

A Rethinking Schools Publication

OPEN MINDS TO EQUALITY

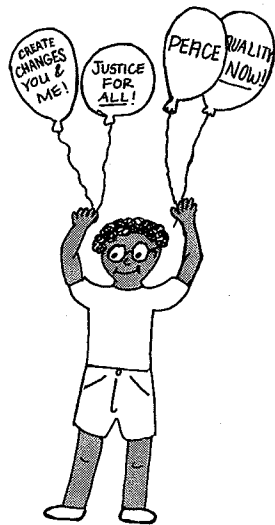


A SOURCEBOOK OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO
AFFIRM DIVERSITY AND PROMOTE EQUITY

Nancy Schniedewind & Ellen Davidson

THIRD EDITION

Teaching for Equality



Teaching for equality challenges us to think in new ways about teaching and learning, the relationship of schools to society and strategies for creating change. Initially in this chapter we describe the model underlying *Open Minds to Equality* that will help you both address issues of diversity in the lives of your individual students and make broader changes in your classroom, school, and community. Since schools and society are integrally related, we examine how current social realities, particularly increasing economic inequality, affect our efforts. Lastly we explore some feelings and issues that may emerge for you as a teacher as you work to open minds and hearts to equality.

A. A HUMANISTIC, SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH FOR TEACHING ABOUT EQUALITY

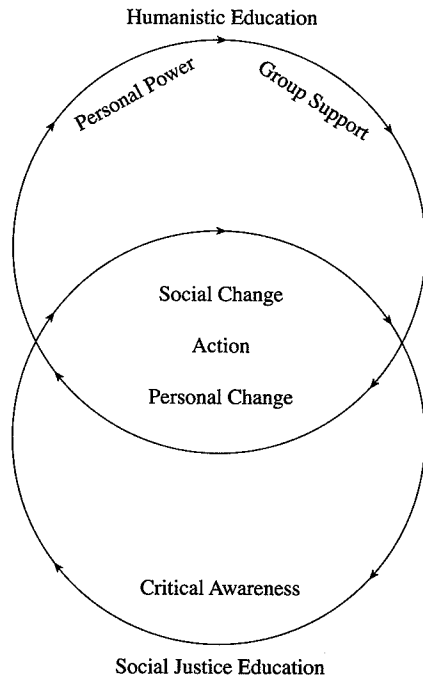
Open Minds to Equality is based on a model that recognizes the importance of both personal and social change. People working for a better society will be more successful with self-knowledge and interper-

sonal skills. Similarly, the more knowledge they have of both systems that maintain inequality and strategies for collective action, the more effectively they can change discriminatory institutions. Our approach emphasizes the importance of knowledge and skills for both personal and social change. It offers personally reflective perspectives and experiential skills from humanistic education. These are integrated with socially-conscious perspectives and skills for critical analysis from social justice education. The four components central to a humanistic, social justice approach for teaching about equality are outlined in the diagram on p. 27.¹

By supporting the development of your students' self-worth, competence, and belief that they can make a difference, you can bolster your students' *personal power*. By teaching students to encourage and care for each other in the class, you can foster a feeling of *group support* among them. Within such a supportive classroom community, students feel safe to act as individuals to promote equality. For example, by standing up for themselves or sticking up for someone else hurt by bias, they feel empowered to take action that fosters *personal change*.

You can foster students' *critical awareness* through activities that increase their understanding of the ways in which difference is used to advantage some groups of people and disadvantage others. Students then can be supported to *take action* to foster *social change* to challenge inequality. Whether such change affects their school (e.g., changing the unwritten rules about who gets to use the basketball courts at recess) or the broader society (e.g., writing to textbook publishers to encourage revisions in biased books), students will be contributing to social justice.

You can foster such change through intentional instructional activities, either those in *Open Minds to Equality* or those you develop yourself. Since *Open Minds to Equality* reflects this model, practical ideas for applying it to your teaching are described below.



1. Humanistic Education: Personal Empowerment and Community Building

Open Minds to Equality reflects a humanistic approach to education that provides teachers with ideas and skills to help students strengthen their personal power and to build a supportive classroom community. It is based on the belief that young people learn most effectively when they are engaged in activities that not only stretch their intellect, but deepen their feelings as well. It assumes we need to teach students skills for self-reflection, working together, and critical thinking. Since it is based on the belief that students learn from the *process* of classroom interaction as well as the *content* of the curriculum, attention is given to both.

A trusting classroom community is the foundation for both opening minds to equality and for strong academic learning. At the beginning of the year, engage in experiences in which class members get to know each other as individuals, and include yourself in the process! Select activities in which students will feel emotionally safe. If you have students share with partners or in small groups first, they feel more comfortable and are then more willing to participate in discussion with the whole class. Also, the content of the classroom discussion will be richer because students have already been stimulated by each other's ideas.

Together with your class, brainstorm ground rules for how people want to interact during the year, especially when discussing issues of diversity. Typically students agree to norms like the following: a) Encour-

age each student's participation; b) Listen to each other without interrupting; c) Put-ups, not put-downs; d) Disagree with others in a kind way: focus on their ideas and not on them as persons; e) No gossip; keep confidential any personal experiences that are shared. Post the ground rules as a reminder of your shared contract. Students may want to modify them as the year progresses.

