
Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty:

Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap

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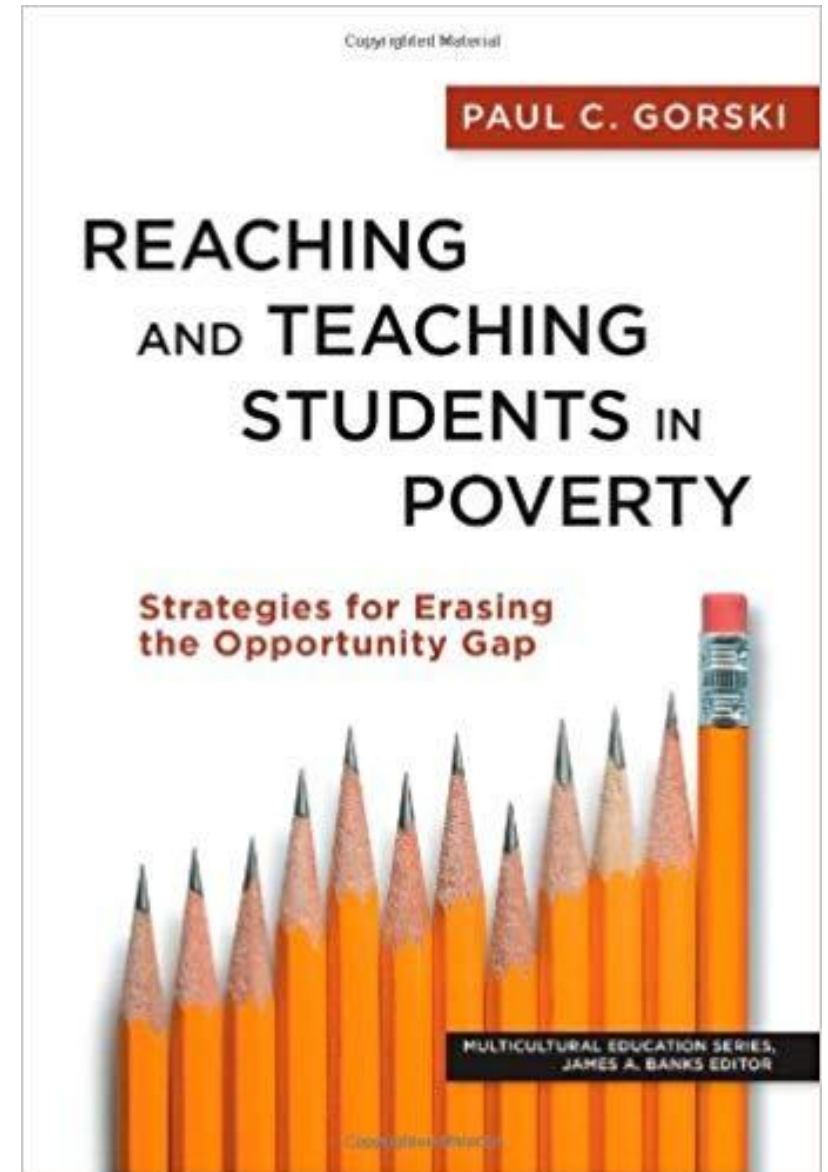
WHY THIS BOOK

POVERTY IS INCREASING

In our district, we are noticing that more kids are coming to school with fewer resources available to them at home. As educators, we want to assist our students in a way that does not shame them or their families. By learning about strategies that help our students who have less, we can also increase awareness and responsibility for students who have more.

DEFICIT VIEWS DON'T HELP

Too often, we think of poverty in terms of judgment. Even teachers sometimes fall prey to stereotypes that blame the student and their families as getting what they deserve based on choices they have made. Not only is this unfair, it is patently wrong. Gorski aptly dismantles the myth that poverty is a choice or a culture. To generalize it as such is irresponsible and dangerous.





“We can decide right now to...bolster our equity literacy so we can spot and address negative depictions.

SILENCE LOOKS TO STUDENTS LIKE COMPLICITY.”

EQUITY LITERACY



Equity literacy is the knowledge and skills educators need to become a threat to the existence of bias and inequity in our spheres of influence (p.17).

THE FOUR ABILITIES OF EQUITY LITERACY

Recognize subtle and not-so-subtle biases and inequities in classroom dynamics, school culture policies, and the broader society, and how these biases and inequities affect students and their families.

Respond To biases and inequities in the immediate term, as they crop up in classrooms and schools.

