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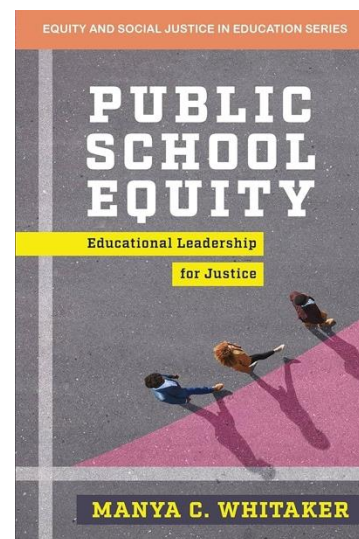
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Whitaker, M. C. (2022). *Public school equity: Educational leadership for justice*. W.W. Norton Company.

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The American public school system is composed of an incredibly diverse student population. More than half are students of color, more than 10% are English learners, and 15% are students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). As young students bring their diverse experiences, literacies, and needs with them into the classroom, will they be met by a school that serves them equitably? As it stands, students are taught overwhelmingly by white teachers (80%) and white administrators (77%). Many students are never taught by a teacher of their own ethnicity (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Despite research that affirms the impact of teacher diversity on students of color (and their white peers; Blazar, 2021; Egalite, 2023), initiatives to grow and retain a diverse teaching workforce are often undercut by poor and inequitable working conditions. In addition to staffing a diverse workforce, there are broader challenges to recruiting and retaining high quality educators for many of the same reasons. Conditions such as those listed above give rise to inequitable student outcomes, and feed a cycle in which educators are left unguided and diverse learners are left behind.

The system that drives these disproportionalities is abound with attempts at reform. However, many interventions often lack contextual depth, and may sidestep authentic appraisals of equity in deference to timelines or bottom lines. Here, there is a unique opportunity for school leaders to take charge. Rather than reforming from the outside in, administrators are positioned with a contextual expertise to interrogate and reform inequitable practices within the walls of their buildings. This is an immense undertaking for educators already managing excessive demands of the profession. Moreover, in a time where mere mention of equity in schools is subject to severe backlash, there is a new fear and hesitation attached to initiatives aimed at providing students and staff, particularly those on

the periphery, what they need to succeed. For the public school leaders who set their eyes on pursuing school-wide equity in spite of these constraints, strategy will be the way forward.

In *Public School Equity: Educational Leadership for Justice*, Manya C. Whitaker takes on the task of reimagining school planning and policymaking, putting forth a playbook with which school leaders can assess and repair various elements of their school design in service of equitable practice. As part of the Norton Equity and Justice in Education series, this work empowers its reader with a measured account of the intricacies of school policy and change, providing equitable solutions that are specific, customizable, and attainable across all school contexts. Whitaker's approach is derived from an array of literature, as well as 40 interviews collected over five years with teachers, principals, and district leaders. Interview participants represent a diversity of roles, grade levels, and geographic regions. In addition to the data and literature largely informing the *process* of school change, Whitaker, a developmental educational psychologist, incorporates frameworks of cognitive psychology to support sensemaking around *the people*, and namely the drivers of belief systems that inform individuals' abilities to embrace and uphold equitable practices.

Strategically organized into three sections, each entailing a "phase," *Public School Equity* guides school leaders through the thoughtful and long-term work of envisioning, implementing, and sustaining equity-based practices. The book begins with a record-setting of sorts. Whitaker offers definitions for key words used throughout the book and makes clear what equity is and is not. According to the author, equity operationalized is: "providing teachers, students, and families with resources and supports aligned with their individual needs (p. xxiii)."

The remainder of the text reads as if Whitaker is consulting with and coaching school leaders to develop them professionally, and consequently, conceptualize their school's "equity-action plan." At the beginning of each section, the author includes relevant excerpts from a case study of an experienced school leader who is set to become principal of a school rife with achievement gaps, a lack of resources, and inadequate facilities. At the same time, the school is undergoing a demographic shift. The nature of this administrator's problems is relatable, and the detailing offers readers a scenario with which they can contextualize elements of each phase, watching it play out in practice. At the end of each chapter, Whitaker poses a series of questions that serve as a personal exit ticket, offering them an opportunity to assess what they've learned while also encouraging reflexivity and inquiry of the chapter's content as it relates to their unique school setting. This exercise is helpful for reinforcing key points, as each chapter is filled with rich information and can seem overwhelming to the school leader endeavoring to adapt it.

