

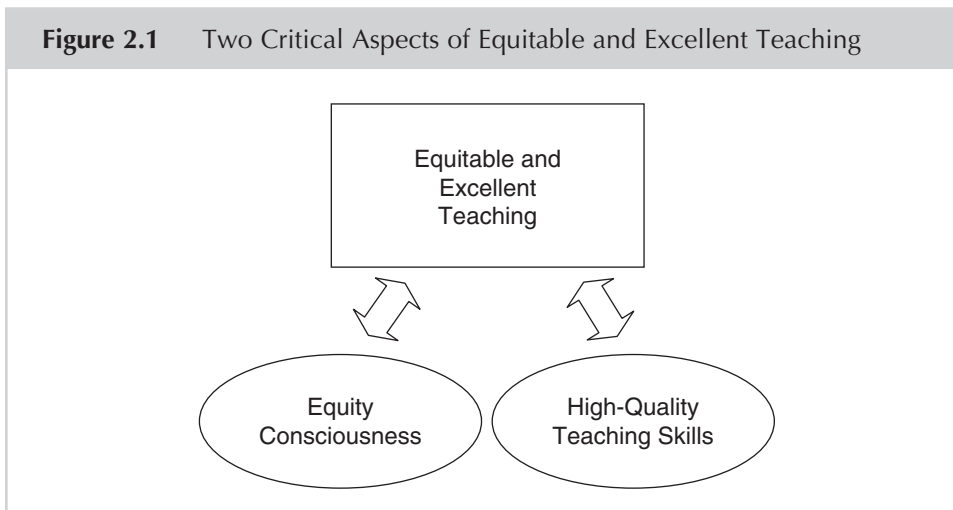
2 Equitable and Excellent Teaching

The dream begins with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes and leads you to the next plateau.

—Dan Rather

In our earlier work (McKenzie, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2006; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009), we discussed two aspects of Equitable and Excellent Teaching (EET) that research (both our own and a considerable body of work conducted by other scholars) has consistently identified as critical for teachers to be successful with all students. These two aspects are equity consciousness and high-quality teaching skills (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Two Critical Aspects of Equitable and Excellent Teaching



In this chapter, we expand our discussion of equity consciousness and high-quality teaching skills and link these more specifically to individual teachers and their classrooms. We turn first to equity consciousness.

EQUITY CONSCIOUSNESS PREASSESSMENT

To begin our discussion of equity consciousness, we have developed a short preassessment for you to use to gauge your current level of equity consciousness (see Figure 2.2 on page 20 at the end of this chapter). Since this is a pretest, it appears before any further discussion of the concept so that readers can use it as a benchmark to see where they are in relation to equity consciousness as we have conceptualized it.

Additional discussion of the rationale for each item on this preassessment and the research on which these are based follows in the next sections.

EQUITY CONSCIOUSNESS DEFINED

The term *equity consciousness* appears regularly in the field of education as well as in other fields of scholarship and practice. Equity consciousness as a concept can be found in widely diverse places, including discussions of U.S. Supreme Court decisions affecting educational equity (Kirp, 1995, p. 107), education policy documents in international settings (e.g., the *Gender Equity Education Act* passed by the government of Taiwan in 2004), and research literature on ethics in conducting ethnographic (field-based, qualitative) research (Laiore, 2003).

The term *equity consciousness* in all these settings generally means a person's awareness of the level of equity and inequity present in behaviors, policies, settings, organizations, and outcomes. In other words, equity consciousness refers to how *aware* or *mindful* people are as to whether others around them are receiving fair and equitable treatment, how well they understand the phenomenon of inequity, and how willing they are to become involved in solutions.