Respect

Fourth-grade teacher Karen Cathers describes her process of setting norms and thinking about values at the beginning of the school year.

"In the beginning of the year I ask the children, 'What kind of classroom do you want?' They say, 'I want a classroom where everybody is nice to one another. I want a class where I can learn.' ... Somewhere in the discussion someone will use the word respect. I jump on it and say, 'Respect. That sounds like a word we could use.'

"We talk about what respect means and generally come up with a definition that is close to the one I like. 'Respect means everyone feels safe—safe in their head and in their heart and in their body.' If you're not feeling safe in your body because someone is running and you might get pushed up against a table and hit your head, then you're not being respected. You're not feeling safe: therefore, we don't run in the room. Do we need to write 'Don't run in the room'? No, just 'Respect.' It encompasses everything."

"A Cooperative Classroom,"
Cooperative Learning, Vol. 14, No. 2

Teach skills for democratic classroom interaction—listening, sharing feelings, giving feedback, cooperation, and conflict resolution—just as you would reading or math skills. Lessons in Chapters 3 and 4 offer activities for doing this. Students who get a strong foundation in these social skills at the beginning of the year can use and build on them throughout the year and in future years both in and outside of school.

Introduce community meetings early and use them regularly for planning and problem-solving. Hold meetings once a week. Select topics from a list generated by the students. As students learn the process, they can take responsibility for facilitating the meetings. This democratic process is particularly helpful in dealing with diversity issues. (See Chapter 4 for a lesson on facilitating community meetings.)

To maintain democratic classroom procedures throughout the year, ask students to respond to "proces-

sing questions" after completing a lesson. Processing questions help them reflect on their group interaction; how well they worked together and what they could do differently next time. For example: "To what extent did you encourage all group members' participation in the activity? Is there anything you could do differently next time to be more encouraging of others?" Vary the format for their responses, as time allows. For example, in their small groups have students write a short response to a processing question, share their comments, and jot down a plan for improvement to be turned in to you. Or ask students to respond orally in their small groups; then in the whole class elicit examples of effective interaction and areas for change. Since processing questions are the source of very significant learning, we urge you to leave plenty of time to discuss them. In addition, students will work much more efficiently in groups throughout the year.

Well-sequenced discussion questions that help students reflect on what they learned from the content of an activity are important parts of any lesson dealing with diversity. Many discussion questions in *Open Minds to Equality* reflect the following sequence, originally conceived by Terry Borton:

WHAT: Share your feelings and experience of the learning activity.

SO WHAT: Analyze and critically reflect on that experience.

NOW WHAT: Connect these insights to broader equity issues and actions.

To maintain a supportive classroom community, encourage all students' ideas and points of view. Set clear limits regarding biased statements directed at others in the classroom. If, for example, you have set classroom norms at the beginning of the year, most likely "respect for others" would be among them. Since any biased statement targeting another student would be violating those norms, you or another student would respond immediately. You can provide information that corrects misinformation. Ask the student for examples or specifics if s/he is making a generalization. If you have students with diverse points of view, ask, "How do others feel about that?" or "Are others' experiences the same or different?" Share your experiences. You can then follow up with lessons from *Open Minds to Equality* that would address the underlying biases and encourage students to think in new ways and see alternative perspectives.

As you can see, a humanistic approach values students' own lives as content for discussing issues of diversity. Experiential activities, such as role plays and simulations, are also used. These help students get into

the shoes of people different from themselves or experience the dynamics of broader social realities that affect themselves and others. Throughout the lessons in *Open Minds to Equality* we ask students to relate what they are learning to their own lives. With the sense of personal power and group support that comes from a humanistically oriented classroom, students are more ready to address discrimination and act to foster change.

2. Social Justice Education: Critical Awareness of Inequality

Education that aims to promote social justice provides background about the causes of inequality. It also offers ideas to foster fair and equitable schools, communities, and society. It addresses a variety of forms of discrimination—those based on race, gender, class, age, physical ability, learning ability, sexual orientation, religion, and language, among others. It examines the ways some individuals and social groups benefit from inequality while others are hurt. It stimulates awareness, ideas, and skills for change. We can think about concepts of social justice in terms of our own lives as well as teach them to our students.

Important to developing critical awareness is understanding the connections between peoples' personal lives and institutional inequality. Each of us has a social identity which reflects various aspects of human diversity. For example, race is one aspect of a person's social identity. It might be black, white, Native-American, Asian-American, biracial, or racially mixed, and so forth. Some aspects of our social identity are typically constant, such as race and gender. Some, like class, religion, and language, may change over our lifetimes. Others, like age, are guaranteed to change.

Inequality in our society advantages some of us as members of certain social groups and disadvantages others. (We use this word not to imply any innate inferiority, but to mean that discrimination takes away from subordinated groups advantages that dominant groups have.) For example, upper-income people receive benefits and others are hurt by institutional class inequality, such as tax policies that allow wealthy people to pay a lower proportion of their income in taxes than poor, working-class, and middle-class people.

