

Transformational Pedagogy: Cashing the Promissory Note of Equity for ALL Students – Especially Those Who Are Marginalized

Excerpt from

Equity-Centered Capacity Building: Essential Approaches for Excellence and Sustainable School Transformation

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When people are valued for their potential, tools and opportunities are created to mine for that potential and to eradicate hindrances. In education, the equity consciousness of believing in and valuing the innate potential of students is apparent in a school district's written vision and policies for students. These articulate and support an image similar to the one posed by Paulo Freire: students being engaged and supported to be self-actualizing so they can transform themselves to both thrive in as well as transform the world (Freire, 1970).

PEDAGOGY OF CONFIDENCE: THE MEDIUM FOR EQUITY

When we are truly committed to equity, we design pedagogy that achieves its original purpose: 'to lead a child' for self-actualization and self-transcendence; self-actualization that enables students to thrive in society, and self-transcendence that motivates them to contribute to that society (Chen, 2014; Friere, 2012; Gladwell, 2008; Jackson, 2011).

An ideology that offers a concrete vision of what should be equity-driven pedagogy is "gifted education." (As used here, gifted education is distinguished from programs for students "labeled as gifted.") In this ideology, students are "*gifted*" with pedagogy in which: a) belief in and expectations for their ability drive the direction, instructional choices and opportunities that are made available to them; b) their education is actually designed as invitations for them to explore the "frontier of their intelligence; their innate capital"; c) the practices, strategies and opportunities are designed to identify and cultivate their unique strengths, gifts and talents; and d) the invitations they receive through their education are complemented by guidance on how to apply the discoveries they make about their intelligence so they can better determine what they want to pursue to feel self-actualized and to experience agency and investment in society (Jackson, 2011, p. 86; Whyte, 2007).

Equity-driven pedagogy that generates practices and structures reflective of "gifted" education and the pursuit of excellence is what I describe as the *Pedagogy of Confidence*[®]. The Pedagogy of Confidence is based on the fearless expectation that all students are capable of high intellectual performances when provided High Operational Practices™ that motivate self-directed learning and self-actualization. High Operational Practices are actually labels for the categories of supports fundamental for eliciting high levels of engagement and intellectual processing. These practices can serve to guide teachers in choosing effective pedagogical strategies and experiences to optimize learning.

The High Operational Practices include (Jackson, 2011, p. 71):

- Identifying and activating student strengths
- Building relationships
- Eliciting high intellectual performances

- Providing enrichment
- Integrating prerequisites for academic learning
- Situating learning in the lives of students
- Amplifying student voice

These practices are the fulcrum around which the meaning of “gifted” education revolves, gearing the objectives for each practice to facilitate students’ exploring and acting on their own potential to produce the high intellectual performances that can motivate self-directed learning, self-actualization, and self-transcendence.

Three beliefs reflect the science behind the High Operational Practices:

- Intelligence is modifiable.
- All students benefit from a focus on high intellectual performance.
- Learning is influenced by the interaction of culture, language, and cognition (Jackson, 2011, p. 71 and 89).

Neuroscience has substantiated the impact that “gifted” pedagogy has on reversing underachievement, stimulating motivation and activating self-determination. The strategies and practices inherent in “gifted education,” serve to enhance how students construct meaning and comprehend the world, resulting in strengthened competence, confidence, resilience and high intellectual performances. *Confidence acquired from competence* causes an individual to become intensely stimulated. This stimulation causes a burning of glucose, which results in the brain being energized, making an individual feel stronger, increasing the sense of confidence. The sense of competence and confidence activates neurotransmitters of pleasure: endorphins that help students enjoy learning more, focuses their attention more deeply, and motivates a desire for self-directed learning. When feelings of competence are increased, the sense of possible achievement catalyzes the quest for self-actualization, while decreasing the release of catecholamines, the body’s natural chemical response to stress (Jackson, 2011, p. 9).

Learning and teaching are reciprocal processes, so approaches such as the Pedagogy of Confidence have a positive effect on teachers as well. For teachers, demonstrations of student learning and competence resulting from their pedagogy provide affirming feedback about their teaching. This feedback is a great asset to teachers, for it catalyzes positive relationships with students, generating enjoyment in work and a deep sense of competence and being valued. These responses activate the release of endorphins, dopamine and oxytocin, which increase creativity in the pursuit and design of effective strategies, and inspire greater collaborative relationships with students and staff (Jackson, 2011, p. 9).

The evidence from this research is unequivocal. It substantiates the power and efficacy of a *Pedagogy of Confidence* as a core medium for equity.

REFERENCE

Jackson, Y. *The pedagogy of confidence: Inspiring high intellectual performance in urban schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2011.