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PERSPECTIVE

Equity Traps: A Useful Construct for Preparing Principals to Lead Schools That Are Successful With Racially Diverse Students

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The concept of equity traps evolved from a qualitative study that revealed the conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors that trap teachers, administrators, and others, preventing them from creating schools that are equitable, particularly for students of color. Although the results of this original study exposed these equity traps, merely exposing the traps is not sufficient. Hence, the purpose of this article is to offer a useful, pragmatic construct to professors in educational administration departments to help them prepare their principal candidates to be able not only to identify these equity traps but also to understand them and be able to implement strategies to avoid or eliminate these traps. Therefore, the authors clearly define the four equity traps—the deficit view, racial erasure, employment and avoidance of the gaze, and paralogic beliefs and behaviors—and offer practical, successful strategies to avoid or free educators from these traps.

Keywords: *equity; diversity; diverse schools; social justice; multicultural education*

Our intent here is primarily not to report research findings but rather, to offer a research-based construct that may be used as a tool for preparing principals. The explicit purpose of this tool is to help departments of educational administration to develop school leaders who can create schools that are successful with children of color. To accomplish this goal, we offer a new construct that we call *equity traps*. Equity traps, which we will later discuss in more detail, are ways of thinking or assumptions that prevent educators from

believing that their students of color can be successful learners. It is our contention that by identifying, understanding, and using these traps, school leaders will have an improved possibility, not a guarantee, but an improved possibility of developing schools that are academically successful with students of color.

Although in the past this goal of achieving school success with students of color has often been ignored by other than a limited number of educators and scholars, it no longer is. In fact, ensuring that all students are successful is now a federal mandate. This mandate, the recently passed No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, was enacted, at least in part, to force the closure of the achievement gap between "disadvantaged and minority students and their peers." More simply, this act calls for equity. Thus, whatever the wide array of problems with the No Child Left Behind Act, it is, in part, a legislative response to the pervasive failure of schools and school districts to provide a high-quality education that ensures the success of all students.

Thus, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states are now mandated to establish accountability systems that require schools to close the achievement gap or in other words, to educate everyone's child. However, educating everyone's child has not historically been the dominant national norm. Most schools have been doing an adequate job of providing a quality education for White middle-class students, but this has not been the case for students of color, especially those living in poverty. In fact, there is an abundance of data and research that shows that students of color not only are performing at lower achievement levels than their White counterparts (Campbell, Hombo, & Masseo, 2000) but, also, are overrepresented in special education and lower level classes (Olson, 1991; Reglins, 1992; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Drescher, 1994; Useem, 1990), dropping out of school at higher numbers (Cardenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992), frequently educated by teachers who do not believe they can learn or who are actively negative in their attitude toward these students (McKenzie, 2001), underrepresented in gifted and talented and higher level classes (Robertson et al., 1994), often times educated in schools with less resources (Kozol, 1991) and with the least experienced teachers (Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000), and more likely to be suspended or expelled (Gordon, Paina, & Keleher, 2000).

Changing these negative and destructive patterns and educating everyone's child so that they achieve at high levels has been shown to be a formidable task (Delpit, 1996; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Mun Wong, 1997; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1997, 2001). This task requires those in schools to rethink and restructure what expectations they hold for all students, how their schools are organized to support teaching and learning, what curricula will be

implemented, what practices include and exclude students, and how instruction will be delivered and assessed, among other aspects of schooling. To accomplish this rethinking and restructuring of schools requires strong, focused, insightful, skilled leadership, specifically, the leadership of the school principal. Thus, "the kind and quality of leadership we have will help determine, for better or for worse, the kinds of schools we have" (Sergiovanni, 1992). This is especially true because there is significant research that indicates there is a positive relationship between leadership and student achievement (see Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Institute for Educational Leadership 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Riehl, 2000; Scheurich, 2002b).

If, indeed, school principals are the keystones of good schools, and if student achievement is dependent on their leadership, it is critical that departments of educational administration, who train and certify a high percentage of those who lead schools (McCarthy, 1999), ensure that their principalship students know how to facilitate the creation of schools in which all students, including students of color, are successful. Thus, if the goal is schools that are successful with all students, professors in departments of educational administration must train leaders to recognize and attend to the impediments that get in the way of achieving this goal. And one major set of impediments, in our view, is the set of equity traps that are the focus of this discussion.

These equity traps, as we are conceptualizing them, are patterns of thinking and behavior that trap the possibilities for creating equitable schools for children of color. In other words, they trap equity; they stop or hinder our ability to move toward equity in schooling. Furthermore, these traps are both individual and collective, often reinforced among administrators and teachers through formal and informal communication, assumptions, and beliefs. For example, teachers will sometimes communicate to each other their belief that the reason they are not academically successful with many of their children of color is due to the bad or negative attitudes of the children or their parents (e.g., McKenzie, 2001). Thus, these traps cause us to become, as J. King (1997) suggested, "dysconscious," which "is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity" (p. 135). In effect, this dysconsciousness prevents us from seeing and believing in the possibility that all students of color can achieve and that we can have the ability and the will to make this happen.

For example, if we hold the dysconscious perception that some children are at a deficit because of race, poverty, culture, behavior, home language, and so forth and, therefore, are incapable of performing at high levels, we lower our expectations for them. This lowering of expectations affects how we treat the students, and it communicates these lowered expectations to the

students, with the frequent result that the students come to see themselves as being less intelligent or as incapable of doing well in school. These students, thus, often receive a less rigorous curriculum, are held to lesser standards, and often times are placed in special education or lower level classes. Then, as more and more teachers and administrators treat these children in this way, these children, who must find some way to protect themselves or support a positive idea of themselves, drop out, whether in school or not; act out; become involved with others who are negative to school; and/or get sent to alternative schools that often serve to reinforce this negative, downward cycle.

To break this cycle for the child and to free ourselves from these dysconscious equity traps, the school leadership must first be able to understand what equity traps are and then be able to recognize or identify these traps in themselves and others and the ways they are deployed in the lived reality of schools. With this knowledge, the principal can begin to work with teachers and other administrators to interrupt and undermine the traps and their deleterious effects. Consequently, we must bring the unconscious, the dysconscious, to a conscious level by assisting educators, including ourselves, in reflecting on the traps. This being done, we can then reframe our thinking, free ourselves from the equity traps, and begin the process of restructuring schools so that they become democratic institutions that promote equity and educate everyone's child. In the next section, we explain the research study, including the methodology, from which equity traps are drawn and following that, present the findings from this research that led us to identify these equity traps and develop a construct for professors of educational administration departments so that they can prepare their leadership students to understand these traps, recognize them in themselves and others, and employ strategies—which we identify—to eliminate them.