Even when people experience discrimination, their social group memberships can be a source of pride. Many American Indians, for example, maintain a positive group identity, taking pride in being Wampanoag, Pequot, Choctaw, and so forth, and resist the cultural stereotypes of themselves. The history of resistance to anti-Semitism by previous generations is a

source of strength to many Jews. Our social group memberships can often be both painful and affirming.

Given the many aspects of each of our social identities, most of us experience some benefits and pay some prices because of institutional inequality. While an affluent African-American male will benefit from class and gender privilege, he will still face discrimination because of his race. However limited by gender bias an able-bodied woman may be in our society, she still has her sight, an advantage that a blind woman doesn't have.

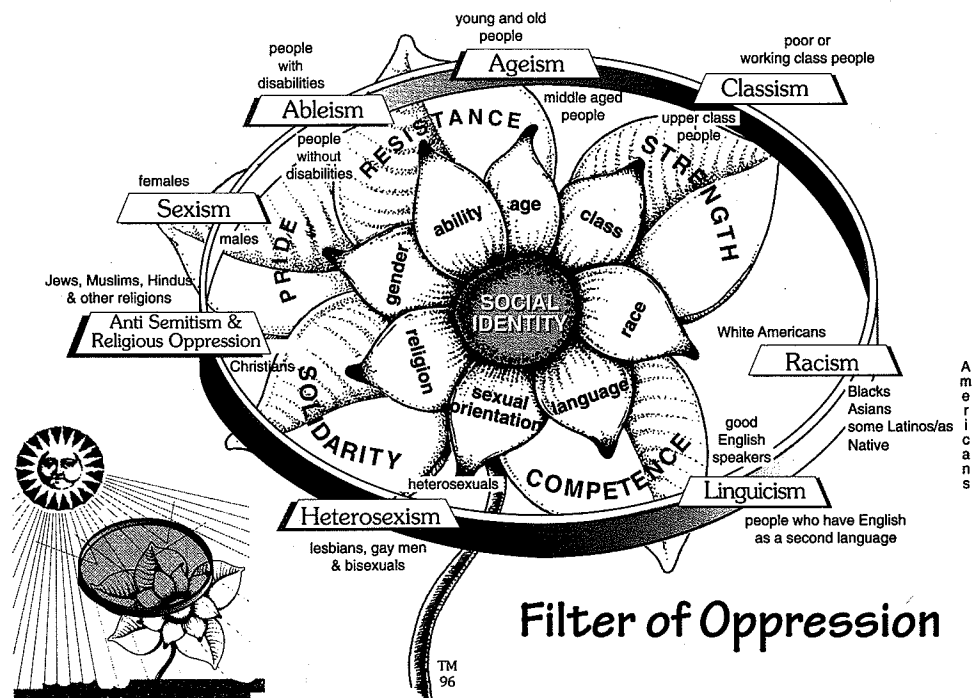
In *Open Minds to Equality*, we explore the particularities of various types of discrimination as well as examine similarities in the way they are perpetuated. Their historical contexts distinguish various forms of discrimination. African Americans, for example, suffer from the legacy of slavery and over two hundred years of racism in the United States. Some immigrant groups of color have voluntarily come to the United States to seek a better life. While experiencing discrimination based on race, they avoid the cumulative effects of historic oppression that African Americans face.

At the same time, different forms of discrimination share similarities. They are perpetuated by stereotypes we are socialized to believe and maintained through accepted norms and practices of institutions. Just as the advertising industry, for example, perpetuates sexism by objectifying women's bodies and presenting an idealized image of female beauty, it reinforces heterosexism by portraying relationships as heterosexual; lesbians and gay men are invisible.

These forms of discrimination combine to create a powerful system of oppression spread throughout social institutions. Since they are interrelated, all must be dealt with to create a truly democratic society. While it would be liberating for a Jewish woman to experience an end to anti-Semitism, would her life be fully fair if she still had to face the ongoing burdens of sexism? How effective would it be to try to change racism alone, when often it is class-based inequality that fuels racist practices?

The similarity in the dynamics of oppression on members of different social groups opens up the possibility for empathy and common understanding. While a white man with a physical disability hasn't experienced racism, he may be able to empathize with a person of color if he makes the connection with his discriminatory experiences rooted in ableism. We can help students make these kinds of connections in our classrooms and schools.

These dynamics are depicted in the Filter of Oppression diagram reproduced here from a lesson in Chapter 7. While not encompassing all types of oppression that people and groups experience, it does depict the following: racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, heterosexism, linguisticism, and anti-Semitism and other forms of religious oppression. The metaphorical flower can represent either an individual person, with various aspects of her social identity, or our society, composed of diverse social groups. In a system of oppression, a person receives privileges or pays prices



Filter of Oppression

based on aspects of her/his social identity. Thinking nationally, social groups are similarly affected. Oppression acts like a filter, allowing sun to nourish some petals of the flower and keeps them from others, affecting the overall health of the flower. The goal of social justice education is to eliminate the filter of oppression so all parts of the flower flourish.

