, and leadership for change were identified. They included the following:

School Culture

- High expectations for student achievement: that included eliminating remedial classes and recommending minority students enroll in advance and honor courses.
- Learning supports put in place to help students meet expectations that included tutoring, study skills programs, and ongoing personalized attention from teachers.
- Teachers receiving professional development training for effective reading and math teaching strategies.
- Emphasis on accountability and assessment to determine when students need additional help.
- Analyzing assessments to guide changes in curriculum and instruction.
- Seeing what teaching strategies work best with specific populations of students.
- A collaborative and optimistic attitude that included collaborative efforts from teachers, parents, and community members, not accepting excuses, and being passionate and enthusiastic about improving the students' accomplishments.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Curriculum alignment and standards-based instruction. All participants stressed the importance of teaching to the state and district content standards that reflect knowledge and skills in the content areas.
- State and district assessments were aligned to the school curriculum and the state and local standards.
- Changes in class schedules that allowed more time for instruction. Longer blocks of time for some courses, such as Algebra I, to allow time for instruction and for students to practice skills.

¹⁴ Shelley Billig et al, "Closing the Achievement Gap: Lessons from Successful Schools, 42.

- Engaging teaching techniques. Teachers realized students learn better when instruction is individualized, incorporates hands-on teaching techniques, and utilizes strategies that specifically teach students how to take notes, organize their thinking, and solve problems. Technology was also used to engage students.

Leadership for Change

- Change is difficult, but necessary. Educators recognized change was necessary to improve Hispanic and African American students' achievement levels. These educators were motivated to ensure that all students succeed.
- Leadership and resources. Sometimes teachers led and, at other times, the administrators performed the task, but both groups knew what was needed: sufficient resources, time for professional development, material acquisitions, and student support services.
- Federal and state policies serve as catalysts. National, state, and local levels served as a motivator for change, but the specific changes were based on local decisions.

These were some of the leadership changes that occurred in the high schools. The changes varied but had similarities in the four high schools. Changes occurred locally through educators and administrators. A strategic plan now guides all activities and is monitored by the community, staff, and students. In one of the schools, teams were formulated along with a written plan that inspired greater commitment and facilitated change from the other staff members. The teachers were placed in teams and developed a portfolio with learning objectives and goals for their specific grade. The teachers discussed the portfolios on a regular basis.

The district provided support in various ways in the four schools. In one of the schools, the district provided funding for substitute teachers to support the time needed for vertical planning for the teaching teams. In another school, the district facilitated change by helping with monitoring but otherwise served as a resource for removing impediments rather than as a leader for change.¹⁵

15. Shelley Billig et al, "Closing the Achievement Gap: Lessons from Successful Schools".

Overview of the Collaborative Effort in the Four Schools

The teachers in the focus group¹⁶ spoke of the many meetings and dialogues that occurred over lunch and created space to discuss how to improve achievement overall as well as for specific students. Parents and community members were also involved in sharing their culture of success through frequently donating time and funds, working with students at home, and providing the time and effort required to get students to Saturday and summer programs. The teachers were enthusiastic, although many times there was a small group of motivated teachers who collaborated to create change and then, eventually everyone came onboard.

Principals set the tone for high expectations for staff as well as students. Administrators provided support, such as professional development and schedule changes to give longer blocks of time to facilitate instruction in critical content areas. The teachers and administrators discussed the importance of aligning the curriculum with the state and district standards and tests. Two of the schools' staff used the alignment process along with an examination of test scores and classroom observations to decide the most important standards to address. In addition, staff from all the schools examined the performance of a subpopulation of students to determine which reading and math topics needed to be reviewed and taught differently.¹⁷

Addressing teachers' research indicated that the teacher is the most important component in bridging the achievement gap. Saphier¹⁸ explained that, of all the things that are important to having good schools, nothing is as important as teachers and what they know, believe, and do. Also, Irvine¹⁹ noted how the lack of achievement among African- American students can be attributed to the quality of their teacher.

16. Shelley Billig et al, "Closing the Achievement Gap: Lessons from Successful Schools".

17. Shelley Billig et al, "Closing the Achievement Gap: Lessons from Successful Schools".

18. Jon Saphier, *Bonfires and Magic Bullets: Making Teaching a True Profession*, 49-50.

19. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Seeing with a Cultural Eye*, 71.

In addition, Corbett and Wilson²⁰ recorded the results from interviews of nearly 400 students from low-income urban schools. The students agreed that the quality of their school experiences depended on good teaching. The students characterized “superior” instructors as those who instituted an overall high-quality professional mission and instructional techniques that included:

- enforced expectations that students complete their work,
- effectively managed the classroom,
- available to assist any student that needed help,
- offered to clearly explain content and subsequent assignments,
- provided varied classroom activities, and
- demonstrated caring by getting to know their students.

The conclusion was these techniques greatly benefit students and ensure success in urban classrooms. Melsner²¹ reported that some preservice teachers spent a semester experiencing student teaching in an Indianapolis public school with an enrollment of 89% African American. The teachers learned how difficult it was to teach students they had not yet connected with. The preservice teachers created an event called Family Fun Night, where families, parents, and community members came into the school to learn about what the students were being taught. This provided rich professional growth and facilitated relationships among the teachers, families, students, and the community. After this event, the preservice teachers felt they knew how to celebrate and assist students in learning to the best of their ability; they knew they could make a positive difference when teaching diverse students.

