

Case Analysis Process: An Equity Literacy Approach

Step 1: Identity the problem or problems posed by the case

Step 2: Take stock of varying perspectives, trying to remember the full variety of stakeholders and community members, including those who are involved directly and those who are involved at more of a distance.

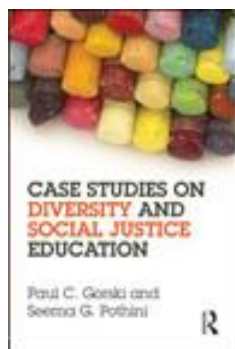
Step 3: Consider possible challenges and opportunities, paying special attention to biases and inequities and how the situation presents an opportunity for dialogue and positive change, not just for those immediately involved, but for the institution.

Step 4: Imagine equitable outcomes, remembering that *equity* requires a fair distribution of opportunity and access—a resolution of the bias or inequity, not just a resolution of interpersonal conflict.

Step 5: Brainstorm immediate-term responses, thinking specifically about how you might respond immediately in order to overcome challenges and maximize opportunities.

Step 6: Brainstorm longer-term policy and practice adjustments, keeping in mind that school and classroom conflict usually are symptoms of bigger structural inequities.

Step 7: Craft a plan of action, including both immediate-term and long-term components.



Designed by Paul C. Gorski (gorski@edchange.org) and Seema Pothini (sg1515@hotmail.com) for their book, ***Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education*** (Routledge, 2014). Check out the book for this more than 35 school- and classroom based case studies on issues like race, class, (dis)ability, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, along with a more detailed description of the case analysis process.

Summary: The equity literacy case analysis process encourages us to reflect deeply on school and classroom scenarios by considering them within a larger context of unequal access to privilege, power, and equity.

Nancy Howard is a new math teacher at St. Ignatius College Prep. Before coming to SI she previously taught math for 4 years at a small SF independent high school (400 students). Prior to that she taught for 5 years at a large (1600 students), elite Catholic prep school on the East Coast. She arrived at SI feeling eager and prepared to take on this new position.

About three months into her first year at SI, Ms. Howard is pleased with her adjustment to her new environment. For the most part, the students are respectful and seem to like her. They did complain a little—predictably, she thought—in all of her classes on the second day of school when, in response to the students' self-selected racially segregated seating patterns she noticed the first day of class, she assigned seats alphabetically. She never mentioned her reason for assigning seats, though, and students were accustomed to seat assignments from some of their other classes, so that tension passed quickly. All in all, things were progressing smoothly.

One afternoon around mid November, Ms. Howard stands writing on the board the day's agenda for her 5th period Geometry class, students make their way into the classroom. She overhears students discussing the previous day's events triggered by the St. Louis County Prosecutor announcement that the DA's office would not press charges against Officer Darren Wilson for fatally shooting teenager Mike Brown last August in Ferguson, MO. The response triggered demonstrations, outrage and some rioting in Ferguson and across the country. Most mainstream news outlets focused on the rioting.

A group of three white boys and one white girl were engaged in conversation. One of the boys, Rob, says, "People are trippin'. This has nothing to do with race. The guy was a thief—he robbed a store, got stopped by a cop and then tried to beat the crap out of the cop. Anyone who does that will get shot. Ain't nothing racist about that."

April, an African American student, sitting nearby in her desk, overhears the comment, momentarily looks at them incredulously, then looks down at her ipad and shakes her head. Ms. Howard notices April's reaction and wants to say something, but hesitates.

Oblivious to April's reaction, the four students continued. "[officer] Wilson was just defending himself against a thug. He's the victim here. If

you ask me, this whole reaction to Ferguson is reverse racism. They need to shoot all those rioters, too."

Then, one of the students turns and notices April. "Hey April, you know what's up, right? You don't think the Ferguson thing is about race, do you? Why does everything have to be about race?"

April, jaw clenched, does not look up from her ipad. "Why are you asking me? Everyone keeps asking me. I don't want to talk about it."

Antonio, a Filipino student, sitting nearby, interjects, "of course it's about race. When's the last time you read about a cop shooting an unarmed white kid? Cops shoot unarmed black kids all the time and nobody does a thing about it"

Rob, replies, "yeah, but you never hear the black community say shit about all the black-on-black crime. It's only when a white cop defends himself against some thug that Hairdo Sharpton shows up and starts crying."

"OK, that's it," interrupts Ms. Howard. "Rob, no swearing—that's a detention. That was totally uncalled for. You can disagree without being disrespectful. You know what, go down to the deans and tell them what you said. I will follow up with you and them after class."

Just then, the start of class bell rings and Ms. Howard notices about half the class staring at her and the rest looking at April, who continues to look down at her ipad and is clearly upset.

Ms. Howard, pointing to a list on the wall of student-made community ground rules, says "Please remember, everyone, that one of our community norms in this classroom is respect. Swearing is disrespectful and unacceptable."

She knew, even as she was making that statement, that she should have handled the situation better. She also knew she needed to figure out a way to respond more thoughtfully in case it happened again.

"Now, please take out your homework and turn to page 221 in your text..."

**Adapted from EdChange Case Study 6.4*