Social justice education also acknowledges the strength that can come from aspects of an individual's social identity, or social group, that are targets of oppression. On the metaphorical flower, the sepals can boost the drooping petals. This represents the pride, strength, competence, resistance, and solidarity that individuals and social groups can develop even when they are oppressed and with which they can resist discrimination.

Oppression hurts us all—the privileged and disadvantaged—although to different degrees. While women are hurt most by sexism, many men suffer too. Some men lose touch with their feelings, miss out on equal and intimate relationships, and never develop personality qualities and skills that are stereotyped as feminine because of sexist norms and values. Oppression is maintained when members of both dominant and subordinate groups accept their roles without questioning them. We can challenge it when we understand how the system works and when privileged groups become allies with disadvantaged groups in working together for change.²

None of us invented oppression, but once we become aware of it we have a responsibility to work to change it. This can be an energizing and hopeful endeavor! The lessons in *Open Minds to Equality* introduce young people to issues of inequality in an accessible, carefully sequenced, supportive way. Through these lessons students learn to think critically about their lives, what they read, and what they see in the media. Our experience, and that of teachers who have used this book, shows that young people have great potential for understanding these issues if introduced to them in meaningful ways.

Our social group memberships have influenced our perspectives. When we make this explicit, students can become more reflective about the sources of their own ideas as well. For example, a teacher explained to her class that because she was white she'd always thought positively about westward expansion and therefore had never before introduced an American Indian's viewpoint of that experience. As we become more aware of how our views reflect our positions in society, we'll be able to listen to each other more sensitively.

Once conscious of the dynamics of oppression, you and your students can become more critically aware of the ways in which inequality is sustained by

the many institutions in our society and explore how various myths maintain the status quo. For example in *Open Minds to Equality* students examine how schools, the media, families, and workplaces, among others, can reinforce practices and values that give unequal power and resources to different groups of people. This awareness stimulates action for change.

Listening with Open Hearts and Minds

The dilemma is ... in addressing the more fundamental issue of power, of whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best for poor children and children of color, both sides do need to be able to listen, and I contend that it is those with the most power, those in the majority, who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process. To do so takes a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment—and that is not easy. It is painful as well, because it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue.

Lisa Delpit, *Harvard Educational Review*,
Vol. 58, No. 3, 1988, pp. 296–297

Education for social justice is multicultural education and more. Some teachers think of multicultural education as teaching about the traditions, holidays, and foods of diverse cultural groups. While valuable, this approach to multicultural education often emphasizes habits of a culture and not deeper issues like values and belief systems. Furthermore, it doesn't deal with the ways in which difference is used to maintain social inequality. A social justice approach encourages teachers and young people to go beyond teaching about culture and to apply the democratic value of fairness to everyone's life and to promote equality for all.

3. Integrating Humanistic and Social Justice Education

When you integrate humanistic and social justice education in your classroom, students will gain understandings and skills for self-reflection and positive

interpersonal interaction, as well as become critical thinkers. Personal and social change occur concurrently as students take personal actions to foster equality and work together to make changes in their school and community. A fifth-grade class offers an example of how the process of integrating personal and social change is ongoing. At the beginning of the school year their teacher used activities from Chapters 3 and 4 to develop students' listening, group process, and problem-solving skills, all strengthening their personal power and group support. Throughout the year they engaged in lessons to raise their critical awareness about inequality from Chapters 5 through 9.

Then students started noticing stereotypes and bias in the books they were reading to second graders in a cross-grade project. Individual students spoke out about the bias they saw in books. As a group they developed criteria for equitable books, reviewed the books they were using, and began choosing books that portrayed all people fairly. Their teacher supported these actions with lessons from Chapters 10 and 11 that strengthened their skills for change. By acting to foster personal and social change, students reinforced their sense of personal power and group solidarity. They then taught second graders how to look for stereotypes in books and created more fair versions with them. This process became ongoing.

The activities in *Open Minds to Equality* reflect this humanistic, social justice approach to multicultural education and are organized following the sequential process for teaching about diversity presented in the Introduction. This approach and sequence can also be the framework to which you apply your own resources and ideas tailored specifically to your students, curriculum, and community.

Educating to Affirm Diversity and Promote Equity

Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant have delineated five different approaches to multicultural education.³ A humanistic, social justice approach combines key elements of three of these. It focuses on building respectful feelings and cooperative interpersonal skills among students, characteristic of a human relations approach. It promotes cultural pluralism and social structural equality, similar to a multicultural education model. It is visionary and prepares students to work actively toward social equality, typical of their multicultural social transformation approach. All elements are vital for educating to affirm diversity and promote equity.

B. THE CONNECTIONS: OUR CLASSROOMS, SCHOOLS, AND THE BROADER SOCIETY

1. Societal Challenges to Equity

Our work in classrooms and schools is not done in a vacuum. We are very much affected by the culture and politics of the broader society. We can better understand the dynamics of the inequality described above both by being politically aware and by participating in collective efforts to change them.

