ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights the application of the equity literacy framework as a curricular approach to infusing diverse and multiple perspectives in PK-12 school curriculum, and presents a rationale for developing equity literacy in PK-12 students. It provides texts and related teaching ideas appropriate for supporting that development. Gorski’s (2014b) equity literacy framework is the basis for the rationale and the text selection. The chapter organizes suggested texts into seven strands: race, social class, culture, global perspectives, power and privilege, gender/sexuality, and intersectionality. The final section presents excellent multicultural literature for each of the strands across grade levels.

INTRODUCTION

In the world of PK-12 education, the terminology used to talk “nicely” about issues of diversity takes the form of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, or working with diverse children. Each of these ideas is grounded in the same belief: that all students deserve a fair quality education and that schools should put in place the necessary curriculum materials and professional development for this to occur.

Historically, the National Association for Multicultural Education has been in existence since 1960; The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children, by Gloria Ladson-Billings, be-
came a mainstay of teacher education programs in 1994; and Geneva Gay’s landmark work, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, was published in 2000. However, during this same time, the opportunity gap for African American and Latino/a students has increased, not decreased, as would be anticipated by the supposed implementation of curricular approaches that focus on and meet the needs of students of color (i.e. multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy). According to the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), African American 8th graders on average are 32 points behind white students in math and 26 points behind in reading.

If curricular approaches to meeting the needs of students of color successfully in PK-12 schools over the past 25 years have resulted in minimal success, it is possible there is a need to modify current approaches. To expand these approaches, this chapter presents a rationale and multiple strategies for developing equity literacy (Gorski, 2014b) in teacher education and PK-12 schools through the inclusion of literature for children and young adults that enhances teachers’ opportunities to promote social justice in their classrooms.

Using the equity literacy framework outlined by Gorski and Swalwell (2015), this chapter is designed to support teacher educators, teachers, and librarians by offering award-winning and culturally accurate and authentic books for children and young adults, with which they can work with students to identify, respond to, and mitigate the effects of bias and inequity, thereby supporting equity literacy development. In addition to the books, the chapter includes pedagogic approaches and strategies, to accompany the use of these texts in teacher education and PK-12 classrooms, extending the texts’ impact beyond a limited reading. We also discuss issues educators must consider when working with sensitive topics.

The chapter focuses on seven topic strands that run through the books selected to promote equity literacy: race, social class, culture, global perspectives, power and privilege, gender/sexuality, and intersectionality. Although we do not include dis/ability in this chapter because of its complexity and intersectionality with the other strands, we recognize its critical importance.

We selected highlighted texts after careful consideration of their excellence in writing and illustration, award-winning status or appearance on lists of distinction, accurate and authentic depiction of culture, and potential to develop equity literacy skills. We also selected texts that explore intersectionality in order to further students’ understanding of and appreciation for how multiple demographic categories impact characters. Finally, our associated activities include best-practice and Common Core related approaches such as active engagement, critical analysis, close reading, text annotation, and community engagement.

**Framework for Equity Literacy**

The equity literacy framework proposed by Gorski and Swalwell (2015) was selected as a focus because it takes the idea of multicultural education curriculum one step farther and moves it into the realm of social justice: “Its central tenet is that any meaningful approach to diversity or multiculturalism relies more on teachers’ understandings of equity and inequity and of justice and injustice than on their understanding of this or that culture” (Gorski, 2014a, p. 36). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) also acknowledges that multicultural education has become mired in focusing solely on culture as opposed to the social justice ideology it was founded to be. Using this framework allows issues of equity to be placed at the forefront instead focusing only on issues of culture.