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Creating Culturally Considerate Schools: Educating Without Bias *BOOK REVIEW*

Samuel Hinton, Eastern Kentucky University

Introduction

This book review first discusses the book's major content divisions and follows with a general analysis of concepts. The book is structured into phases of equity development namely, self-examination, reflection, integration, actualization, and educational equity (p. 12). The phases are further subdivided into eight manageable steps of personal and professional growth that would empower teachers to operate in culturally considerate classrooms, galvanized by school climates and cultures that support individual and collective student achievement. The eight stages of personal and professional growth are: acknowledgement of bias, assessment of current equity skills, acceptance of limitations, cognitive restructuring, expanding knowledge base, skill building, culturally considerate education and counseling, and reparation (p. 13).

Four Parts

The book is divided into four parts. Part I contains the general heading "culturally considerate schools." The sub-headings are: manner and methods; what to expect; model of cultural consideration, equity skill building, and practical applications of the model, the latter specifically dealing with the Common Core State Standards (pp. 18-22).

Part II discusses the five phases of the model, which are: self-examination, reflection, integration, actualization, equity and social justice. Aligned to the five phases are eight stages of professional growth. The alignment can be explained as follows: Self-examination is a process in which the teacher acknowledges bias and assessment of current equity skills. The second phase is self-reflection, under which the teacher accepts his or her limitations, and goes through the process of cognitive restructuring. The third stage of integration is associated with expanding the knowledge base. The actualization stage incorporates skill building. Finally, the equity/social justice phase includes culturally considerate education and counseling level and reparation (pp. 25-104).

Part III is titled "Educating Without Bias" (pp. 105-113). It contains portraits of culturally considerate educators, including teachers and administrators. In addition, it describes the landscape of a culturally considerate school. Some characteristics of such a school are: demonstrates awareness of the many cultures represented within the school community; gives voice and consideration to all students; welcomes all types of families; shows interest, empathy, and respect for each faculty and staff member; advocates respect and reverence for individuality; acknowledges limitations in resources and puts forth efforts to fill needs; admits mistakes and changes policy, programs, and personnel accordingly; adapts innovative policies in the interest of the total school community, even when uncomfortable or unpopular (pp. 114-115).

Part IV is titled "Appendices and Tools" and contains worksheets, resources, references, and index (pp. 119-155). Titles of the worksheets include: A Wholistic Reflection Worksheet, A Cultural Consideration Event Summary, Cultural Self-Awareness Matrix, Guidelines for Clear Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Problem Solving Steps. They are appropriate for use individually or in groups for professional development workshops on culturally considerate Schools.

Internal Shifts

The authors postulate that schools have to inspire internal shifts that demonstrate awareness of the many cultures represented within the school community, give voice and consideration to all students, welcome all types of families, and show interest, empathy, and respect for each family and staff member. In addition, these institutions should advocate respect and reverence for individuality, acknowledge limitations in resources, and put forth efforts to fill needs, admit mistakes, change policy, programs, and personnel accordingly, as well as adapt innovative policies in the interest of the total school community even when they are unpopular and uncomfortable. They discuss five phases of professional development and eight stages of professional growth.

The book contains vignettes, endnotes, and case examples. The authors maintain that the model can be practically applied at six levels, namely: Individual educator, classrooms, professional learning communities, administration, allied professionals/school social workers, counselors, psychologists, nurses, and total school communities (p. 17). Self-examination involves an acknowledgement of bias. The authors exemplify this by providing biographies indicating incidents or reflections on educational biases. They also provided cultural consideration exercises to be used for self-examination. After this, the next step is to accept limitations and then proceed to cognitive restructuring.

Cognitive Restructuring

“Cognitive Restructuring” is a clinical term usually used in behavioral therapies to replace “faulty thinking,” with thoughts derived from accurate information, and fundamental understanding of the issue or situation at hand. By beginning to restructure how we feel inwardly, we also restructure how we think and feel outwardly. Diminishing biases about our own abilities gives way to alleviating bias towards others. Self-care is a large portion of this process. Another term used in this context is “social perspective-taking,” which entails discerning the thoughts and feelings of others with particular attention to how others perceive the situation. The authors stipulate that we are unable to identify our distorted thoughts and feelings, and why we have them in the first place: “Basic principles of personal growth can be the best way to begin our transition from cultural carelessness to cultural consciousness, and integrate new knowledge and practices. Professional growth calls for personal growth” (p. 58).

Racial Identity Development

The perspective taken on this topic is that there is a difference in the racial identity development of people of color and the racial identity development of whites. There are vast differences between the experiences of white persons, and non-white others. Macintosh (1988) describes “white privilege” as the invisible package of unearned (inherited) assets about which many white people are generally oblivious. Many, perhaps most white people/students in the United States think that racism does not affect them because they are not people of color. They do not see whiteness as a racial identity. White people have to grapple with the knowledge that some of their ancestors, used various tools of domination and oppression, have created a society in which their benefits and privileges have been amassed at the expense of other racial and ethnic groups.

Unearned Advantage

However, it is difficult to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage—which rest on social and economic class, race, religion, gender, and ethnic identity—from other factors. Frankenberg (1997) stated that “conscious realization of others does not necessarily lead to the conscious

realization of the white self ... whiteness makes itself invisible by precisely asserting its normalcy.”

Intersectionality is a theory that analyzes how social and cultural categories intertwine. It was first credited to (Crenshaw, 1991, 1992), who ascertained that no one has a singular identity. The authors urge readers to challenge the status quo of their school cultures, become an identified advocate of cultural considerations, and lead the discussion of multiculturalism and diversity one-on-one in faculty meetings (p. 75).

Self-Actualization

With regard to self-actualization, the authors examined culturally considerate teaching by describing the classroom practices of one teacher in a computer course classroom, and another in an algebra classroom. The teacher in the computer classroom used a project-based approach. He met his students at the level they were and knew that they came to his class with different cultures, abilities, and degrees of motivation. He provided each student with the necessary scaffolding to achieve success with each assigned project. He worked one-on-one with students outside class time to show them that he truly cared about them. Lastly, he provided a classroom environment to students where they experienced success. The algebra teacher’s approach included concrete strategies to engage the students, teach the lesson, connect it to practical living, check for understanding, give feedback, and culturally respect her class (pp. 80-83). The authors presented a five-step “cultural considerations for actualization” model for skill building, and cultural considerations for actualization.

Equity and Social Justice

The section on equity and social justice is broad. The advice given on this topic is summarized as follows: List five things that make you a culturally considerate teacher; assess yourself for culturally relevant instruction; assess the community in your classroom for culturally considerate interactions; keep a gratitude journal, and build a cadre of colleagues for equity coaching. Examine student data to inform your practice and give evidence of equity. Where inequities exist, discuss how you might work together to eradicate them through culturally relevant practices. I recommend this book highly as a resource for professional development workshops on cultural competence, and culturally considerate schools.

Reference

Anderson, K. A., & Davis, B. M. (2012). *Creating Culturally Considerate Schools: Educating Without Bias*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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