When *Open Minds to Equality* was first published in 1983, young people came into our classrooms from a society that was more accepting of efforts to foster equality. Today bigotry is more socially condoned. Popular talk show hosts encourage divisiveness and the language of hate. Powerful interests have organized to push back the gains that women, people of color, and other oppressed groups had made in the 1960s and 1970s. More fearful and less hopeful, many people concerned with their own survival don't see the connections between themselves and people different from them who may be similarly oppressed. When we better understand the sources of these dynamics, we can address them more effectively.

Increasing economic inequality in the United States is a very significant challenge to the promise of all forms of equality. Since the first edition of *Open Minds to Equality* was published, the economic situation of the average person in the United States has worsened. At the same time, class inequality is typically one of the forms of oppression least talked about in schools. We may have gone to a workshop or taken a course on dealing with racism or sexism in education, but how often have we been offered a workshop on class inequality? We may distance ourselves from looking at issues of class because they seem overwhelming. Critical analyses of economic inequality are typically omitted from the mainstream media. Also, those of us who benefit from our class status have choices about what we do with our money and resources that we may not want to examine. Yet becoming more critically conscious of the dynamics of economic inequality and its connections to racism and sexism and other forms of inequality is central to any hope for social justice.

The real wage—what the average worker's paycheck actually buys after taking inflation into account—peaked in 1973 and has been declining ever since for the average person in the United States. Income inequality has increased, and the number of millionaires has grown along with the numbers of poor people. Economist Richard McIntyre explains that for the past 30 years we actually have been experiencing a

“silent depression,” with the standard of living declining for most people, but for different groups of people at different times during this period.⁴

Economics for the Layperson

Particularly accessible and helpful books that relate issues of economic inequality concretely to our daily lives with humor and good cartoons to boot are:

Chaos or Community: Seeking Solutions, Not Scapegoats for Bad Economics by Holly Sklar

The Field Guide to the U.S. Economy by Johathan Teller-Eisberg, Nancy Folbre, and the Center for Popular Economics

The statistics are staggering. The richest 1 percent of the population now owns more wealth than that owned by the bottom 90 percent of the people all together. The compensation of CEOs of our largest corporations is 500 times greater than their workers.⁵ Eighteen percent of our children live in poverty.⁶ Thirteen million children experience hunger.⁷ About three and a half million Americans experience homelessness in a given year.⁸ Economic studies show that social mobility has not risen for most Americans and has diminished for many, particularly for the poor and for young people.

Economic inequality breeds violence. Violence is not just rough or injurious physical actions, but damage

that is done to people when they are denied dignity, power, and opportunities to live a fulfilling life. While many bemoan the violence in American society, economic inequity is itself structural violence, violence that is done to people by economic policies of corporate and political leaders and carried out through laws and institutional policies. Sometimes those most destitute respond to the structural violence of hunger, joblessness, and poverty with individual acts of violence when their lives have become overwhelmingly painful and hopeless. Changing institutionalized economic inequality is essential for creating a more nonviolent and just society.

The Wrong Target

The attack on affirmative action is an expression of the anger and frustration felt by large numbers of overwrought and underemployed white men. Their anxiety is understandable, but affirmative action is not their enemy. ... These men are caught up in the treacherous world of technological innovation, economic globalization and unrestrained corporate greed. Buffeted by forces that seem beyond their control (forces that are affecting everybody, not just white men), they listen to the demagogues. ‘It’s the blacks doing this to you. It’s the women. They’re getting your piece of the pie. Otherwise you’d be OK.’

Bob Herbert, *The New York Times*, April 5, 1995



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**Many Americans Get Welfare:
Why Are the Poor Targeted?**