In our discussion of equity consciousness, however, both here and in our earlier work, we mean something quite specific—a set of four beliefs based on our own and others' research in schools and districts that have demonstrated substantial, sustained progress in raising achievement for all students and in closing achievement gaps among students in differing racial and socioeconomic (SES) groups. These four beliefs are

1. that all children (except only a very small percentage, e.g., those with profound disabilities) are capable of high levels of academic success;

2. that *all* children means *all*, regardless of a child's race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, learning difference, culture, language, religion, and so on;
3. that the adults in school are primarily responsible for student learning; and
4. that traditional school practices may work for some students but are not working for *all* children. Therefore, if we are going to eliminate the achievement gap, it requires a change in our practices. (Skrla et al., 2009, pp. 82–83)

RESEARCH ON EQUITY CONSCIOUSNESS

Many people might read the above list of the four central beliefs that compose our view of equity consciousness and think, “Well, *of course* everyone in public schools believes those things.” The same people might wonder why it is even necessary to have a discussion about the topic, much less devote an entire chapter to it. It seems intuitive that the people who chose to work with children and young adults in schools would believe wholeheartedly and enthusiastically in students' capacity for academic success and in adults' responsibility for seeing that that capacity becomes reality.

Research on this issue, however, shows that, despite how intuitive it might seem that everyone in schools believes in all children's capability to be highly academically successful, the real-life views held by educators often are much different. Consider, for example, these findings from the 2009 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*:

- Nearly nine in ten teachers (86%) and principals (89%) believe that setting high expectations for all students would have a major impact on improving student achievement.
- Most teachers (84%) are very confident that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to enable all of their students to succeed academically.

[YET]

- Only 36% of teachers and 51% of principals believe that all of their students have the ability to succeed academically. (MetLife, 2009, p. 3)

Thus, even though the overwhelming majority of teachers believe that high expectations are important for improving student achievement, and even though most believe they have the necessary teaching skills, *only*

about a third of teachers believe that all of their students actually have the ability to succeed. This is a discouraging finding given what we know from research about how holding high expectations for the success of all students translates into actual classroom practices that are important influences on how much students learn (Edmonds, 1979). This is the reason we emphasize, in our first component of equity consciousness, a belief that all students can learn at high academic levels.

Furthermore, teachers' beliefs about students' abilities to be highly academically successful tend to be unevenly distributed based on students' race and family income status. Research has shown that, in general, teachers have less positive views of the capability of African American and Latino/a students (as compared to their white and Asian American peers) and believe students from low-income homes to be, as a group, less academically capable. As Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004) found,

Our data showed that teachers' beliefs about students were patterned by the race and social class composition of the student population. . . . When students were majority African American and low-income, teachers held more deficit-oriented beliefs about them than when students were majority white or Chinese, or when a higher percentage came from middle-income families. Our data further demonstrate that teachers' sense of responsibility for student learning was higher in contexts where they saw students as possessing greater learning resources. When students' deficits were emphasized, teachers believed that students' lack of motivation, families, and limited skills undermined teachers' ability to effectively teach. (p. 93)

This pattern of unevenly distributed belief in students' ability to be highly academically successful is the reason for our emphasis on the second component of our conceptualization of equity consciousness—that *all* means *literally all* students.

The findings of Diamond et al. (2004) also point to the importance of the third component of our idea of equity consciousness—the responsibility of the adults in schools for ensuring academic success. Research suggests that teachers, when asked about the causes of persistent achievement gaps among student groups in public schools, overwhelmingly cite factors *external* to the schools and out of the direct control of educators. For example, a recent survey of North Carolina teachers found that

secondary mathematics teachers endorsed various explanations for the achievement gap; our results suggest that the most frequently

endorsed factors were related to student characteristics. . . . In particular, differences in students' motivational levels, work ethic, and family or parent support were cited. (Bol & Berry, 2005, p. 40)

There is little question that factors such as student motivation and family support do matter, but to rely solely on these factors as explanations for why achievement gaps persist is to avoid accepting responsibility for the *other* important factors that also contribute to the gap that are *within* the power of educators to control and change. Education Trust's Katie Haycock explained it this way:

When we speak with adults, no matter where we are in the country, they make the same comments. "They're too poor." "Their parents don't care." "They come to school without an adequate breakfast." "They don't have enough books in the home." "Indeed, there aren't enough parents in the home." Their reasons, in other words, are always about the children and their families.

Young people, however, have different answers. They talk about teachers who often do not know the subjects that they are teaching. They talk about counselors who consistently underestimate their potential and place them in lower-level courses. They talk about principals who dismiss their concerns. And they talk about a curriculum and a set of expectations that feel so miserably low-level that they literally bore the students right out the school door.

