
Foreword

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The greatest educational challenge of our time is upon us. It is to operate schools in a way that makes poverty essentially irrelevant. Can we close the achievement gap between the haves and have-nots? Apparently so. Can we close it on a large scale across the country? That will depend on the will of those in charge of our schools. The guidelines in this book are designed to provoke that will so that certain groups of students are no longer disenfranchised from the promise of success in the Information Age and the global economy.

When we look at the growing number of turn-around schools reported by the likes of Doug Reeves, Mike Schmoker, and Katie Haycock, the theory that poverty causes low achievement in schools must be abandoned. It only *seems* to cause low achievement because of how schools have been run traditionally. Obviously, some educators have found ways to do business that makes it possible for students heretofore doomed to educational failure to succeed well enough to be competitive with their more advantaged peers. Are these educators more charismatic or more intelligent than the rest of us? Not really, but they do act on assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge that open the door to solving the problems and finding the innovations necessary to be successful with low-income kids.

Is there a single formula for such success? Surely not. Can any group of educators get together in their school and begin to figure it out too? Surely they can if they can overcome the barriers—both conscious and unconscious—to the notion that it is actually possible. Fortunately, this book helps us acquire that notion in a variety of ways. Unlike some treatments of this subject that provide us only with the window of insight into the limitations of our beliefs and policies, this book provides us with a doorway to action.

The authors are committed to an asset-based rather than a deficit-based approach. They remind us not to continue to blame the victims and compensate for their shortcomings. Rather, we should find out about their strengths and come to grips with our own blindness related to beliefs, policies, and actions that unwittingly contribute to our failure with them.

What is most striking about this approach, however, is the way it is modeled throughout the book. There are vignettes and case studies that illustrate that putting the onus for students' success back on ourselves can be done without guilt-tripping those of us in charge of running schools. Yes, we are in charge of changing the status quo, but we don't have to feel guilty that we haven't seen the light before now. If you believe as I do that human enterprises such as schooling run primarily and fundamentally on feelings, the lack of blame and guilt in this approach is not only refreshing but absolutely necessary for it to be effective in provoking the insights required to dramatically improve schools for low-income kids.

With the help of a variety of tools such as the "Guiding Principles" and the "Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency," the authors walk us through an "inside-out" approach, helping us reveal to ourselves the overt and subliminal norms and policies that get in our way. With these tools and examples, anyone can begin the deep conversations necessary to open the way to more effective practices for all children.

In their own way, they help us to achieve a "*conscientização*" through a "dialogic process" as advocated by the late Paulo Freire in his landmark work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire believed that the lot of the poor and oppressed was not predestined nor immutable to change. Since the conditions in society are made by man, they can be changed by man. This message by Freire, which is echoed in this work as well, is a powerful statement of both hope and responsibility. It may be uncomfortable to unveil our beliefs, to examine our policies, and to search for new ways to act. But the stakes are too high for "other people's children" for us to fail to act now. I might add that the stakes are also too high for us to continue to fail to fulfill our own sacred calling as educators.

This volume offers a safe, effective road map for doing just that. No matter how uncomfortable or difficult, the implicit message of hope and optimism will lead us to improve the human condition by improving how we school our most vulnerable children. May this book help you in your own quest for adding yet another school to the roles of outlier institutions that have dared to confront poverty and win. Do it for your students. Indeed, do it for yourself!