RESEARCH STUDY FROM WHICH EQUITY TRAPS WERE DRAWN

The research study that led us to identify the four equity traps was a qualitative research project. This study was originally conceptualized as a participatory action research study in which the researchers and teachers would, together, discuss the teachers' perceptions of their students of color, their perceptions of themselves as White educators, and the relationship between their perceptions of their students and their own racial identity. Then, based on these discussions, the researchers and participants would collaboratively develop an action plan for continuing the discussions or taking actions based

on these discussions. However, the project transformed as we went along. For example, there were times when the teachers made comments that revealed their perceptions that the children and their families were somehow deficient in different ways. During these moments, we would challenge the teachers' thinking as much as we felt we could without thwarting the discussion, but there were times when the comments were so negatively extreme that we were stunned. Thus, at times, we were no longer participating, just observing and listening. What follows, then, is a description of this research project, including the context and the design of the study.

The Context

The purpose of our research was to conduct in-depth discussions with a group of 8 experienced White teachers about their perceptions of their students of color, their own racial identity, and the relationship between their perceptions of their students of color and their perceptions of their own racial identity. The teachers were chosen by the purposive method of sampling (Patton, 2001). We wanted to study White, experienced teachers who had reputations as being fairly good or decent teachers. The selected teachers included a prekindergarten teacher, a special education teacher, a music teacher, a fourth-grade teacher, a third-grade teacher, a second-grade teacher, a kindergarten teacher, and a first-grade teacher. We selected White teachers for our study because, although the majority of the students in the public education system are students of color, most of the teachers in this school, like many schools, are White females. In addition, we wanted to work with experienced teachers because they are the ones who are typically assigned as mentors to new teachers and are given student teachers to supervise. Therefore, each teacher chosen for the study had more than 3 years teaching experience, and some had as many as 15 to 20 years teaching experience.

All the selected teachers were from the same elementary campus, East River Elementary. East River is located in a large urban city where there is a major research university. The city itself has citizens of both great wealth and substantial poverty. A freeway mainly separates these two groups, with the affluent living to the west and the low-income families, most of whom are Latino or African American, living to the east, and East River Elementary is located in this latter area of the city. The school district within which East River is located has more than 70 elementary schools. East River, however, is only one of two elementary schools in the district in which the majority of the students are African American rather than Latino or White. Whereas in the past there were more African American students in the district, in the past 10

years the population of the city has shifted significantly, and most of the low-income schools are now populated predominately by Latino students.

East River Elementary is a small school with 291 students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Of the students, 95% are from low-income families. Approximately 56% of the students are African American, 40% are Latino, 3% are White, and 1% is Native American. English-language learners make up 16% of the students, 5% receive services through the gifted and talented program, and 12% receive special education services. Of the teachers, 50% have taught for 5 years or less, and 24% of the teachers are new to the profession. Approximately 30% of the teachers are African American, 8% are Latino, and 64% are White. However, there were only 8 White teachers in the school that we considered experienced; that is, they had more than 3 years of teaching experience.

The Study Design, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

In our study of these experienced White teachers, we used a protocol that included 1-hour interviews with each of the participants and six 2-hour group sessions. The purpose of the 1-hour interviews was to get to know each teacher and her background and to establish rapport (Fontana & Frey, 1994), whereas the purpose of the group sessions was to dialogue with the teachers about their perceptions of their students of color and themselves as White educators. Each of the group sessions began with a focus. For example, the first session began with a sharing of the data that revealed that nationwide, students of color are not performing at comparable levels to their White counterparts. After sharing the data, the teachers were asked, "Why do you think students of color are not performing at comparable levels to their White counterparts?" This question was the catalyst for the ensuing discussion. Although the first session began with a preconceived question, in the sessions that followed, the topics were a continuation from previous discussions, emerged during the session discussion, came about from a campus happening that occurred between sessions, or sprang from articles and readings that we brought to the session.

During and between sessions, the teachers were asked to keep journals and were invited to share their journals with the group. Each of the interviews and group sessions was audiotaped and transcribed. In addition, anecdotal notes were taken during both the interviews and group sessions. The tapes, transcriptions, and notes were reviewed between sessions. This allowed us to frame questions for the next session and bring back to the group specific comments for their review and revision. In addition, the review of the data

between sessions began the recursive process of weaving back and forth between the data collection and the analysis.

As we read the transcriptions, replayed portions of the tapes, and reviewed our field notes, themes began to emerge. However, this was a dynamic rather than static process. The themes that appeared to emerge initially changed throughout the project with the result being the identification at the end of the study of six themes: (a) prioritizing economics over race; (b) blaming the students, their families, and community for what the teachers perceived as the students' inadequacies; (c) employing and avoiding the "gaze" (Foucault, 1994); (d) using anger, power, and control; (e) norming the dissenting voice; and (f) being abusive. These themes revealed the teachers' perceptions of their students of color and their students' families and community, the teachers' perceptions of their own racial identity, and the relationship between the teachers' perceptions of the students, their families and community, and the teachers' perceptions of themselves. However, the importance of this discussion is not so much the themes that emerged but rather, the patterns of thinking—the equity traps that were revealed through the teachers' comments. Indeed, the goal here is not to identify and discuss the original six themes (available in McKenzie, 2001). Instead, the goal here is to build on this research by developing concepts and tools to assist educators in increasing equity in our nation's schools.

In the next section, then, we explain each of the four equity traps we identified based on the research study we just described, and we follow each trap with some practical strategies for interrupting and eliminating each trap. However, we are not saying that every one of these strategies will work in every specific context. Instead, the strategies we offer are meant to help professors, principals, teachers, professional development experts, and others think about ways educators trap equity and about some practical ways to interrupt and eliminate the traps.

THE EQUITY TRAPS

Equity Trap 1: A Deficit View

The first equity trap we identified is what we have labeled as a deficit view, which is directly drawn from Valencia's (1997) work on deficit thinking. The deficit-thinking model, according to Valencia, is

> an endogenous theory—a theory that posits that the student who fails in school does so principally because of internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficien-

cies manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcom-
ings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral behavior. (p. 2)

Employing a deficit view, the teachers in this study attributed the lack of suc-
cess of their students of color to what the teachers perceived as inherent or en-
dogenous student deficits, such as cultural inadequacies, lack of motivation,
poor behavior, or failed families and communities. That is, the teachers said
the students were deficit because the students, their parents, and/or their com-
munities were deficit. The teachers thought that the students had deficits be-
cause of their upbringing, which was a result of the students' parents having
deficits because of their upbringing and on and on. Thus, the students, their
families, and community were seen as living in a culture that was based on
deficits that were generational. One teacher described this culture as a
"culture of apathy." Another teacher said,

[I blame the parents] 100%. Not that it's their fault. But it's the culture that they
are living in . . . our kids come to us at pre-K, 2 or 3 years below grade level al-
ready . . . we are playing catch up from preschool on.

Moreover, the teachers seemed to believe that unless the students came to
school motivated to learn, they could not be taught. One teacher stated,

I think that's where the schools are having a hard time is because the parents are
not . . . motivating their children to do well. So, the school is hardly going to
undo that lack of motivation. And I think that's a sad thing.