When we ask, "What about the things that the adults are always talking about—neighborhood violence, single-parent homes, and so on?"—the young people's responses are fascinating. "Sure, those things matter," they say. "But what hurts us more is that you teach us less."

The truth is that the data bear out what the young people are saying. It's not that issues like poverty and parental education don't matter. Clearly they do. But we take the students who have less to begin with and then systematically give them less in school. In fact, we give these students less of everything that we believe makes a difference. We do this in hundreds of different ways. (Haycock, 2001, pp. 7–8)

The point Haycock makes underscores the importance of the fourth component of our concept of equity consciousness—educators' acceptance of the inequity built into traditional practices and routines of schooling and acknowledgment that these must change if achievement gaps are to close and if all students are to achieve high academic success.

As our colleagues who study Total Quality Management (TQM) often point out, *every system is ideally designed to produce what it is currently producing*. In other words, whatever systems and routines are currently in place in your classroom are ideally suited to continue to produce what you currently are getting—in terms of student achievement, discipline, and so forth. If you want things in your classroom to change significantly for the better, you will have to be open to making significant changes to what goes on in that classroom. However, not only will you need to consider your equity consciousness, the first aspect of equitable and excellent teaching, you will also need to examine your teaching skills, the second aspect of EET.

RESEARCH ON HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING SKILLS

The research findings on teaching that is successful with all students are consistent, although the language used by the various researchers may not be exactly the same. Figure 2.3 summarizes the research-based recommendations for high-quality teaching skills provided by selected renowned researchers who have studied teaching in schools serving diverse learners.

Figure 2.3 Research-Based Recommendations for High-Quality Teaching Skills

<i>Delpit (2006)</i>	<i>Ladson-Billings (1995)</i>	<i>Sleeter (2008)</i>
See students' brilliance: Do not teach less content to poor, urban children but instead, teach more!	Believe that students are capable of academic success.	Hold high expectation for students' learning, regardless of how they are doing now.
Ensure that all students gain access to "basic skills"—the conventions and strategies that are essential to success in American society.	See pedagogy as art—unpredictable, always in the process of becoming.	Engage students academically by building on what they know and what interests them.
Demand critical thinking, whatever methodology or instructional program is used.	See yourself as a member of your students' community.	Relate to students' families and communities, and read them in culturally accurate ways.
Provide the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views of the competence and worthiness of the children and their families.	See teaching as a way to give back to the community.	Envision students as constructive participants in a multicultural democracy.

Figure 2.3 (continued)

Recognize and build on children's strengths.	Believe in a Freirean notion of "teaching as mining" (1974, p. 76) or pulling knowledge out.	
Use familiar metaphors, analogies, and experiences from the children's world to connect what children already know to school knowledge.	Maintain fluid teacher-student relationships.	
Create a sense of family and caring in the service of academic achievement.	Demonstrate connectedness with all of the students.	
Monitor and assess children's needs, and then address them with a wealth of diverse strategies.	Develop a community of learners.	
Honor and respect the children's home culture.	Encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another.	
Foster a sense of children's connection to community—to something greater than themselves.	Believe knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed.	
	Believe knowledge must be viewed critically.	
	Be passionate about knowledge and learning.	
	Scaffold, or build bridges, to facilitate learning.	
	Believe and ensure that assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence.	

Consistent with the work of the selected authors above, our previous work on this topic (McKenzie & Lozano, 2008; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; McKenzie et al., 2006; Skrla et al., 2009) positions the teacher as the most important factor in ensuring equitable and excellent classrooms. In our 2009 Corwin book, *Using Equity Audits to Create Equitable and Excellent Schools*, we identified and provided an extended discussion of nine skills that we think are among the most important for all teachers to possess. These skills are

- using consistent and reliable classroom procedures and routines;
- clearly communicating expectations for learning;

- stimulating students with high-level and complex tasks;
- ensuring students are actively, cognitively engaged;
- extending student learning through teacher-to-student and student-to-student discussion;
- frequently assessing individual student learning;
- differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs and capitalize on individual assets;
- using an asset model to respond to students' varying cultures; and
- demonstrating respect and care in all interactions with all students and students' families. (Skrla et al., pp. 90–96)