Redress biases and inequities in the longer term, so that they do not continue to crop up in classrooms and schools.

Create and Sustain a bias-free and equitable learning environment for all students.

PRINCIPLES OF EQUITY FOR EDUCATORS

1. People experiencing poverty are the experts on their own experience.

2. The right to equitable educational opportunity is universal.

3. Poverty and class are intersectional.

4. People experiencing poverty are diverse.

5. What we believe about people experiencing poverty informs how we teach, interact with, and advocate(or fail to advocate) for them.

6. We cannot understand the relationship between poverty and education without understanding the barriers and inequities people experiencing poverty face in and out of schools.

7. Test scores are inadequate measures of equity.

8. Educational outcome disparities are the result of inequities, of unjust distributions of access and opportunity, not the results of deficiencies in the mindsets, cultures, or grittiness of people experiencing poverty.

9. Equitable educators adopt a structural view rather than a deficit view of families experiencing poverty.

10. Strategies for creating and sustaining equitable classrooms, schools, and school systems must be based on evidence of what works.

11. Simplistic instructional strategies, absent a commitment to more robust institutional change, are no threat to inequities.

12. There is no path to educational equity that does not involve a redistribution of access and opportunity.



OPPORTUNITY GAP

It's about access to resources,
not student effort (p.97).

EQUITY -INFORMED RELATIONAL COMMITMENTS

We strengthen relationships with students experiencing poverty when we:

FAMILIES

- embrace a structural view rather than a deficit view of families experiencing poverty
- demonstrate respect and compassion in relationships with families
- broaden our notions of family engagement

STUDENTS

- cultivate trusting relationships with students grounded in ethics of equity and humility
- avoid making students (or parents) “perform” their poverty at school
- elicit input from families experiencing poverty, but only if we have the will to follow it

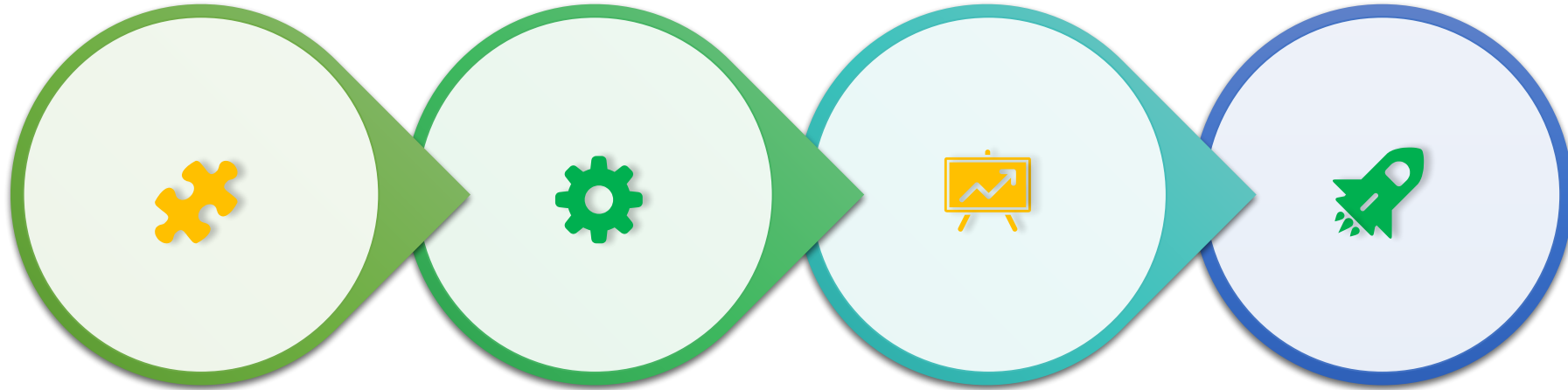
SCHOOLS

- ensure that at-school opportunities for family engagement are accessible
- become equity-responsive by finding ways to mitigate barriers they experience

ERASING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

FIRST STEP

Notice what your views on poverty are. See judgments for what they are: subjective and potentially false.



SECOND STEP

Recognize the differences between the myths of poverty and societal factors. Educate yourself.

THIRD STEP

Commit to using equity literacy as the lens with which you view your students and their families.

FOURTH STEP

Improve educational access and opportunity for students experiencing poverty, both in your classroom and beyond.



“WE ARE IN A UNIQUE POSITION AS EDUCATORS. Even if we focus only on creating change within our spheres of influence, we can’t help but pay that change forward by a factor of the number of students whose lives we touch.”

p.190