However, the predominate reason the teachers gave for the students not being
motivated to learn was that they felt the students' parents did not value educa-
tion. One teacher stated, "They [the students] don't have intrinsic motivation
to do well, and I think it has a lot to do with if the parents don't value educa-
tion, the child has no reason to think it's important."

One teacher did acknowledge that the school plays a part in motivating
students to learn; nonetheless, she believed that "these kids" needed some
unique and special type of motivation to learn. She stated, "These kids do
need some kind of special motivational thing that the kids on the west side
[the more affluent area of town] don't seem to need." For the most part, how-
ever, the teachers did not believe that school was the place where students
developed a desire, a motivation, to learn; they felt the students needed to
come to school already motivated to learn. As one teacher put it, "We can
only mold the clay as the clay comes to us."

In addition, the teachers not only felt the students were coming to school
unprepared and unmotivated to learn but also said the students did not come

to school knowing how to behave appropriately. They referred to the students' behaviors as "pathetic." They said that once the students get to school, there is "behavior breeding behavior." In other words, the students learn to misbehave from each other and, thus, this misbehavior spreads among their fellow students, one infecting the next. The teachers characterized this behavior as "delinquent," and they sometimes referred to the students as "gangsters."

However, although the teachers partly blamed the students' misbehavior on other students, they always referred the foundation of the problem back to the home where, in the teachers' view, the students did not learn how to behave correctly. One teacher said, "I think, at home . . . they are not being taught how to, you know, deal with anger." Another teacher said,

> Sometimes I think by the time they are 2 or 3 they probably already have that [anger] . . . just from the 2 or 3 years of living in the environment they live in or whatever the circumstance. . . . I hate to say that they are already tainted when they are 4 year olds, but.

Repeatedly, then, the teachers identified the students as having "built-in" or "endogenous" deficits that the teachers could not be expected to overcome. Thus, these teachers appeared to hold a strong belief that their children of color walked in the school door at 4 years old with built-in deficits that the teachers should not be expected to overcome.

Strategies for Addressing Equity Trap 1, A Deficit View

To address this first equity trap, a deficit view, school leaders need to help teachers reframe their thinking about students, families, and communities and, thus, move their thinking from a deficit orientation to an assets-based one that recognizes what Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) called the "funds of knowledge" that students bring with them to school. These funds of knowledge are the strategies, abilities, practices, and ideas that children bring to school from their homes and communities (Gonzalez et al., 1993). In other words, this assets-based or funds of knowledge approach always assumes that all children come to school with assets that need to be recognized, validated, and used in the educational process. This reframing, from a negative orientation to a positive one, will free teachers from the deficit-thinking trap and guide them toward a positive acceptance and support for all their students. Therefore, to eliminate deficit thinking as an equity trap, school staffs need to get to know their students and their students' families and community on a personal level, they need to learn to dignify the culture of their students,

and they need to actively solicit and incorporate the community into the decision making of the school.

One strategy we have found successful in getting school staffs to know their students and their students' families and communities at a deeper level is neighborhood walks. We have found that having staffs go door-to-door at the beginning of the school year to welcome students and parents and to distribute important information not only establishes positive rapport between the school and the community but also begins to dismantle the negative, preconceived notions the staff frequently have about the students, their families, and their communities. For example, at a school in which one of us was principal (McKenzie), many of the teachers believed, before they did neighborhood walks, that the students came from homes that did not value education or value the teachers. To address this deficit thinking, the teachers went on neighborhood walks. These teachers were pleasantly surprised when they knocked on the doors of their students' homes and the families invited them in, offered them refreshments, and engaged with the teachers in discussions about their children, their goals for their children, and ways in which they, the parents, could help their children be successful. Hearing the parents' concerns for their children demonstrated to the teachers, contrary to their prior deficit thinking, that the parents, indeed, cared about their children and valued education.

In the debriefing sessions following these walks, the teachers reported that they had acquired a better understanding of the students' home lives and were impressed by the interest and concern most parents had regarding their children's educational experiences at school. Moreover, several of the teachers began holding their parent conferences in their students' homes. These teachers became intimately involved with the students' families, often being invited to dinner, *quinceañeras* (a Latina's 15-year-old birthday party), and birthday parties. McKenzie recalls that one of these teachers explained to her that because she had become close to the families, this teacher was better able to deliver the good and not-so-good news from school. She said the parents were more willing to listen to her regarding the importance of attendance, homework, and daily home reading. In addition, this teacher reported that several of the parents became more involved in at-school functions and were more willing to ask questions regarding their child's schoolwork. What occurred, then, was an important effect of these neighborhood walks. Thus, the subsequent home visits many of the teachers chose to do changed the teachers' attitudes. For example, several of the teachers who had previously felt sorry for the children and who had taken on a patronizing missionary perspective in dealing with the students and families began to see the students

and their families as competent and caring; as a result, a more authentic and equitable relationship was forged between school and home.

However, beyond our own experiences with neighborhood walks and home visits, others in the United States, England, Australia, and Japan have also implemented these practices (Steele-Carlin, 2001). For example, California State Assembly Bill 33 was passed in 1999, and it provided funding for home visits. The passage of this bill came about after 10 Sacramento schools that had conducted home visits for 2 years reported that 98% of the parents and 98% of the teachers felt students' academic performance had improved since the implementation of these home visits (Rhee, 1999). Although this report does not directly correlate improved student performance to the decrease in deficit thinking of the teachers, it is our contention that we as educators are far more willing to "see" the strengths and assets students bring to school and develop at school when we have a stronger connection to them and their families.

Another strategy that has been found to be highly successful in getting staffs not only to know the school community but also dignify the culture of their students is for students and teachers to gather oral histories from the people in their communities. In gathering these oral histories, students go to the homes in their communities and interview their neighbors. They audiotape, videotape, or take notes as the person relates her or his history. Then, all of the stories can be brought together in various ways, from homemade books to public displays. They can even be made into dramas or speaking parts so that the students can re-present the stories to the general public. However this is done, the process brings students, the community, and educators together in a process in which everyone learns about each other and in which solidarity and community are being built by gathering the oral histories.

One community and school group that has done particularly well with community-oriented oral histories is the Llano Grande Project. Indeed, they are the best we have ever seen in doing this kind of work. This group is located in the Edcouch-Elsa School District in the border area of Texas. This district is one of the poorest in the country, and virtually 100% of their students are Mexican Americans. As part of the project, educators and community people have used this oral history process to educate their students, to educate educators about their students and community, and to do community building. One mark of their outstanding success is that this tiny district, during the past 5 years or so, has sent 15 to 20 students to Ivy League colleges where they have succeeded and graduated. For such a small, low-income, Mexican American community to send so many students to these colleges is truly impressive, and according to them, the oral history project has been

central to this success. (For more information on Llano Grande or to contact them, see their Web site at http://www.llanogrande.org/home/home.html.)

