

Examining Equitable Practice:

Starting a study group for school staff

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Examining Equitable Practice - A study group for school staff

Introduction

This “tip” provides a model for fellow practitioners who wish to form a study group to examine equitable practice and the achievement gap in their school.

At one school in Portland, the counselor and a fellow teacher worked together to organize a study group that would examine the “achievement gap”. This elementary school is located in an urban neighborhood and has a population of 496 students. Approximately 48 percent of the students are African American and 49 percent are European American. The school staff is primarily white and from the middle class. Of the 45 adults in the building, six are African American, one is Asian, one is Hispanic, and thirty-seven are white. The school has an achievement gap as identified by test score differences between the two populations, with the European American students scoring higher on standardized tests in math and reading. The gap persists in spite of the faculty’s efforts to address the disparity.

Organizing the Study Group

Step 1. A study group is formed by a teacher and the counselor. The group is voluntary and will meet once a month for six months. Readings related to the topic of privilege, racism and/or institutional bias are selected. Each participant will read the selection before the group meeting and will be prepared to discuss how they were impacted and what, if any, implications there are for their classroom practice. For the study group, readings include: *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children* (Lisa Delpit); *White Privilege* (P. McIntosh); *A Framework for*

Understanding Poverty (R.Payne); Teachers, Culture and Power: an interview with Lisa Delpit (Levine et. al 1995).

Step 2. A values and attitudes survey is distributed to members of the study group.

(Survey follows.) The first meeting of the study group will center on a discussion of the survey and the first reading. The study group will meet once a month, thereafter, to discuss the readings and the implications for classroom instruction.

Step 3. Each month, the counselor and teacher will present information and participate in discussions during PTA or Portland Schools Alliance Meetings to engage parents/families in the conversation about the achievement gap.

Step 4. Results and outcomes will be subjective and based on self-reports of the participants. The members will examine ways in which participation in the study group changed attitudes and beliefs. They will also examine ways in which classroom instruction was modified or enhanced as a result of the discussions.

Children/students are members of an ethnic minority

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---|-----------|---|-----------------|
| Negative impact | | No Impact | | Positive impact |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Children/students come from situational poverty

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---|-----------|---|-----------------|
| Negative impact | | No Impact | | Positive impact |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Children/students come from generational poverty

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---|-----------|---|-----------------|
| Negative impact | | No Impact | | Positive impact |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

VALUES**Competition and freedom**

| | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Not important | | | | Very Important |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Cooperation and equity

| | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Not important | | | | Very Important |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Compassion

Not important
1 2 3 4 Very Important
5

Justice

Not important
1 2 3 4 Very Important
5

Maintaining the structure of wealth

Not important
1 2 3 4 Very Important
5

Eliminating poverty

Not important
1 2 3 4 Very Important
5

Are there ways in which you are:

racist:

classist:

sexist:

heterosexist:

ableist:

anti-Semitist:

Have any of the above “isms” impacted you in your life? Are you willing to share?

Would you describe your family of origin and your upbringing as Middle class?
Working class? Lower Class? Upper Middle Class? Upper Class?

References

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other People's children: Culture an conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.

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McIntosh, P. (1990). White Privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, 49:2, 31-36.

Payne, R.K. (1998). *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (revised ed.). Baytown, TX: RFT Publishing Co.