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A Thesis in the Field of Early Childhood Development
for the Degree of Master of Science in Education

Art of Teaching Program

Equitable Strategies: Broadening Opportunities for Students in Public Education

SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

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May 2021

Abstract

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that public education is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. Twelve years later, Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Elementary and Secondary Acts (1965), which provided federal grants to state education agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education. My position is that despite all of the education laws (listed on the slide) from Brown vs Board of Education (1954) to Elementary and Secondary Act (1965) to No Child Left Behind (2002), to Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), even though the gap is slowly closing, the American education system is still not **equitable** for all students. Children of color (Black, Latino, Native Americans) or of lower income are more likely to go through several barriers to become successful. The barriers begin at early childhood and continues throughout the education process. Some of these barriers include standardize tests, racial bias, underfunded schools, and school discipline. As teachers, we must find innovative solutions to ensure that students receive the customized services they need to be successful in their learning goal, which supports their lifelong careers and success in school. It also includes creating a smart space for the student to reach their full potential.

Keywords: equitable, achievement, disparities, children of color, classroom

Acknowledgments/Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents, Robert & Emily Ellis, my parents who led by example and provide me with unwavering love and support.

My Ancestors from the Brown & Ellis families who come from Mississippi and South Carolina whose shoulders I continue to stand on.

My mentors who guided and directed me in Social Justice and Advocacy, Dr. Jim Bostic, who gave me my first tutoring/counseling job working with elementary students attending the after-school programs and summer camping program the Nepperhan Community Center in Yonkers. Mrs. Beverly Robert, President of the Parkchester Branch of the Bronx NAACP and Mrs. Karen Blanding, Youth Advisor for the New York -NAACP. They inspired me to be the best and to always serve youth and young people in communities of colors. Both women served as mentors and roles models to me and help me to develop my leadership skills. My pastors and church schoolteachers who taught me values and grounded me in developing a lifestyle of community service and to always “do good and be a light to others”.

My thesis topic grew out of my passion for mentoring, volunteering, advocacy, teaching and being a source of encouragement for young people who live in my community of color. As I grew up, so many people inspired this passion for service. One of my greatest examples and role models/influencers has been and continues to be my parents. Both have demonstrated both in their professions and through their endless community services, that we must use our talents and resources to help enrich the lives of others.

In addition, I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors as I come from a background where so many of my family (grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and village of supporters) are teachers, social workers, nurses, pastors, community workers and small business owners.

Annotated Outline

I. Introduction**A. Argument/Thesis**

1. Despite all of the education laws from the brown vs board of education to elementary and secondary act to no child left behind, to every student succeeds act, the American education system is not equitable for students of color (Black, Latino, Pacific Asian, Native American).

B. Education Laws

1. Brown vs Board of Education (1954): A decision that declared that public education is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.
2. Elementary and Secondary Acts (1965): Provided federal grants to state education agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education. (Brenchly, 2015)
3. No Child Left Behind (2001): states are required to test students in reading and math in grades 3 – 8 and once in high school. (OSPI, 2021)
4. Every Student Succeeds Act (2015): purpose of this title is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps. (ESSA, 2021)

C. Equity

1. Absence of avoidable or remedial differences among groups of people of whether those groups of people, whether these groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically. (WHO 2021)
2. The goals of creating equitable opportunities for students in order to reach their full potential and to be successful in their careers.
3. Equity (Explain: 3 Persons watching the baseball game)
4. Play the video Ensuring Educational Equity for All Students

II. Barriers**A. Standardized Testing**

1. The standardize testing movement, now over a century old have become a weapon to degrade and dehumanize black students.
2. The achievement gap between the races with Whites and Asians at the top and Blacks and Latinos at the bottom is a racial hierarchy. And his popular racial hierarchy has been constructed by our religious faith in standardized testing
3. “Americans have been led to believe that intelligence is like body weight, and the different intellectual levels of different people can be measured on a single, standardize weight scale. Our faith causes us to believe that the racial gap in test scores means something is wrong with the test takers and not the tests.” (Kendi 2016 p.7)

4. This inbred theory of led Charles Darwin’s cousin, English Statistician Francis Galton, pioneered the Eugenics movement, failed in developing a testing system to support his racist hypothesis. IQ Tests SAT was developed in 1926. (Kendi 2016 p. 7)

B. Racial Bias

1. “Racial biases tend to influence the expectations they have for their students, the quality of their teaching, and the choices in how they manage their classrooms” (Will, 2020, p.3).

2. White teachers also tend to have far lower expectations for black students than white students, contributing to high school graduation and college enrollment.

3. I believe that this is the wrong approach because its builds a strong distrust between the student and the teacher. Also, it contributes to a student’s self-esteem...lowering it and de-motivates them to some degree.