A third practical strategy for helping teachers develop a deeper knowledge of their students and their families is three-way conferencing, which includes the teacher, the student, and the student's family member. This strategy not only enhances understanding but also involves the student and their family member in making instructional decisions that support the student both at home and at school. At one of our schools, three-way conferences were held twice a year. The first conference was a goal-setting conference in which the student, along with the family member and teacher, established goals for the year. The student, family member, and teacher each had responsibility to ensure that the student met his or her goals. These responsibilities were written down and reviewed in the end-of-year conference. During this final conference, the student, taking the leadership role in the conference, presented his or her portfolio documenting progress toward the goals established in the initial three-way conference. In addition, the family member and teacher reviewed the strategies they had used to meet their responsibility in helping the student reach his or her goals. At the end of these conferences, parents were given a conference feedback form to complete. Overwhelmingly, the parents felt that the three-way conferencing was superior to the traditional parent/teacher conference (for more information regarding three-way conferencing, see Lam & Peake, 1997; Ricci, 2000).

What we have offered here, then, are three possible strategies for interrupting and eliminating the deficit view equity trap. We know that others can come up with further examples that would fit well here. We hope the ones we have briefly described are either directly helpful or provoke ideas of other ones. The point, whatever the strategy, is to move teachers away from thinking about their students in deficit ways and move them toward thinking of their students in assets-based ways. Unfortunately, many of us, teachers and administrators, have little real knowledge about our students, their home lives, their families, and their communities, and this space of ignorance is subsequently often occupied by prejudices and biases that are negative for the students and, thus, become a trap for equity. By developing and applying ways to remove this equity trap, school leaders can facilitate improved academic success for all students.

However, we cannot just talk about school leaders removing this equity trap. We, at the university, are responsible for training these leaders and teaching them how to identify and remove these traps. Thus, for the deficit view trap, how can we teach future leaders to develop the strategies necessary to eliminate deficit thinking? Take for example the first strategy we suggested, neighborhood walks. One of us, McKenzie, in one of her graduate

courses, had students participate in a neighborhood walk. In setting up these walks, a principal of a local school in which the majority of the students were low-income students of color was contacted and asked if she would like a class of university students to conduct a neighborhood survey for the school. The principal was eager, and the students developed a list of interview questions based on the information the principal was seeking. The students canvassed the community surrounding the school, which mainly consisted of federal housing projects, and interviewed the families. After conducting the interviews, the class met and debriefed the experience. During the debriefing, it was revealed that this was the first time many of the university students had been in a neighborhood unlike the ones in which they had grown up or in which they currently lived. Moreover, many of them had never seen federal housing. What was surprising to many of these students was the genuine interest the families had in their children's educational success. Thus, the notions that some of the university students held about the community they visited and the families living in the community were beginning to be disrupted. This disruption provided a leverage point for more discussion related to the students' perceptions of families of color and those living in poverty. In other words, the university students began to identify their own equity traps and to understand what it would take to change the perceptions of some of those they would soon lead.

Equity Trap 2: Racial Erasure

The next equity trap we identified is racial erasure. We take this concept from the work of bell hooks (1992). She defined *racial erasure* as "the sentimental idea . . . that racism would cease to exist if everyone would just forget about race and just see each other as human beings who are the same" (p. 12). We define this concept as the notion that by refusing to see color, by acting as if we can erase the race of those of color, and by prioritizing other factors—such as economics—over race, we can deny our own racism. For example, when we posed the question, "Why is it that the students of color at this school, and in most schools, are performing at lower levels than their White counterparts?" to the teachers in our original study, the teachers were quick to respond that the issue had nothing to do with race but rather, it was because the students were poor. However, although economics over race was what they would argue, they would frequently use words and phrases in their conversation that would clearly indicate that the primary marker that they had for their students was race.

In addressing this issue, we know that many educators often claim to be "color blind" toward all their students of color. However, we are also aware

that many scholars working in the area of racism, both scholars of color and White scholars, have consistently criticized this idea of being color blind. The basis for this criticism is that the assertion of color blindness is a rhetorical move (conscious or unconscious) that covers or hides an unwillingness to address race and racism. As Sleeter (1993) has said,

> People do not deny seeing what they actually do not see. Rather, they profess to be color-blind when trying to suppress negative images they attach to people of color, given the significance of color in the U.S., the dominant ideology of equal opportunity, and the relationship between race and observable measures of success. (pp. 161-162)

In addition, in the United States, today at least, virtually everyone sees the "color" or race of a person, but that does not mean that being "color aware" needs to equate with racism.

Thus, by ignoring race, by erasing the racial marker of their students, the teachers in our study were able to deny that there was any possibility that they treated their students differently based on their students' skin color. Then, by blaming the students' lack of success on the economic conditions in which the students were living, that is, attributing their students' lack of success to an overarching societal ill of poverty, the teachers could absolve themselves of any culpability for the low academic performance of their students. One teacher said,

> Well, you know, poverty is such a huge umbrella because underneath poverty comes drugs and abuse and . . . all those other things that of course affect the kid's education . . . race is . . . just one little factor. But I think money is where it all comes from.

In other words, how could the teachers be responsible for eliminating the effects of poverty?

Furthermore, the teachers not only said that race was "just one little factor" but also reinforced their contention that race was not an issue by professing to be color blind, as was discussed above. As one teacher said, "I respect every individual as a human. I don't look at their color. I don't judge them in any way based on that." Another teacher admitted that although she did *see* the color of the students, she tried to ignore their color and imagine them as White, certainly a telling substitution. She said, "I can't say that I don't see color, but I see the human and the person as if the skin was the other color maybe and try to respect them just as much."

Another way in which the teachers tried to see the students as White was to point out ways in which their students of color were like the White students in

the school. (It is important to note that there were only seven White students attending East River.) For example, the teachers reasoned that because they had a few poor White students who were performing at the same low level as their students of color, the cause of the students' poor academic performance must be poverty instead of race. One teacher stated, "I have a White kid in my class, and really he's no more for learning and anything than [the students of color], so it's really the neighborhood school, the economic, I think economics have tons to do with it."

However, and this is for us the key to seeing that the color blindness or racial erasure was a rhetorical strategy to hide their racism, although the teachers said that the issue was economics and not race, they would frequently, too frequently to be ignored, substitute words that referred to race when they were speaking about their "poor students." For example, one teacher said,

> I don't see color as an issue. I see, ooh, mom is a prostitute and has left him alone for 4 days now. You know, whether it was a White kid in that situation or a Black kid in that situation, I don't see the color as being the issue. I think that a lot of the issues that they come with perhaps come from the fact that they are in a Black situation over here, where these kinds of attitudes are constant all the time.

This teacher starts out saying that she does not "see color as an issue" and that it does not matter "whether it was a White kid or a Black kid," but then she says that the student is living within a "Black situation," and she characterizes this Black situation as "mom is a prostitute" and mom "has left home for 4 days now." In other words, she tries to say she is not racing the child but then turns around and clearly races the child.