For the administrator who wants to hit the ground running, the first section may seem constraining. Whitaker makes clear that careful and informed planning at the levels of self, organization, and community, are required for change to be meaningful. After calling on readers to envision equity in their schools, the book draws on organizational role theory, and the work of Kahn et al. (1964), to support

understandings of roles, expectations, and relationships between school leaders, teachers, staff, and community members. The author advocates for the inclusivity of these stakeholders in its process of equity-centered planning and implementation that includes a thorough examination of school processes vis a vis a 15-step guide. School leaders are then charged with embedding equitable practices within all facets of the organization (from school policies to curriculum) and are given suggestions for how to implement them. For example, concerning school policies, Whitaker uses culturally responsive alternatives to traditional school discipline, such as restorative justice, de-escalation, and inquiry-based dialogue. Encouraging readers to think about the student holistically, Whitaker brings attention to their unique cultural capital and tendency for disciplinary challenges to arise when this capital is at odds with the system of whiteness where schooling takes place. Here, the reader is provided a problem of practice, equity-centered resolutions, and a broader reframing that challenges the traditional system of education. The entire text offers opportunities for this type of dynamic learning, which not only serves to respond to the challenges educators face when seeking equity, but stretches them beyond their contexts, thinking about their students and teachers in a system that may not be designed for them.

Public School Equity centers teachers as a critical stakeholder in school-wide equity transformation. Rightfully so, after guiding readers through the planning phase in Part I, Whitaker turns to an extensive section on staffing in Part II, devoting three chapters to addressing the complexities of recruiting and onboarding teachers with an equity mindset and reflective of the population of students attending the school. The result is a detailed “how-to” for administrators who may not know what to look for when staffing their schools with equity at the forefront. In the author’s exploration of teacher-student ethnic matching and multicultural education (ME) as a means for addressing inequity in the classroom, readers are provided with a substantive review of literature and the psychology of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to explain the affordances and constraints of these approaches. This information is undoubtedly valuable. The work of hiring equity-minded teachers is critical to implementing an equity-focused school. However, in a time of extensive teacher shortage, the implementation of this selective process seems daunting. What is a leader to do if there are no candidates evidencing an equity mindset? At the very least, this chapter supports hiring decision making and emphasizes the importance of teachers’ multicultural attitudes and dispositions. The broader section, however, provides equity-driven orientation, induction, and professional development activities that are more within the locus of an administrator’s control, ensuring that educators become familiar with their school culture and community. Here, extant sources of information are contrasted with basic humanizing ideas of teacher belonging and acceptance that build a cohesive and equitable school community.

Equally important to recruiting high quality teachers is retaining them. The final section of the text displays an array of models and practices, aligned with cognitive role theory (Biddle, 1979), to evaluate teachers and provide them access to supports that are matched to their will and skill. In crafting an approach to equitable evaluation, Whitaker puts forth the idea of an integrative review in which

teachers are assessed holistically rather than narrowly through accountability data. Students, families, teachers' peers, and teachers themselves are engaged for insights on the educator's performance. This mixed-methods approach offers a more comprehensive view of a teacher's assets and challenges and provides more data with which school leaders can plan for customized professional development and career advancement. The uniqueness of these four chapters lies in the author's esteem for the teaching profession. Contrary to the hopelessness of the uniform salary schedule and limited career advancement opportunities, Whitaker challenges school leaders to become creative, develop new positions, or move teachers across positions to gain greater compensation. This approach requires a certain nimbleness on the part of school leaders to take on teacher professional advancement on a case-by-case basis. This is undoubtedly more work for administrators. However, inequity thrives on our exhaustion and the absence of our vigilance. Creating leaders willing to engage the work of investigating opportunities and propelling their teachers forward is one step in the right direction for creating equity in schools.

Public School Equity offers a comprehensive and inclusive approach to equity-driven school reform. Perhaps the clearest point made throughout the book is that equity work in schools requires a commitment to *praxis*. Whitaker's approach is not a "set it and forget it" solution to a 400-year-old problem. Leaders must commit to the long and challenging work of achieving equity. Undoubtedly, there will be successes with which to energize future work. There will also likely be failures that challenge such a commitment. The system within which these rich ideas are to be implemented is overburdened and leadership is spread thin. As Whitaker points out, school leaders are flooded with competing priorities like other school-level interventions handed down to them by their district leadership. In this case, the book's adaptability may not matter as much as the will of a school leader who picks it up, determined to work toward equity.

To that point, the long-game vision of Whitaker's work assumes that administrators plan to stay at their school long enough to see it through. What happens when there is administrative turnover? Is all lost? In the interest of sustainability, the author's approach may benefit from some succession planning if school leaders must leave their post. Practically speaking, the text does address many other "what-if" questions. And the author's grounding of each section in a particular psychological theory is helpful for understanding the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms through which these suggestions are expected to work. In this way, the author widens the book's appeal to researchers in psychology and education in addition to the practitioners for whom the text was written.

It must be acknowledged that school leadership can be an isolating role. While Whitaker's approach never suggests that school leaders do this work on their own (in fact, its strength is in its inclusivity), spearheading it is still a risk, and may engender loneliness depending on the broader values of the district or region. The peer accounts offered in this book expand its function to a written community of practice. The inclusion of educator voices helps to illustrate a movement, forging connections between readers with the experiences of others in the field, and

allowing them to see what is possible for their schools and themselves as they work to envision and actualize public school equity.

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