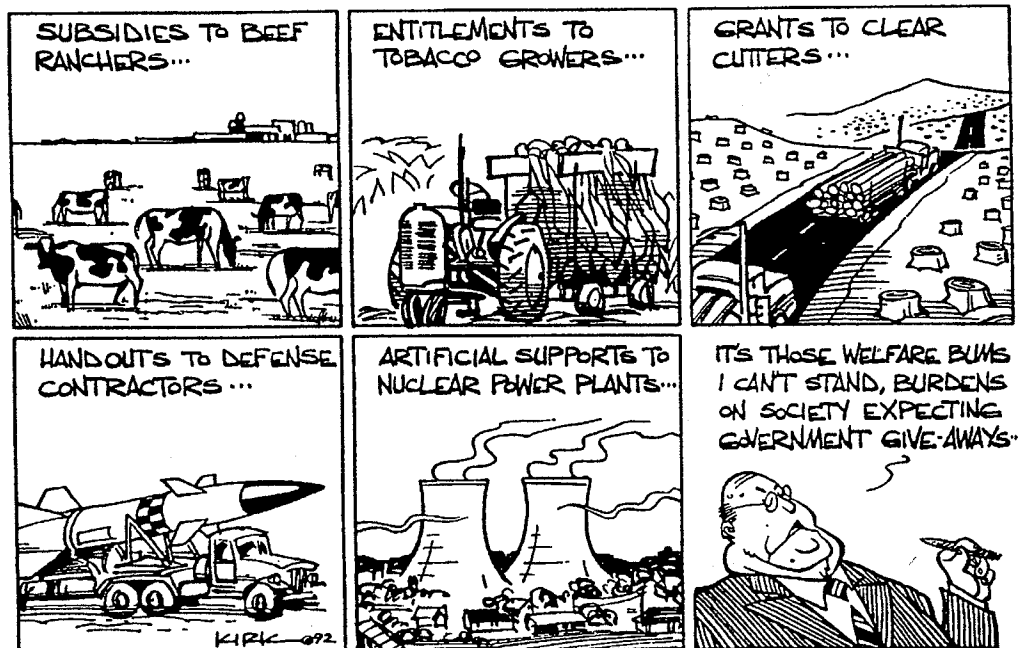
- 63 percent of federal housing subsidies go to households earning more than \$77,000 while 18 percent go to households earning less than \$16,500 (Clara Jeffery, "Poor Losers," *Mother Jones*, July 8, 2006).
- The federal government provides annual farm subsidies to farmers and agribusiness. In 2002, 12 *Fortune* 500 companies received a total of about \$2.5 million in farm subsidies. Eligibility for subsidies is determined by crop, not by income or poverty standards. Agribusiness receives the largest subsidies, while family farmers with few acres receive little or nothing (B. Riedl, "Another Year at the Federal Trough," *Background*, May 24, 2004).
- Wal-Mart made \$10.3 billion in 2004. Yet it received over \$1 billion in state and local subsidies geared to attract businesses to a locale. The federal highway bill contained \$37 million for widening the road in Bentonville, Ark., that is the main access to Wal-Mart Stores Inc. ("Curbing Corporate Welfare," *The New Rules Project*, www.newrules.org, July 23, 2006).

Many Americans are rightfully angry about their declining economic situations. The problem is that rather than direct this anger at its source—corporate and government policies that increase economic in-

equality—many take out their frustrations on others in similar or worse economic straits, often those who are perceived as different or "other." Class inequality can fuel racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination.

While targeting other oppressed groups may provide an emotional release, an alternative analysis points to a different source of the problem. For example, a report on discrimination commissioned by the Labor Department found very little evidence of employment discrimination against white men. A high proportion (71 percent) of so-called reverse discrimination claims brought by white men were without merit.⁹ While often poor people on welfare are blamed as the cause of the declining economic status of "average Americans," most welfare does not go to poor people. Virtually every part of American society receives some "welfare," as indicated in the box at left.

Alternatives to class inequality that would provide greater economic justice would also reduce other forms of inequality. Most Americans don't hear of alternatives that are proposed because the media, itself corporately controlled, seldom reports them. The congressional Black Caucus and Progressive Caucus, for example, annually submit a Common Sense Budget to Congress that would cut the military budget and invest in jobs, housing, education, health care, and so forth. This would change where a U.S. citizen's tax dollar goes, including the 51 percent (2007) that goes to the military.¹⁰



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The Progressive Congressional Caucus: Examples of Proposals

- United States National Health Insurance Act (2004) would establish a national health insurance program to ensure that all Americans will have access to health care.
- Media Ownership Reform Act (2005) would undo the massive consolidation of the media that has been ongoing for 20 years and restore the fairness doctrine, lower the number of radio and TV stations one company can own, and ensure new obligations to the public interest by media companies.
- Common Sense Budget Act (2006) would give \$60 billion earmarked for unneeded programs in the Defense Department budget to schools, medical research, job training, renewable energy projects, and deficit reduction.
- "Progressive Caucus legislation embodies national priorities consistent with the values, needs, and hopes of all our people, not just the powerful and the privileged."

When more citizens know of these economic alternatives that would provide most Americans more economic equity, their energy could go into working for these alternatives rather than into blaming people different from themselves for their situation. Diverse groups of people could work collaboratively for the common good. For example, people have worked together to enact "living wage" ordinances in over 70 localities. They require employers who have a contract with a city or county government or those who receive economic development subsidies from the locality to pay a wage that a full-time worker would need to earn to support a family above the federal poverty line.¹¹

Why not work together for a "maximum wage," for example? Sam Pizzigati, a labor journalist, suggests this idea of "salary caps." While that may sound far-fetched, years ago the idea of a minimum wage did too. Today we take it for granted. There have been periods of greater economic equity in the United States. In 1943, U.S. workers who made the equivalent of at least \$1 million in modern dollars paid 78 percent of their total incomes in federal income taxes. This percentage has decreased ever since. In 2003, the nation's 400 richest taxpayers paid 17.5 percent of their total incomes in federal taxes.¹²

One of our biggest challenges in dealing with all forms of inequality is to keep a vision of the common good guided by principles of fairness. John Rawls, an American philosopher, contends that a society is fair if its level of inequality appears acceptable to a hypothetical in-

dividual who is about to join the society and who does not know if the inequality would work for or against him. In other words, the individual would not know what place he would hold in that society. We can apply such a measure of fairness not only to our society, but to other forms of social organization as well, such as classrooms and schools.