This teacher's comments illustrate what we heard from most of the teachers. The teachers not only verbally substituted race for class but also, in particular, most often referred to the race of the African American students, as if Black is the primary marker of race. The race, however, of the student population at East River was 40% Latino and 56% African American, so many of their students had to be Latino. Thus, in answer to our question—Why are students of color performing at lower levels than their White counterparts?—the teachers all ostensibly agreed that the achievement gap was due to the economic situation of the students, and that it had nothing to do with race. However, the teachers' language, for example, substituting *Black* for *poor*, seemed to indicate that their perceptions toward their students of color were more of a factor than they said.

Wanting to find out more, we queried the teachers' opinions on one of the theories posited as an explanation for the achievement gap—deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). Operationalizing this to the school setting, we explained to

the teachers that when students of color are seen as deficit, oftentimes, teachers lower their expectations for the students, thus, decreasing the probability that these students will perform at high levels. When they heard this, the teachers appeared to perceive this explanation as an indictment that they were racist. They rejected the theory, saying that they were not racist and were not responsible for the failure of their students and, instead, that economics was the problem. One teacher said,

> It's the neglect and the abuse and the poverty that they are living in and, of course, racism is an issue, but I don't think it is *the* issue. I just don't buy it. It sounds like White-girl guilt to me. Oh, it's me. It's because I'm not just enlightened enough to know. I just don't buy it. Period.

These teachers worked hard to "erase" race as a key issue in their lack of success with children of color and tried to give the impression that the race of the child was not a critical variable for them, although they belied their refusal of race with their persistent focus on it (for more discussion of these kinds of issues, see Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1997; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998; J. King, 1997; Scheurich, 2002b; Sleeter, 1993; Solomos & Back, 1994). The question, then, is how can we disrupt and eradicate this equity trap, a question the next section addresses.

Strategies for Addressing Equity Trap 2, Racial Erasure

One way in which the equity trap of racial erasure can be addressed is to have teachers participate in book study groups using books that expose the ways in which Whites often view "racial Others." Particular books that we think would be helpful in this regard include *The Dreamkeepers* (1997) and *Crossing Over to Canaan* (2001), both by Gloria Ladson-Billings; *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking* by Richard Valencia (1997); *Other People's Children* by Lisa Delpit (1996); and *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* by Gary Howard (1999). One way in which we have incorporated book studies into the staff development on our campuses was to restructure the typical weekly faculty staff meeting into book study groups. To do this, teachers grouped themselves into study groups of six or less participants. Each group established its group norms and a schedule for the readings. The teachers then read the agreed on portions of the text prior to coming to the study groups. This allowed the groups to have enough time to discuss the texts at the regularly scheduled weekly faculty meetings, which typically lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

We organized these groups in two ways. One was to have the teachers decide on a schoolwide common text to read and discuss. In this case, the teachers discussed the text in small groups each week. Then, when all the groups were finished discussing the entire text, we debriefed by group with the entire faculty. During these debriefings, topics that were of significant import to changing the culture of the school emerged. For example, when reading passages from Ladson-Billings's (1997) *The Dreamkeepers*, the concept of color blindness emerged. When the teachers read about Ladson-Billings's experience with White teachers and her teachers' insistence that they "did not see color," many of the teachers on the campus recognized themselves. They began to question their own assumptions and beliefs, their dysconsciousness.

Another way we organized book studies was by offering a variety of texts for study groups that were centered on a common theme, in this case, the perceptions of teachers toward their students of color. The groups then chose one of the texts to study. In other words, not every group was reading the same text, but each group was reading a text that had a theme in common with the other texts being read. When each group had completed its text, the group offered a book talk to the whole faculty. This book talk consisted of a synopsis of the text and a critical review of the book. This provided other groups a menu of texts from which to choose for further group studies. The book talks also allowed us to discuss common themes that were threaded through the variety of texts. For more information and educators' comments on book study groups, see MiddleWeb Listserve Conversation (n.d.); although this conversation is not specifically focused on the impact of study groups on the issues of equity and teacher attitudes, it provides educators' comments on the usefulness of this strategy for staff development and group learning.

A third way to address this trap is with *equity audits*. Equity audits (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2001) are a simple way to start a discussion of inequities within a school or district. Equity audits are simply "auditing" the school's or district's data for inequities by race. For example, the staff might disaggregate by race who the students in gifted or honors classes are. Typically, it will be found that a higher percentage of middle-class White students, as opposed to children of color, are in these classes. However, because intelligence is equally distributed across all humans, contra Hernstein and Murray's (1995) *The Bell Curve*, every group by race and income should be equally represented in gifted and honors classes. The disaggregated data, thus, becomes the basis for analyzing the problematic situation, discussing how to equalize the representation of all groups in these classes, and then acting to change the inequities.

Based on this kind of effort, some schools have broadened their criteria for gaining admittance to advanced placement and gifted courses, whereas others have worked harder to identify and enroll more students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Whatever the solution, these schools have understood that removing the achievement gap requires equity across the board in schooling, which in turn means that the highest ranked classes need to be equally representative of all student groups. In addition, the process of analyzing the disaggregated data by race, discussing their meaning, and devising solutions makes teachers aware of the need to focus positively on the race of their students.

Similarly, equity audits can be applied to who teaches whom. We can ask whether the best, most experienced, and/or most highly educated teachers teach the gifted students and typically White students whereas the weakest, newest, and/or least educated teachers teach the students who are struggling academically, a group that is often predominantly students of color? If this is the way a particular school or district works, it can easily be seen that the system is reinforcing race-oriented inequities. In this situation, again, teachers and others can do an equity audit—analyze the data, discuss its meaning, and devise solutions. Whatever solution is applied, the point is to audit the school or district system to make visible where the inequities are being created or reinforced and then to use the resultant data as a basis for a discussion that leads to solutions. What this accomplishes is to have the teachers focus on the fact that rather than erase race as an issue, educators need to focus on how schools are systematically producing inequities by race and how, in response, educators can focus on race positively by dissolving these systematic inequities. Through this process, teachers can come to have a very different view of race and racism.

However, the issue is not just a call to principals to eliminate the equity trap of racial erasure but rather, a call to us at the university to teach our students, who are future principals, to identify and eliminate this trap. Thus, the strategies we are suggesting are ones we have incorporated into our educational administration courses and found to be successful. For example, to address the first strategy, book study groups, we have had our university students engage during class in book study groups of the type they could use as leaders of schools. This, then, allowed our students to participate in, debrief, and analyze the use of book study as a way to engage staffs in substantive conversations regarding the issues of their perceptions of their students, their perceptions of their own racial identity, and the relationship between these two.

In addition, we have taught our students how to conduct equity audits and required that they do an audit on their own school. The benefit of this activity is that many of the students identified significant inequities in their schools,

which they had not noticed before. Some of them, then, lobbied their princi-
pals to make changes in the way their schools were operating, which is simi-
lar to what we would want them to do as school leaders. In response to this
activity, according to their course evaluations, conducting an actual equity
audit was identified as one of the most beneficial learning activities the stu-
dents had engaged in during their graduate course work.

