

Discourse II - Areas for Equity Discussions

As part of any program to eradicate inequity it will be necessary for educators to have extensive discussions on needed changes in practices and policies and to develop strategies to achieve desired changes. This must be done in conjunction with or following BUT NOT PRECEDING developing alliances and understanding through personal stories in order that the strategies are grounded in deep personal understanding. Eight areas that require discussion – and some starting questions for each area are below.

Classroom practices

- Who is participating in classes? Are teachers paying attention, asking probing questions of, and encouraging all students?
- Who gets access to the computers and why?
- Does learning have to be individual, competitive, lecture approach with little or no collaborative group work?
- Are students being discouraged to speak and write in their native language and to give up their culture?

Curriculum

- Does the decontextualization of subjects (subjects being taught outside of a meaningful context and/or not connected to students' culture or experience) affect students' success?
- Does the curriculum represent the contributions of all people (women and people of color, for example)?
- Are there accurate historical accounts of shameful periods of U.S. History (slavery, the treatment of Native Americans, the internment of Japanese-Americans, anti-Semitism, the eugenics movement, for example)?
- Are students reading literature written by females and people of color?

Culture of students in a school

- Are there faculty role models for students? How does it affect a student of color if most of the teachers he/she sees are white?
- Do students talk with other student respectfully about important issues?
- Can students talk with each other about their problems? with teachers?
- How much harassment and teasing (of female students, of students of color, of gay students for example) is going on in the school?
- Are there friendships in the school across racial lines?
- Are students of color in positions of leadership?

Adult Culture

- How do people explain the disproportionate failure/success by students of color, language-minority students, students from low economic classes?
- When equity issues are raised, do teachers say, "We've already dealt with that" or "I don't see color"?

- Is there safety in the district to talk about sensitive issues such as racism, sexism, or homophobia? Are adults working to overcome their own biases?
- Do counselors understand how oppression works in our society?
- Do educators from different racial backgrounds communicate each other? Are there friendships in the school across racial lines?
- Are teachers of color respected? Are they in positions of leadership?
- Do bilingual teachers have as much power in the school as regular teachers?
- How do teachers feel about their jobs? How does teacher morale affect students' school experiences?
- How does the pressure at the state and district level to improve test scores affect the way educators relate to students?
- Is the atmosphere of the school one of respect for students? How do teachers talk about students in the faculty room? What are their expectations? What kind of relationships do they have with students?

Parents

- Are parents of students of color and English language learners present in school events and school board meetings? Are they represented on committees and on the school board? Do they feel they have a voice in the school and are respected members of the school community?
- Are translators always present at school meetings?
- Do teachers have professional development about relating to parents of different cultural backgrounds? Do they make an effort to support minority parents participation in their children's education?
- Which parents have the most influence in school? over their children's academic experiences?
- Does the scheduling of parent-teacher conferences discriminate against parents who have to work during the day?
- Are schools connected to the community in which they reside?

Testing

- How does the current, very narrow means of assessment affect the achievement of students from under represented groups?
- How does the emphasis on raising test scores affect students from under represented groups?
- Are high stakes (including gifted/talented and placement) tests available in languages other than English?

School and district policies (including counseling and professional development)

- How do counseling practices affect student self-perception, performance? How are tracking policies affecting students' success?
- Does professional development at the school provide opportunities for educators to talk about the biases they encountered growing up and how that affects them? About how race, class, and gender bias affects teaching and learning? Are these issues treated in depth?

- Are teachers feeling empowered in planning and conducting their professional development?
- Are English language learners receiving adequate support for learning academic subjects or is the emphasis on increasing reading scores impeding their learning of other subjects?
- Are high level math and science classes taught bilingually or with sheltered methods?
- Do the most experienced and better-qualified teachers teach the classes with a disproportional high number of white or affluent students?
- What is the ethnic distribution of teachers within the district?
- How are resources allocated to different schools within the district? Do schools with the most needy students also have the least experienced teachers and worst equipment?
- Does the district and school leadership emphasize equity and practice what they preach? Are administrators providing both intellectual and emotional support to teachers for changing unequal success rates? Do teachers of color report having difficulty with one or more administrators?
- Do administrators and school boards support teachers' attempts to implement new curriculum or pedagogical approaches that provide access to the curriculum for more students? Do they provide encouragement for risk-taking?

Colleges and Universities

- How do university policies affect eligibility rates? curriculum? teaching practices?
- What is the University doing to prepare teachers to teach in schools with large numbers of students living in poverty?
- How do high school students perceive the university?
- What kinds of relationships do university faculty have with K-12 teachers in the districts?
- Do university faculty spend time in schools and classrooms?
- Are there mutual discussions between university educators and school people about racial and class bias?
- Is the university providing professional development on educational equity?