How Fair Is It?

Students who learned to ask questions like those in "How Fair Is Our School?" might become the kind of adults who ask questions like those in "How Fair Is Our Society?"

How Fair Is Our School?

- Is our athletic program fair, knowing I might enter the program as a girl or a boy?
- Is our urban school district structured fairly if I knew I might have an equal chance of going to the crowded inner-city school as well as the magnet school on the outer edge of the city?

How Fair Is Our Society?

- Is our society fair if I knew I would as likely enter it as a homeless person as a middle-class person?
- Is our society fair if I knew that I might enter it and not have health insurance so my serious health problems would not be treated?

And then all might more readily ask, "What can we do to make it fair?"

2. Teachers, Students, and the Power to Change

Our schools can help students envision how our communities and society might be organized to be more fair for all. We can begin by creating such communities in our classrooms. Using their own life experiences, the theory and ideas from *Open Minds to Equality*, and challenges that face their school and community, students can learn about forms of inequality and alternatives to this. They can discover our nation's powerful tradition of collective action for social change.

As you use these activities, set high goals for yourself and your students. Expect that students will learn. When all students feel respected, a basic precondition for learning is met. Help young people who experience discrimination decrease the degree to which they internalize inferiority that schools and society can instill in them. Expect that all children, including those who are privileged, can understand causes of inequality and make changes.

Dealing honestly with young people about diversity issues can be frightening. Our fears are common and natural. If you have just begun to explore some of these issues yourself, it is unsettling to think about being responsible for discussing them with young people. It can help to let go of your expectations of having all the answers and try to trust the *process*. As long as you maintain firm guidelines for respectful communication, letting young people speak about their lives usually results in meaningful learning for everyone, including yourself. Learning about diversity is lifelong for each of us; the more we open ourselves to the process, the more we learn.

We encourage you to begin where you are and do what you can. People are often afraid to take risks, imagining catastrophic results. While sometimes we do experience negative consequences for our actions, often our fears aren't borne out in reality. Think about the context of your particular situation when deciding on change strategies. Look for allies among other educators, parents, and community members. While change is long and hard, we often have more power and flexibility than we think—especially when working together!

It has been our experience that activities in *Open Minds to Equality* can be taught in most school districts. That is not to say that you shouldn't be prepared for resistance. Some school personnel, board members, and parents, either because of misinformation or because their value systems or political perspectives don't encourage considering diverse points of view, oppose teaching toward equality. Your dedication to giving all students a meaningful education and to confronting bias will be important in meeting this resistance. Speak clearly about the role of public schools in a democracy. Public schools must protect the rights of everyone; bias or discrimination toward any person because of their social identity or toward any social group is incompatible with American values of justice and equality.

We also recognize that what we do in schools alone won't change society. By practicing democracy on a small scale students: (a) experientially understand what democracy is; (b) develop insights about what democracy can be when practiced on a broader scale; (c) become knowledgeable about the sources of inequality and approaches to change; and (d) act to create those changes. These are important first steps.

In addition to educating students, we can all be involved in broader efforts to foster social equality. Along with our colleagues, students, parents, and administrators, we can examine our schools for practices and policies that may maintain discrimination, such as tracking and hiring practices, and work to change them. We can become involved in community-based projects and national organizations committed to social justice

and share these efforts with our students.

While you won't use all these lessons with your students, we hope that you read them all; you'll gain valuable information yourself about addressing inequality. Look for examples in your life and your school that relate to the issues raised. Talk to your colleagues about them. As you become more conscious of examples of discrimination in your school we expect you'll feel motivated to work with others to change these.

Alternative and diverse sources of information can support your developing critical consciousness. Books like Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, journals for teachers such as *Rethinking Schools*, and periodicals such as *Extra!*, from Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting,^o keep us thinking. They also introduce us to perspectives and ideas not typically available in the mainstream media, ideas that are important to share with students. The Bibliography provides a wide range of choices in the "Background Reading for Teachers" and "Periodicals" sections.

It is energizing to know that there are numerous educators and people from all walks of life working together—as colleagues, union members, participants in national organizations—to change all forms of inequality in their schools, communities, and nation. We are particularly fortunate as educators to be in a profession where, as part of our job, we can help shape a more just future.