Equity Trap 3: Avoidance and Employment of the Gaze

The next trap is both avoiding and employing the gaze. This idea of the
gaze is taken directly from the work of Foucault (1977). He defined the *gaze*
as surveillance for the purpose of controlling behavior. Foucault said,

> There is not need for arms, physical violence, material constraints [to gain con-
> trol of people, their thoughts, and their behaviors]. Just a gaze. An inspecting
> gaze, a gaze that each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to
> the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this sur-
> veillance over, and against, himself. (p. 155)

In this study, however, we saw the gaze as being operationalized in two
ways—both avoiding the gaze and employing the gaze.

First, the teachers, most of whom had previously taught in more affluent
schools, said they came to East River Elementary to avoid always being
watched by the administrators and parents at their previous middle-income
schools. Therefore, by teaching at a low-income school in which the parents
and administrators rarely questioned them, the teachers felt they were avoid-
ing the gaze. In other words, in their low-income schools, they did not feel as
though they were under the surveillance of parents and administrators like
they were at their middle-income schools. As one teacher said,

> I can slide here, where I couldn't slide on the west side [where the students are
> predominantly White and middle class]. If I walk out of here 10 minutes early
> every day, I don't have the slightest bit of guilt about it because I know I'm
> working up here on the weekends. I'm killing myself during the day. You know,
> there are just little things like that, that I can kind of fudge on because I know,
> they need me here. They will put up with all kinds of shit from me before they
> fire me. . . . You would have to go a pretty long way to get them mad at you here.
> Just showing up is like, thank you, thank you, thank you. . . . You wouldn't do
> that on the other [west] side of town.

Thus, these teachers chose this low-income school to avoid the gaze or sur-
veillance of parents, other teachers, and the administrators like they had ex-
perienced in their White middle-class schools.

Another part of their avoidance of the gaze was that because the teachers' behaviors were not being scrutinized, they could treat the students at East River in ways that would not have been tolerated at their former middle-income schools. As one teacher explained,

> When I taught in, I guess what you would call kind of central northwest . . . I would not dare raise my voice at those kids . . . for fear of them going straight home and telling their mother and her calling me at home that night and saying, "So-and-so said you were mad today, blah, blah, blah" . . . I have said things here that I would have never have said over there as far as stuff like, "Get away from my desk, sit down and leave me alone."

These teachers, then, indicated that their avoidance of the gaze allowed them to treat their children in ways they could not have treated middle-class White children on the other side of the city.

The second way that the gaze was operationalized at East River was its use in norming the behavior of the teachers that spoke out in ways that could disrupt the deficit discourse of the teachers in the study. For example, when Lauren, the music teacher at East River, would speak positively about the students and their families, the other teachers would counter her remarks with negative examples and eventually, Lauren would acquiesce by either agreeing with the deficit comments or becoming silent. The other teachers were, thus, letting Lauren know that they were paying attention (using their gaze) to what she was saying, that they did not like it, and that they wanted her to change her view to fit theirs (i.e., norm her views to theirs).

For example, in the last research session, the teachers were discussing their responsibility for the success of their students and the possibility that they might be lowering their expectations for their students because of their beliefs that the students were unable to perform at high levels. The following exchange between Tammie, a first-grade teacher, and Lauren demonstrates the way that Lauren acquiesced when under the gaze of the other teachers:

> Tammy: It just irritates me to even think that it's me that has anything to do with their failure.
> Lauren: Maybe I'm an egomaniac, but I think teaching has everything to do with it. I really do think that. . . . And Tammy, you are selling, you are making yourself sound like a horrible [teacher] and you are not, you are a wonderful teacher.
> Tammy: No, that's what I'm saying, I am a good teacher, but if a student is a failure, that's not my fault. That's what I'm saying.
> Lauren: But if a student fails in your class, don't you feel, say a first grader?

Tammy: I feel like he [the student] got to me way too far behind, and I can't make up 3 years of difference in 1 year. I don't expect myself to be able to make up 3 years of difference in 1 year and that doesn't make me a bad teacher.

Lauren: That's a good way to put it.

In this exchange, even though Lauren first seemed appalled by Tammy's statements that her students' learning had nothing to do with her, she backed off and accepted Tammy's rationale that the students were just too far behind. Although this is just one example, the teachers, in many of the sessions, were constantly using their gaze to let Lauren know that they were watching her and that she needed to fit her view to theirs, and Lauren repeatedly acquiesced to their norming of her. Thus, these teachers sought both to avoid the gaze of middle-class White parents, by moving from middle-class schools to low-income schools, and to deploy their own gaze to norm the thinking of any teacher who tried to assert an opposing view, especially one based on a positive view of the students or their parents. What is needed, then, as with the other equity traps, are strategies to undermine and remove this equity trap.

Strategies for Addressing Equity Trap 3, Avoidance and Employment of the Gaze

One way to address this equity trap is when hiring new teachers, to hire teachers who have a commitment to the success of all students and avoid hiring teachers who are trying to avoid the gaze. That is, the new teachers who are hired need to be firmly grounded in the belief that all students can learn at high levels and they, as teachers, have the ability to be successful with all students. These new teachers need to respect and embrace the community in which they teach and solicit feedback from administrators, colleagues, and parents so that they can continually refine their skills.

Articulating the characteristics and skills that are needed for teachers to be successful in diverse schools actually is fairly easy; hiring teachers with these characteristics and skills, however, is not. Therefore, principals need all the help they can get. One way to get this help would be to establish hiring committees that bring together people who can evaluate the candidate using different lens. That way there is a greater opportunity that the individuals will be available to identify red flags that reveal a candidate's deficit perspective toward the students or families in the community. We suggest, for instance, that these committees be composed of faculty, staff, administration, parents, and community members that are representative of the racial and economic makeup of the community.

Also, an interview protocol could be used that teases out the candidate's beliefs about students of color and the candidate's ability to serve and be successful with these students. This protocol needs to get at the rationale for teachers wanting to teach at a school in which the majority of the students are students of color and students living in poverty. In other words, the protocol needs to get at whether teachers want to come to the school to be a part of the learning community and help all students be successful or whether they want to come to the school to escape the gaze they may have been under at other schools. Typical questions we ask prospective teachers that we have found to be revealing are "What is your motivation for wanting to teach at this campus?" and "What are your thoughts about working with students of color?" (see, e.g., the protocol developed by the Organizing for Diversity Project by Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratories at http://www.sedl.org/).

In addition to hiring practices that ensure the hiring of new teachers who are committed to the success of all students and who are not just trying to avoid the gaze, systems need to be put in place on campuses so that the gaze is not employed to norm the behavior of dissenters, especially those who advocate for the children. This can be done by establishing group norms that invite all voices to speak and by dignifying the voices of those who have a contradictory opinion. In other words, democratic discussion ought to be the order of the day. A good resource to assist in developing democratic learning communities that dignify all voices is *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups* by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman (1999).

