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“A Reflection of Powerful Case Methods in Education”: A Book Review of Paul C. Gorski and Seema G. Pothini’s Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education (Second Edition)

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Abstract

Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education (Second Edition), by Paul C. Gorski and Seema G. Pothini, is a text that captivates your attention from the very beginning. It pushes and motivates the reader to dive into, begin, and share the work of social justice. Each case study presented is complimented by reflection questions, the “Equity Literacy Case Analysis” worksheet which provides a framework to reflect upon while reading the cases, and further “Points of Consideration” for each case. This text serves as a masterpiece of excellence in the realm of social justice and diversity as seen in the realm of education and the greater community.

Keywords

social justice, diversity, inclusion

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Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education (Second Edition), by Paul C. Gorski and Seema G. Pothini, is a text that captivates your attention from the very beginning. It pushes and motivates the reader to dive into, begin, and share the work of social justice. Each case study presented is complimented by reflection questions, the “Equity Literacy Case Analysis” worksheet which provides a framework to reflect upon while reading the cases, and further “Points of Consideration” for each case. This text serves as a masterpiece of excellence in the realm of social justice and diversity as seen in the realm of education and the greater community.

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Overview of *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education*

Paul C. Gorski’s and Seema G. Pothini work, *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education* (Second Edition), is a narrative, case method used to outline and explain the stories of students, teachers and families who experienced uncomfortable scenarios while at school, on trips, or during sporting events. The book is segmented into case methods on the following: poverty and socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity and culture, race, sex, gender identity and gender expression, disability, sexual orientation, language, and immigrant status. The reader is furthermore given a directory based upon topic encompassing: curriculum and pedagogy, “discipline,” engagement and classroom management, school and classroom policy and practice, school culture, programs, parent and community engagement and relations, and bias and bullying. The directory goes on to highlight how cases intersect and how cases can be found in more than one topical category. The first case study we are exposed to is about Ms. Samaya and how hateful views of racism and xenophobia impact a community in different ways. The impact occurring within the greater community (town) was influencing behaviors and occurrences within the school community. She had first-hand feelings towards racism and xenophobia coming from a family of immigrants; now to see her students experience the same treatment was unbearable. The first case stands as an eye-opening read.

The authors (Gorski & Pothini, 2018, p. 7) wrote this text to:

1. Strengthen our efforts to prepare educators, including the authors, to think, teach, lead, and advocate more equitably and justly. As a reader, you might have undergone similar cases, and this allows you to process.
2. We can (hopefully) see past our own biases and ideologies in our schools and classrooms. The case method process opens the door to considerate evaluation and problem-solving skills.
 - a. Keeping in mind the sociopolitical context of schooling (Nieto & Bode, 2011) - inequities within schools and society

Gorski and Pothini share an equity literacy framework consisting of the following steps (Gorski & Pothini, 2018, p. 13):

1. Identify biases or inequities
2. Take stock of various perspectives
3. Consider possible challenges and opportunities
4. Imagine equitable and just outcomes
5. Brainstorm immediate-term solutions
6. Brainstorm long-term solutions
7. Craft a plan of action

Sharing this framework allows for reflection while reading the cases and in real life. The narrative titled, “Winter Party,” showed how giving parents too much power and leverage can make school more personal and less equitable. Parents in this narrative wanted to overrule one parent and focus on winter holiday-based activities instead of winter-type activities. A parent chimed in to share that if we have activities about all the winter holidays then that would be fair. I advocate for family engagement completely, but it needs to be balanced and that is why schools have educational professionals to facilitate, lead, and govern. We (families and community members) must see school activities as educational opportunities students cling to and recall for years to come, they discuss and ask to have repeated. So, should not we honor and respect the lives, histories, and experiences of the marginalized and forgotten? There is a time and place for everything but reshaping a winter party into a holiday party changes the original dynamics of the event.

There was a student who wore an ancient Hindu symbol that looks like the swastika and students were upset about the student wearing it. He received it from his grandmother and wanted to honor her. The teachable moment that could have happened with this scenario did not come to fruition. There are so many teachable moments in education and taking the time to stop, pause, and teach about these moments matter. They can become more memorable than well-planned lessons. Teaching about these moments benefits students in the now and in their future.

I’m noticing a pattern within some cases, and it is that in some situations teachers or leaders allowed parents or students to make decisions and they (educational professionals) provided little input. With the biases and ideologies that others embody this sets up a stage of negative situations at times. There were opportunities for growth in each case study. For instance, one school decided to completely overhaul their use of technology with the data that not each child had adequate access to devices. This encouraged me to reflect on COVID-19 and all the disparities surrounding access to internet, devices, lack of privacy for students and families during virtual classroom meetings, and more. Assumptions were present throughout the narratives, which made me reflect. Assumptions paint a false reality and increase the likelihood of bias and fear within people. Knowing that equality typically implies equal, equity is our goal. Equity connotes “fairness, a redistribution of access and opportunity, including access to a bias-free, supportive, actively anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist, anti-transphobic, anti-ableist, and anti-every-other-oppression educational experience. Equity takes context into account” (Gorski & Pothini, 2018, p. 18).

The text highlighted bias well. When you experience bias it’s painful. You are left out, ostracized and a target: it’s painstaking. So, how do we address the real heart issues of the matter? How can change come? How does one explain or comprehend the difference between an achievement gap and an opportunity gap? These are some of the reflection questions I gathered from my reading of the text. I look forward to possible future editions that will include additional cases and reflection.

You might have encountered similar experiences to the opportunities portrayed in the text. I know that in my years of teaching and while in educational settings, most of these case studies were relatable and I could proceed to add a few case methods of my own to the literature. We are unique and special within our own degree of living so our lived experiences matter and help to contribute to the grander population of change we hope to see in the community. I strongly endorse reading this text if you are wholeheartedly excited and passionate about diversity and social justice. Also, if you are unaware and confused about terms that are associated with social justice and diversity this is a great read for you. When you can educate yourself about matters you are unfamiliar you are able to gain more insight and application. This text can be applied to social justice courses and even for passionate educational professionals who hope and work to see positive change in schools.

References

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Author Note

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