C. Underfunded Schools

1. Public schools in urban districts tend to have fewer resources than public schools in the middle and upper-class suburban areas

2. New York spends more money per student than any other state in the country, but those dollars are not distributed proportionately to the highest need schools (Zimmerman, 2018 p.1)

3. Under-resourced schools in terms of

- 1) Textbooks & Supplies
- 2) Equipment that’s outdated or doesn’t work
- 3) Staffing
- 4) Limited internet Access (Digital Divide Gap)
- 5) Fewer Extracurricular Activities

D. School Discipline (Disciplinary)

1. Black students are more likely to get in trouble in school and end up suspended, compared to white students. (Zill, 2019).

2. Students suspended are disproportionately black and males

- 1) Affects the graduation rates.
- 2) Feeds prison to pipeline industry and overrepresentation of males from communities of color in prison

3. Given that black boys are disproportionately suspended beginning in preschool, it is important to explore how this loss of vital school time contributes to the achievement gap (Jones & Levin, 2016 p. 2)

III. **Creating Equitable Opportunities for all**

A. Provide Enrichment Opportunities geared towards Broadening the Learning Experience Where People Live

1. After Schools Programs, Summer School and Saturday Academies

2. Local businesses, civic and social and fraternal organizations (Rotary Clubs, Greek organizations, PAL) can become key partner in this community building efforts
 3. After School Involvement (15 Years)
 - 1) Gateway After School Academy (10 years): 21st Learning Century Program) federally funded afterschool program with activities specialized in robotics, visual arts, poetry, coding
 - (1) Video Production Instructor
 - (a) Students learned about professional video/audio techniques.
 - (b) Students created their own masterpiece (short films and PSAs)
 - (c) Projects: researched, created a script, and wrote
 - 2) Dreamyard Project/After School Academy: after school program sponsored by DYCD/SONYC specialized in robotics, visual arts, poetry.
 - (1) Group Leader (3 years)
 - (a) Board/Trivia Games: games geared to help with students memorization, teamwork, math & literacy
 - (2) Teacher Assistant (after school academy)
 - (a) Program that ran from mid-October to mid-May (after the state exams)
 - (i) Provided additional support for ELA and Math. Students worked in smaller groups or with the teacher
 - (b) Lessons free flowing
- B. Diversifying the staffing to reflect the community.
1. There is a lack of multicultural staffing across all levels to the community – administrative leadership (principals/AP)
 - 1) Administrative Support
 - 2) Teachers
 - 3) Paraprofessionals
 - 4) Evaluators
 - 5) Guidance Counselors
 2. “Colleges of education across the nation should do more to attract Black and Hispanic males into teaching so that young Black and Hispanic students have access to a critical mass of men of color educators as positive male role models and mentors to better understand their own identities and to develop plans for college enrollment” (Chiles, 2014, p.5)

3. Many students of color (Black, Latino, Pacific Asian, Native American) come from neighborhoods with few role models.

4. ***My Experiences***

1) MS390 (exception to the rule)

(1) The administration is very diverse.

(2) Students could relate to the teacher because they understood their culture and were from the similar neighborhoods

IV. **What Would My Classroom Look Like?**

A. I am the role model for my students!

1. Teachers' responsibilities is to encourage students and let the students know.

1) They can engage successfully in a meaningful learning process

2) Teachers are there to help and support

3) Make every effort to build trust with all students

2. The one that fills the void in the classroom.

3. We have to give students additional encouragement to learn math, reading, writing, science, social studies, and other subjects.

1) Highlighting the achievements of Black/Latino/Native America/Pacific Asian figures in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.

2) Structure the classroom so that the students become the experts on the subject and sharing their findings with their peers.

3) Provide the additional support (one on one support) for those who need the assistance.

B. Teamwork helps students reach their life goals and helps their dreams become reality.

1. Students need to learn how to work effectively with others and as part of a team. We have to help students understand what, why, and how of collaboration. (Burns, 2016, p. 2).

2. Students can brainstorm ideas and assist their peers in understanding the content better.

3. Students are encouraging (can encourage and help to lift each other up) lifting each other up.

4. ***Story: Ella Baker Reading Group***

1) Books together as a whole (Tigers Group) (Exploring and reading the same books)

(1) Broaden perspectives

(2) Different vantage points

2) Conversations: collaborated on ideas about characters, made predictions (these natural and facilitated discussions help to build communication skills and critical thinking skills)