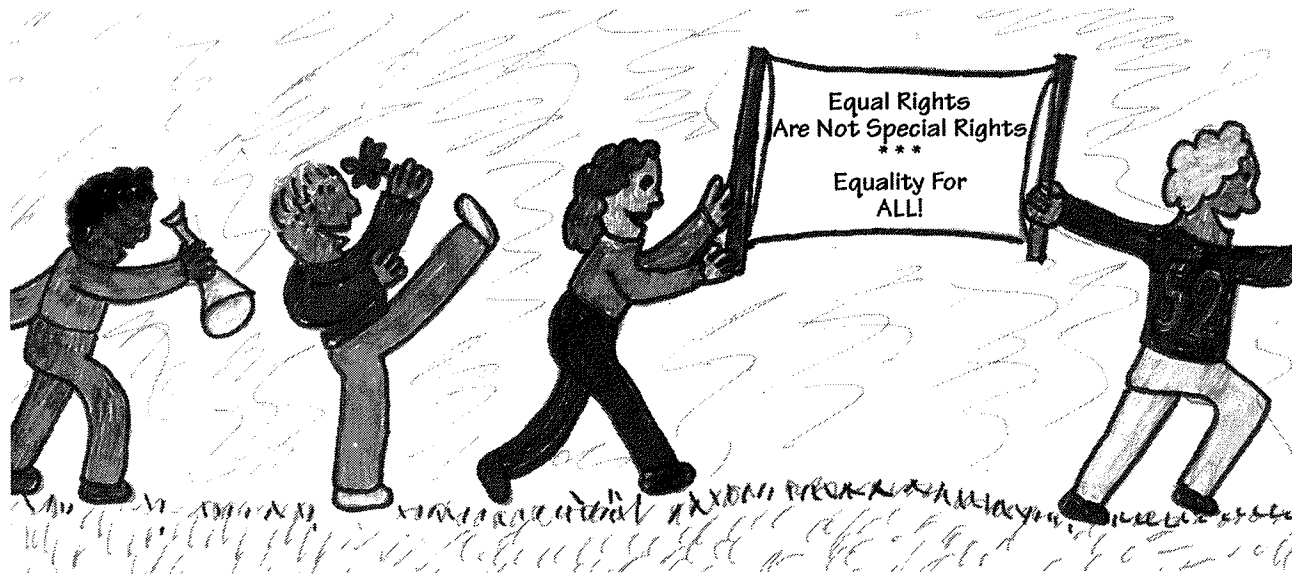
In this book we aren't providing a bag of tricks for promoting equality. We do offer activities and ideas toward that end. Your honesty, critical thinking, commitment, collegiality, and individual and collective action are what ultimately will ensure not only a democratic classroom but an egalitarian society as well. Carry on!

Becoming Fleas for Justice

Sojourner Truth could not stand injustice; she was an early feminist and she constantly fought against slavery; she couldn't read or write but she knew right from wrong. One day when it was terribly unpopular after the civil war to be speaking out against slavery, Sojourner Truth stood up and made one of her fiery speeches. A man stood up in the audience and heckled her, "Old woman, you think your talk does any good? Why I don't care anymore for it than for a flea bite." "Maybe not," Sojourner snapped back at him, "The Lord willing, I'll keep you scratching." ...

You dedicate yourselves to becoming fleas for justice.

Marian Wright Edelman, Children's Defense Fund



ENDNOTES

1. For more details on this model, see Lee Bell and Nancy Schniedewind, "Reflective Minds, Intentional Hearts: Joining Humanistic Education and Critical Theory," *Journal of Education*, Vol. 169, No. 2, 1987, pp. 55-77.
2. See Maurianne Adams, Lee Bell, and Patricia Griffin, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1997), for more information on social justice education as geared to adults.
3. Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant, *Making Choices for Multicultural Education*. San Francisco: Wiley/Jossey Bass Education, 2006.
4. Richard McIntyre, personal correspondence, July 2006. There was an upturn for low-wage workers in the late 1990s, but that upturn was not sustained.
5. Bernard Sanders, "Are You Better Off Today?" *Rutland Herald* (Vermont), Sept. 16, 2004.
6. "America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being," Forum on Children and Family Statistics, July 21, 2006. www.childstats.gov.
7. "The Rich Get Richer, the Poor Go Hungry," *Food First*, Aug. 6, 2002. www.foodfirst.org.
8. "How Many People Experience Homelessness?" National Coalition for the Homeless, Washington, DC, June 2006. www.nationalhomelessness.org.
9. Alfred Blumrosen, "Daily Labor Report," U.S. Department of Labor, March 23, 1995.
10. "Where Your Income Tax Money Really Goes," fiscal year 2007. War Resisters League, New York. This differs from the government's tax budget pie, because the chart depicted on income tax returns buries the expenses of past military spending in nonmilitary parts of its pie. The government's pie also includes trust funds (such as Social Security) which are raised and spent separately from income taxes. This makes the human needs portion of the budget seem larger and the military portion smaller in the government's presentation.
11. "Living Wage: Facts at a Glance," Economic Policy Institute, July 26, 2006. www.epi.org.
12. Sam Pizzigati, "Must Wealth Always Concentrate?" *The Good Society*, Vol. 14, No. 3, November 2005.

Adult Conversations for Understanding

There are a variety of community groups adults can join in order to talk across lines of culture, race, and class. This is a way teachers and children's parents can be involved as adult learners and members of the community can join together to better life for all. One possibility is the Public Conversations project (www.publicconversations.org/pcp/index.asp) where participants learn to discuss difficult issues across typically divisive lines. Another possibility is World Café, designed to have "conversations that matter" with families, friends, workplaces, and in the community (www.theworldcafe.com). A third is citywide book clubs with books chosen to help facilitate dialogues about important issues (<http://news.bookweb.org/news/305.html>).