Now that you know what constitutes high-quality teaching skills, you will need to assess your own teaching. We will assist you with this in the following chapters, where we provide you with self-assessments and strategies for improving both your teaching skills and equity consciousness.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter we discussed our framework for Equitable and Excellent Teaching (EET), including equity consciousness and high-quality teaching skills. We began with a preassessment to aid you in determining your level of equity consciousness and followed this with a definition and discussion of equity consciousness and related research. Next, we introduced the second aspect of EET, high-quality teaching skills, offering discussion and research from renowned scholars in the field of teaching excellence and equity. The important takeaway point from this chapter is that teachers must know how to teach; that is, they must have high-quality teaching skills. However, to be an equitable and excellent teacher, they also have to believe that all their students can learn at high levels and ensure that their students do; that is, they must have an equity consciousness. Stated another way, a teacher who has good teaching skills but is only teaching some of the students in the class is not an equitable and excellent teacher. EET teachers believe all students can learn at high levels and that it is their responsibility to teach to all students. They have high-quality teaching skills *and* an equity consciousness. In the next chapter, we describe equitable and excellent classrooms and provide a look into a school where teachers and administrators are working consistently to ensure equity and excellence.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Download the complete *Met Life Survey of the American Teacher*, <http://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/contributions/foundation/>

american-teacher/MetLife_Teacher_Survey_2009.pdf. Which findings from this survey affirm what you would have predicted to be true? Which are surprising to you?

2. Extraordinary teachers who transform students' lives through the power of high expectations have been a frequent focus for Hollywood films, such as *Stand and Deliver*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Dangerous Minds*, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, and *To Sir With Love*. Why do you think this type of transformative teaching is often limited to a few exceptional individuals and is not standard practice for many or most teachers in schools?
3. Reflect on the teachers and professors you have had in your own schooling experiences thus far. Can you think of particular individuals who communicated to you that they believed you were capable of being successful with the subject/material they taught, even when you yourself might have doubted that you could learn it? If so, what effect did this have on you? In what ways did these teachers let you know that they believed you could be successful? Conversely, have you had teachers in the past who you sensed did not believe you could learn what was being taught in their classes? If so, how did this affect you? In what ways was this lack of belief in your ability to learn communicated?

Figure 2.2 Equity Consciousness Preassessment

For the 10 items below, circle the number that represents your level of agreement with each statement based on the scale provided, with 1 being “strongly disagree,” and 5 being “strongly agree.” In responding to these statements, we encourage you to be as thoughtful and honest as possible about what you *really believe*.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = neither disagree nor agree
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree

1. All the students in my classroom are capable of mastering the curriculum and achieving academic success.
1 2 3 4 5
2. All my students, regardless of their life circumstances, bring intellectual, cultural, and personal assets with them to my classroom that I can build on through my teaching.
1 2 3 4 5
3. I see the race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, language, learning differences, culture, and religion of my students as important parts of their identities (i.e., who these students are).
1 2 3 4 5
4. Open acknowledgment and discussion of racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination present in my school can be a useful step toward advancing equity.
1 2 3 4 5
5. The responsibility for student learning in my classroom lies primarily with me and with the other adults in my school.
1 2 3 4 5
6. Most parents care deeply about their children’s learning and want them to do well in school.
1 2 3 4 5
7. The regular routines and procedures in my school do not serve some students and student groups as well as they serve other students and student groups.
1 2 3 4 5
8. If I do everything the same way this school year as I did it last year, it is highly likely that the results (in terms of student learning) will be the same.
1 2 3 4 5
9. As a classroom teacher, there is much I can do to change inequitable procedures and practices.
1 2 3 4 5
10. If I attempt to change the status quo in my classroom and implement more equity-conscious strategies, my fellow teachers and other colleagues may not celebrate and support my efforts.
1 2 3 4 5

Add your scores for each of the ten items and use the scale below to see where your current level of equity consciousness falls according to our definition of the concept.

- 45–50 Indicates highly developed equity consciousness
- 40–44 Indicates well-developed equity consciousness
- 35–39 Indicates somewhat developed equity consciousness
- 34 or below Indicates minimally developed equity consciousness