C. Going beyond, Thinking Outside the Perimeters

1. As teachers, we must bring it to the student's level of understanding.

2. We need to look (explore each students' interest and broaden our understanding of their cultures) this helps to build community bridges and helps the classmates gain a deeper and richer understanding of each other. for students' interests and embrace their culture.
3. In my classroom.
 - 1) Embracing the multi-cultural aspects of the students in the classroom community. All cultures bring unique features and rich tapestries that provide rich perspectives which broaden the classroom experience. Classroom environments should help students find the "connecting/common threads that are interwoven within and across cultures." Looking at the common ground.
 - 2) Using my video – production background (family has owned a video production company for the past 25 years and my father took me to work throughout his career in network television in NY and O grew up in the family business) Talk about assets helping students in summer camp programs develop vide blogs about themselves, write scripts and storyboards and pull together video projects as part of a production tea, for over 15 years in schools in Yonkers and Mt. Vernon's 21st Century After School programs. Help students use this video/virtual medium as a tool to express their creativity and tell their stories, background, create a positive music video based on a particular subject.
4. **Example: Ella Baker (Black Musicians unit)**
 - 1) Students had to choose between six famous musicians that have made a huge influence in the jazz/r &b music industry and write a small blog
 - 2) Devon: Duke Ellington "Take the A Train" (**show the work**)
 - 3) Students talking with a jazz musician
5. The results are that students have a better understanding of the content because it's related to their interests.

V. Conclusion (Take aways)

- A. The Foundation of creating equity in New York City Public Schools and in my classroom should be/or will be.
 1. Building strong relationships with students individually, the classroom environment collectively as a learning multicultural community.
 2. Team building within the classroom learning community
 3. Broadening and developing understanding of the cultural diversity represented by the students in my classroom, my larger school community and the communities from where the students come from.
 4. Engaging community members as mentors, connecting with local businesses and other professions in various sectors of the community arts, technology, designers, mathematicians, musicians, bring them into the classroom.
 5. Resources and Support Materials should be the most current, not outdated, access to the internet should be made to all students.
 6. Expanding exposure to the "virtual technology space to access and engage in communities across the globe.
- B. Liberating Education:

1. A Liberating Education has surprisingly diverse attributes, From it, students gain the confidence needed to take imitative, solve problems and formulate ideas. They skills in language, learning, and leadership. They also learn about domestic and foreign cultures, history, mathematics, science and technology.
2. As a teacher, we must go beyond equity.
3. We need to break these visible barriers that prevents a student from being successful.

Quotes

“That landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* stood for the proposition that the federal government would no longer allow states and municipalities to deny equal educational opportunity to a historically oppressed racial minority” (History Channel, 2009).

“ESEA offered new grants to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for textbooks and library books, created special education centers, and created scholarships for low-income college students. The law also provided federal grants to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education” (Brenchly, 2015).

“NCLB authorizes several federal education programs that are administered by the states. The law is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Under the 2002 law, states are required to test students in reading and math in grades 3-8 and once in high school” (OSPI 2021).

“The purpose of this title is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.” (ESSA, 2021)

“Americans have been led to believe that intelligence is like body weight, and the different intellectual levels of different people can be measured on a single, standardize weight scale. Our faith causes us to believe that the racial gap in test scores means something is wrong with the test takers and not the tests.” (Kendi 2016 p. 7)

This inbred theory of led Charles Darwin’s cousin, English Statistician Francis Galton, pioneered the Eugenics movement, failed in developing a testing system to support his racist hypothesis. In 1905, Alfred Binet and Thodore Simon developed an IQ test that Lewis Terman revised and became the SAT (college entrance exam) (Kendi, 2016 p.3).

“Racial biases tend to influence the expectations they have for their students, the quality of their teaching, and the choices in how they manage their classrooms” (Will, 2020, p.3).

“The achievement gap is a problem not only for African Americans students and their families and communities; it affects the well-being of the entire country. Researchers have found that “the persistence of the educational achievement gap imposes on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession. (Bowman, Comer, Johns, 2020)”

Poverty places a burden on families, and a large number of students of color live at an economic level that stresses families physically and mentally, with hunger, mental and physical illness, and despair being frequent corollaries. (Bowman, Comer, Johns, 2020)

“Approximately 12.6 million children under the age of 18 were in families living in poverty. This pattern was observed for children across all racial/ethnic groups, except for Pacific Islander children. 25 percent of Hispanic children lived in poverty, 32 percent of black children lived in poverty” (NCEP, 2020)

“Schools with 90 percent or more students of color spend \$733 less per student per year than schools with 90 percent or more white students” (Spatig-Amerikaner 2012 p.7).

“Given that black boys are disproportionately suspended beginning in preschool, it is important to explore how this loss of vital school time contributes to the achievement gap” (Jones & Levin, 2016 p. 2)

“The best way to standardize a highly effective system is not by standardizing our tests but by standardizing our schools to encourage intellectual” (Jones & Levin 2016 p.7).