A third strategy is to create a school that is so thoroughly collaborative that no one can hide destructive or deficit teacher beliefs or behaviors. This requires persistent focused attention. That is, if school leaders are constantly visiting classrooms and if teachers are constantly viewing each other's classrooms and constantly working together on improving their teaching, it is much harder for negative beliefs and behaviors to remain invisible. On a similar note, the school can assist parents and other community members in visiting or helping out in classrooms. Indeed, one of the strategies that we know is important to schools being successful with all students is an overall commitment to continuous collaboration among the staff, parents, and community members (see, e.g., Garcia & Scheurich, 2002; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). With all of these strategies, the focus is to prevent the occurrence of contexts in which teachers can hide deficit views and/or try to norm other teachers who disagree with child-negative views.

Here, again, we also need to think about how we professors of educational administration can teach the identification of this trap and strategies to

address it in our educational administration courses. First, students can role-play the interviewing process or participate in actual teacher interviews, using an interview protocol designed to identify attitudes that support classroom equity. In other words, having participated in mock or real interviews, the students would then share with each other the answers they garnered from their questions and together, analyze the answers for racial biases about students of color.

Second, university classrooms could be conducted so that divergent points of view are honored. However, for this to be a learning tool, the actual focus on including and respecting all perspectives must be made explicit. Therefore, as instructors, we would have to explain our values related to encouraging all voices, explain that the organization of the classroom for participation is being modeled as a strategy for our students to use on their campuses once they are principals, and then be receptive to critical feedback when we are less than inclusive of or fail to dignify our students' voices. One strategy that we have found successful in addressing this last point, that is, receiving critical feedback, is the use of exit notes at the end of each class. This is done by having students take the last 10 minutes of class time to reflect on the content, the process, or any other component of that class period and then leave their exit note with the instructor prior to exiting the class. The instructor reads and responds to each note, as the notes are returned to the students with the instructor's responses at the beginning of the next class. This, thus, models an openness to divergent viewpoints, including viewpoints that may be critical of the position the students are training to pursue, that of principal.

Third, another strategy for addressing this trap, one we have used when teaching an instructional leadership course, is to have our university students partner with another teacher on their campus for the duration of the semester. This strategy works best if both participants are currently teachers on the same campus; however, if the university student is not currently in a teaching position, the assignment can be modified. The assignment is for our student to visit his or her partner's classroom and to be visited by his or her partner. In the modified assignment, the university student would visit a teacher's classroom, but there would not be the reciprocal arrangement. These classroom visits are undertaken on a weekly or biweekly schedule. The goal is to make teaching transparent.

This latter strategy is similar to using a cognitive coaching protocol developed by Costa and Garmston (1994) in which each of the teachers invites her or his partner to assess a particular teaching component with which she or he is having difficulty. This conversation takes place in a preconference or informal meeting prior to the classroom visit. The partner then observes the

classroom, makes notes, and follows the observation with a debriefing session with the teacher. Guiding questions are used to structure both the preconference and postconference (for more specifics on how these cognitive coaching observations and conferences are conducted, see Costa & Garmston, 2002). Whichever approach is used, when specifically addressing the issues of equity, the teachers would focus their areas of observation and feedback on practices that either promote or undermine equity. For example, teachers being observed might ask their partners to observe their practices related to inclusion of all students. In other words, the teachers might ask their partners to observe which students they call on in class, how often, and how they respond to each student or group of students, identifying areas in which the teachers are less than equitable. Our experience is that this is a powerful strategy for improving instruction, building trust, and distributing leadership throughout a campus.

Equity Trap 4: Paralogical Beliefs and Behaviors

The last equity trap is paralogical beliefs and behaviors. A paralogism, which is derived from the medical literature, exists when a conclusion is drawn from premises that logically do not warrant that conclusion. In other words, it is false reasoning that involves self-deception. For example, in our original study, the teachers did examine some of their own behaviors. They described these behaviors as losing control, screaming at their students, and, in general, treating the students in disrespectful ways. They then went on to conclude that these negative or destructive behaviors were caused by how their students treated them and each other. The teachers concluded, thus, that their own behavior as adults was not their fault or responsibility. In other words, these teachers drew the false conclusion that their negative treatment of their students was caused by the behaviors of their students (their erroneous premise). The teachers were simply rationalizing their own beliefs and behaviors by blaming their students.

For example, one teacher offered this explanation of her behavior. She said,

> The anger of the kids has caused me [to act this way]; I've gotten sucked into their anger. I mean I've never spoken to kids the way I have spoken to them this year. I mean it's just, I am just this far out of control in my classroom on more days than I want anybody to repeat.

Here the teacher argued that because the students were being angry, she had to act in ways that were inappropriate. Therefore, she blamed the students for her behavior.

Probably, one of the best examples of rationalizing, not only behavior but also beliefs about the students, was that one first-grade teacher referred on several occasions to her first-grade students as "gangsters." She justified her behavior by saying the 5- and 6-year-old boys in her class "ganged" up on her. She stated,

> My boys think it's a competition to show who's the maddest. It is a nightmare when my boys decide that they are going to gang up on me to see who is the maddest because I end up being the maddest, and I have really gotten to the point now where I'm afraid that I have to be really careful with what happens once they make me mad.

Like the other teachers, she blamed her "madness" on the "madness" of her students. This is especially chilling because it sounds like the language of an abuser who blames the victim for the abuse he or she does to the victim (see McKenzie, 2001, for a further discussion of this troubling issue of the use of abusive language by these teachers).

These teachers not only characterized their students in negative ways and tried to control them by losing their tempers and screaming at their students, as in the example above, but also used humiliation, their use of which they, again, blamed on their students. For instance, one fourth-grade teacher explained a situation in which she had the students mock another student in class:

> On Thursday, he got really mouthy with me at the end of the day, and he was going, "So," to me, like that. I went, "So," back to him. I said, "Everybody, let's say it." And everybody said, "So." And that just sent him over the edge . . . and the class, they knew I was not in the mood anymore to deal with him.

Finally, one teacher blamed the students' parents and home lives for her negative behavior. She said,

> Well, we are trying to teach the kids how to respect adults because [there is] a huge lack of respect for adults, and so what they respond to more than doing things out of respect is doing things out of fear. Which is why when you start yelling, they respond. In their home, I don't think they do what their parents tell them to do because they respect their parents. They do it because they don't want to get hit.

Once again, the teachers were using a paralogism by drawing a conclusion from a false premise. They rationalized their destructive behaviors toward their students by concluding that it was the students themselves, their parents, and their home lives that caused them to treat the students destructively. Our point, however, in identifying and explaining this trap, as with the other three traps, is to make it possible to get rid of this trap.