This preservice teacher experience coincides with Delpit and Roman’s research. Delpit²² explained that culturally diverse students find themselves at a disadvantage for many reasons, including the fact that teachers do not attempt to find out who the students really are. In addition, teachers are not encouraged to develop links to the often-rich home lives of their other students. Teachers cannot hope to begin to understand who sits before them if they have not connected with their students’ families and communities.

20. Dick Corbett and Bruce Wilson, “What Urban Students Say About Good Teaching”. 18-22.

21. Nancy Melsner, “Ain’t Nothin’ Like the Real Thing: Preparing Teachers in an Urban Environment”, 228.

22. Lisa Delpit, *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, 182.

As Roman²³ indicated, having knowledge about another culture does not mean to only speak one or two words in a student's language or to celebrate an activity or sing a song based on the student's heritage. Being sensitive to another's culture requires making changes in one's curriculum or pedagogy when the students' needs have not been served. It requires being patient, tolerant, curious, creative, and eager to learn and, most importantly, non-authoritarian with students. For a teacher to promote excellence in education, there must be a real and honest connection between the teacher and the students' cultural values.

Teacher Bias

For change to occur, teachers need to be transparent with themselves, know themselves, and be honest about any biases that they may possess. Once teachers can discuss their biases, they become able to move forward and acquire the core values that are needed to build equity in the classroom and to close the achievement gap.

Kopetz, Lease, and Warren-King²⁴ explained that teachers need to understand the socioeconomic conditions that are most prevalent in urban schools in order to adjust and design teaching and learning to effectively meet the needs of a diverse student population. It becomes evident that elevating the achievements of students of color will not happen until teachers are trained to place students and culture at the center of learning.²⁵

In addition, teachers must first understand their own cultures before they can appreciate and use their students' cultures in effective instruction.²⁶ According to Villegas and Lucas,²⁷ teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially marginalized groups, requires

23. Leslie Roman, "Social Class, Language, and Learning", 90-97.

24. Patricia Kopetz, Anthony Lease, and Bonnie Warren-Kring, *Comprehensive Urban Education*, 195.

25. William Howe and Penelope Lisi, *Becoming a Multicultural Educator: Developing Awareness, Gaining Skills and Taking Action*, 7, 49-50.

26. Kikanz Nuri-Robins et al., *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*, cited by Howe & Lisi, *Becoming a Multicultural Educator*, 111.

27. Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas, "Culturally Responsive Teachers", 204-207.

a new way of teaching. Villegas and Lucas²⁸ developed a coherent framework with six salient qualities:

- understanding how learners construct knowledge,
- learning about students' lives,
- being conscious of sociocultural issues,
- holding affirming views about diversity,
- teaching ethical activities, as teachers have an ethical obligation to help all children learn, and
- using appropriate instructional strategies.

Approaching students' education in culturally and responsive ways rather than emphasizing deficits has the potential to engage all students in learning. The teacher must be intentional about building equity in the classroom by being inclusive in a positive manner and building on each students' strengths. It also means appreciating and respecting the diverse cultures in the classroom and ensuring that each child has the necessary support to reach their maximum potential.

Time Changes for Teachers

For teachers to implement the Blueprint Education Plan, the time that has already been developed and implemented into the classroom schedule will have to be adjusted (Template 1). The core values involve more individualized instructions and support for students to meet their optimal potential. More time will be needed since there are diverse learning styles in the classroom, and the teacher will need to equalize the learning field to abolish the inequities that have existed in the classroom.

These accommodations may include getting more helping hands in the classroom. Flexibility needs to be built into the schedule as some content areas may last longer than others and, where the concepts are easier for students to grasp, less time may be needed. Students may work individually with support from the teacher or classroom helper on some concepts that may be more challenging. Since being intentional about building equity for all students is a change, teachers must have some mandatory intentional professional development. Professional development may include topics such as: building self-concept in students; the importance of multicultural education; understanding students' diverse backgrounds; and incorporating

28. Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas, "Culturally Responsive Teachers," 205-206.

multiple intelligences theory into the curriculum. Some of the concepts in the lessons from the selected schools illustrate an overlap with the core values. The idea of administrators and teaching staff working together and being enthusiastic may be the starting point for ensuring school success in meeting the needs of all students. This Blueprint Education Plan (Template 1) requires time for discussion, exchanging ideas, asking questions, giving support, and involving parents. All staff members must be ready for change to close the achievement gap and help each student reach their maximum potential.

Chapter Summary

Although the American education system has attempted to bridge the education gap, there has been a student achievement gap for over 40 years. Researchers have demonstrated that this achievement gap was not a surprise because, for a long time, research has revealed the disparity that African-American, Latino and other students of color were and are still underrepresented among the top scorers in standardized tests, such as those reported by the NAEP.

The research that has been cited in this chapter can be used for the blueprint to close the achievement gap. The disparities (dropout rates, low standardized test scores, and low graduation rates) cited by the researchers would be eliminated if the seven core values are implemented along with the techniques explained by the U.S. Department of Education's four study high schools. We will also be delving into other research in the following chapters. This will create the Blueprint Education Plan (Template 1) that will resolve the major disparity in American schools: The Bridging of the Achievement Gap. This Blueprint Education Plan is applicable to K–12th grade. Teachers can tweak the plan to ensure that it is age-appropriate for their specific group of students.

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