New York spends more money per student than any other state in the country, but those dollars are not distributed proportionately to the highest need schools (Zimmerman, 2018 p.1)

Black students are more likely to get in trouble in school and end up suspended, compared to white students. (Zill, 2019).

It should include learning opportunities with an intense literacy focus in the form of after-school programs, summer school, literacy or Saturday academies (Chiles 2014 p.5)

“Colleges of education across the nation should do more to attract Black and Hispanic males into teaching so that young Black and Hispanic students have access to a critical mass of men of color educators as positive male role models and mentors to better understand their own identities and to develop plans for college enrollment” (Chiles, 2014, p.5)

Students need to learn how to work effectively with others and as part of a team. We have to help students understand what, why, and how of collaboration. (Burns, 2016, p. 2).

“Absence of avoidable or remedial differences among groups of people whether those groups of people, whether these groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically” (World Health Organization 2021)

“A liberating education has surprisingly diverse attributes. From it, students gain the confidence needed to take initiative, solve problems, and formulate ideas. They develop skills in language,

learning, and leadership. They also learn about domestic and foreign cultures, history, mathematics, science, and technology” (Scott, 2013).

Process Paper

It all started with my Family:

As I stated in my acknowledgements, one of the major threads that has run through my life is the examples set by my ancestors, parents, family members and my village of allies and supporters. My father's grandmother who raised him in the deep bowels of the South, Jackson, Mississippi was one of the first African American teachers in her community. Grandma Ellis lived until she was 103, and often told the story that even after she graduated college and passed the certification tests, she was not allowed to teach in the public schools in Jackson. She told the stories of how her husband, who was a local pastor had to drive her by horse and buggy to live with a local pastor's family in the "country communities" outside of Jackson where people of color had schools in one-room school buildings, which is where she spent the early years of her teaching journey. She would come to be with her husband on the weekends only until they started their own family, and she was recommended for a teaching job at the segregated public elementary school being built in Jackson near their home. She spent decades teaching, getting her advanced degrees, and even getting her Ph.D. in education when she was well in her 60's. She ended her career as a professor at the local Historically Black College, Jackson State University where many of my Dad's family members attended and became educators also. The same story held true with my Mother's family in Pineville, SC who attended HBCU's in both North and South Carolina. Hearing these stories as I grew up and visited my extended family that I heard these stories and knew that I wanted to be involved in educating our community and supporting the young people in communities of color.

The light bulb went off when several people mentored me and showed me how important it is for me to be a servant leader and a teacher. These people came from all walks of life in my community. My parents made a choice when I was a young boy, to move from a majority white neighborhood, Kew Gardens, NY to a more ethnically diverse neighborhood in Brooklyn where I was a toddler and later during my elementary school years to Yonkers NY where I have lived ever since. My mentors, mentioned in the acknowledgements, helped guide and directed me towards teaching from the time I was a little boy.

I was a summer camp counselor for my church program from the age of 12, I started tutoring elementary age afterschool children at a local community center, and worked with them as counselor, mentor, and teacher throughout my college years, while on breaks. I was so inspired by this. I also worked with the 21st century programs afterschool programs in Mt. Vernon and Yonkers for over 15 years. Our family business taught young people video production skills across the spectrum. Many of these young people have finished school, college and now have careers in video production across New York State.

When I discovered the Art of Teaching graduate program at Sarah Lawrence, I was a seasoned video professional in my family's business and took a part-time job with the Dream Yard project in the Bronx. For four years, I mentored with middle school during the after-school hours with homework and other activities. In addition, I worked closely with a teacher for ELA and literary skills for one year. For this experience, it exposed me to the need for male teachers of color in the classroom as role models and teachers. I was determined to become a teacher and make a difference to help students become successful in their school life and in the careers of their choice.

As I was preparing for my master's orals project, I did a lot of online research and looked at a lot of education laws and how it has impacted students in community of college. I know and realize that based on my non-public (private education) that there were disparities and an achievement gap for the students I tutored and taught in my community. I believe very strong that equal should be equal. Resources, supports, access to internet, great teachers, great libraries in schools, professional business role models as speakers in the classrooms, customizing field trips to expose students to a wide range of learning about other cultures, art, music, engineering., science, math. I believe that my video production background can be an added value to students in developing exciting curriculum which engages students.

My story and experiences across a wide spectrum of diverse experiences and teachers taking the time to help me build on my strengths, areas for development, engaging with mentors and roles models can help my students become confident, proficient students. The academic achievement gaps can become narrower and as the ESSA "Every Student Achieves Act" coupled with dynamic, teaching and engagement can help student become successful in all areas of their personal and career endeavors. Learning is more than a process and strategy; it is about relationships. Community building Community, one member at a time.

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