Strategies for Addressing Equity Trap 4, Paralogical Beliefs and Behaviors

Three of the strategies we suggest using to address the equity trap of paralogical beliefs and behaviors are (a) having teachers visit classrooms and schools where the teachers are being successful (for descriptions of successful schools with students of color, see Koshchoreck, 2001; Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes Scribner, 1999; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001), (b) using master teachers or instructional coaches to promote or demonstrate success (Edwards & Newton, 1995), and (c) developing a critical mass of advocates for equity among the teachers. When implementing best practices in a content area, we have found that having teachers visit the classrooms of teachers who are being successful with the same kind of students is extremely powerful. Teachers have told us that seeing equitable and successful practices implemented in classrooms like their own provided them with a useful model, helped them to understand how to create equitable classrooms, and initiated the possibility that they too could be successful. When teachers see classrooms and schools similar to theirs being highly successful with students like theirs, it calls into question their deficit beliefs and behaviors toward their students. This, then, begins the process of breaking down the deficit-oriented attitudes teachers hold toward their students and families that result in behaviors toward their students that are not only inappropriate and illogical but also harmful to or abusive of their students.

Another way to carry out this same strategy is for a master teacher or an instructional coach to teach the teacher's class as she or he observes. Prior to this, the master teacher or instructional coach needs to be aware of the teacher's areas of challenge and needs to observe the teacher who will be helped. The master teacher or coach can then dialogue with the teacher on better ways to interact with her or his students. The master teacher or coach can also model how the teacher needs to treat the children. After some days of practicing the new behaviors, the assisted teacher can be observed again by the master teacher or coach to ensure persistent application of the new practices. This process should continue until the teacher sees herself or himself as responsible for her or his own beliefs and behaviors and until it is clear that

the teacher knows how to appropriately and successfully interact with the students.

The third strategy we propose for eliminating this equity trap is building a critical mass of equity advocates among the staff. Principals know that they, alone, cannot make systemic change on their campus. They need advocates. They need at least some teachers who truly believe in equity and who are willing to stand up for, argue for, and speak out for equity. Thus, we believe that if you can get a group of educators, however small this group is initially, to openly advocate for equity, the erroneous and illogical blaming of students for teachers' destructive behaviors can be ended.

Teaching the strategies we have suggested for eliminating the trap of paralogical beliefs and behaviors in the context of a university setting is somewhat more challenging than the other strategies. For example, to address the first strategy, having teachers visit classrooms and schools where the teachers are being successful, requires actually going to a school and observing. For example, one summer we took a group of beginning master's students to visit a school that is highly successful with students of color. The school, Baskin Elementary, which is in the San Antonio Independent School District, has received recognition from the state of Texas for the high achievement of its students, most of whom are Latino and living in poverty (for more information on Baskin Elementary, see Garcia & Scheurich, 2002). Our field trip to Baskin included a conversation among our university students, the administration of the school, a district administrator, teachers, parents, students, and paraprofessionals. The Baskin staff explained how they had changed their attitudes about their students from a deficit model to an asset model. Once their attitudes changed so did their expectations for their students. What resulted was the reforming of a mediocre school to one that was equitable and high performing. According to our students, the Baskin visit positively affected their thinking about how to create schools that successfully serve students of color.

To address the second strategy for this trap, using a mentor teacher, we suggest having students shadow, for a significant period of time, a mentor teacher as he or she works. The student should keep a reflective journal that chronicles the ebb and flow of the change process—what works, what does not work, and what are their reactions to this process. Knowing, however, that each mentoring situation is highly complex and idiosyncratic to the context, we still believe that this process of observing and reflecting on the part of our university students will give them an opportunity to see a strategy that many have found to be highly effective in changing teacher practices.

The last strategy, developing a critical mass of advocates for equity, is what this entire article, in fact what our entire work, is about. We teach this

strategy in our one-to-one conversations with our students. We teach it by the way we frame our courses. In other words, we explicitly state in our syllabi that we value equity and social justice and that these tenets will be the under-girding framework of each of our courses. We teach it by advocating for students who historically have not been privileged at the university. We teach it by raising issues of racial equity and inequity in our classes, even when this results in difficult and uncomfortable conversations. To us, one of the main problems with education, both at the university and in K-12 schools, is the avoidance of dialogue about race and racism, which results in leaving racial inequities in achievement unaddressed.

CONCLUSION

On average, classrooms, schools, and districts in the United States are inequitable for children of color. As the research that this article is based on shows, some substantial portion of that inequity is caused by the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of teachers and administrators. Consequently, if it is going to be possible to achieve equitable schools, as more and more states are requiring and as, at least rhetorically, is called for in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it is necessary to find ways to change teacher and administrator attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors.

Arguably, the best route to influence current teachers is through the principal, who, research repeatedly shows, is the key to school change. For a principal to change both her or his own and her or his teachers' attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors, the principal must be able to identify and understand barriers to equity or, what we have called here, equity traps. These traps ensnare, undermine, and defeat the ability of educators to create equitable schools. However, if a principal can learn to identify and understand these traps, she or he must also have some practical, proven ways to interrupt and remove these traps so that equity can be achieved. Consequently, we have here provided a description and explanation of four equity traps, and we have also provided practical, workable strategies that principals can use for addressing and removing these traps. Although we do not think this particular work, by itself, will end inequity, understanding the traps and applying appropriate change strategies can certainly improve equity in classrooms, schools, and districts.

To accomplish this, what is needed is for principal preparation programs to include this work with equity traps in their courses and activities. If

professors of educational administration would begin to understand these traps themselves, teach their students about them, and help their students to understand how to identify and remove them in their work as school leaders, we would all be taking some positive steps toward equity in our public schools. Furthermore, if district staff, professional development specialists, and others would embed this equity trap work in the professional development of assistant principals and principals, we could further increase equity in our schools. The point is to change leadership practices and through these changes to help educators understand how we are thinking and acting in ways that undermine and prevent the achievement of equity. Therefore, rather than blaming external causes that we cannot control, rather than lamenting about racism and inequity in schooling, we can change our own attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors in ways that will help create schools that work academically for children of color.

Drawing, then, on what Martin Luther King (1968) said in his *I Have A Dream* speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., more than 30 years ago, we have tried here to "dramatize an appalling condition," the inequitable achievement of children of color in our public schools. However, as King said,

> When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all [women and] men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. (paras. 3-4)

Thus, our intent, trying to follow in King's footsteps and to deeply hear and operationalize his passion and commitment to equity, has been to be helpful to all those who work with educators to improve equity in schooling. We have, as a result, offered a new concept, equity traps, that we think will be useful for improving schools, and we have provided examples of strategies that we believe will disrupt, undermine, and erase these equity traps. In other words, we have tried to contribute to paying off King's promissory note of equity in U.S. education. We hope that professors of principal preparation programs, current school leaders, and others involved with preparing new principals and with improving the practices of current leaders will add these tools to their courses, practices, toolkits, and trainings and that we will all recommit to achieving the great dream of equity in public schooling. Surely, if we want to think of our society as truly democratic, nothing less is sufficient.

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