

THE WORKING CLASS: POVERTY, EDUCATION AND ALTERNATIVE VOICES

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Confronting and closing the gap of social/class division is one of the greatest challenges we face as a society today. Removing barriers and systemic inequalities in education by providing a fair curriculum for all is essential and is key to closing this gap as well as truly enabling social mobility. Further, within this a creative approach needs to be utilised to further enhance individual talents among lower socio-economic classes.

So, how can we develop an educational structure and curriculum that will support the idea that education should impact in “social justice” and empowering communities, families and generations of children towards building a fairer world for all to thrive. *The working class* seeks to give an overview of strategies and a range of provisions that can be used to provide this, in a clear understandable, readable and accessible way. This is a big book, with 46 chapters, whose titles are single words, specifically chosen to reflect themes/feelings that relate to ‘working-class’ as well as attempting to diminish thoughts that this ‘status’ implies failure.

In fact, the underlying theme is that ‘poverty is multifaceted’ and that engagement through meta-cognitive awareness and growth mindset is linked to both emotional and social experiences through different ‘forms of capital’.

This is a book that you will want to consider deeply, reread, consistently refer to and take time to reflect on. It is not just political: if you are an educator who wants to make change for social justice it provides proven effective and innovative solutions.

Each of the chapters provides personal experiences that the author has used constructively in their own professional practice to ensure that ‘children who face additional challenges due to growing up in poverty’ are able to engage and contribute positively in the long term. In some chapters there are poems and rhymes, which are an excellent alternative and accessible way of expression through repetitive and interactive language. r.

The first chapter titled ‘Failure’, reflects a feeling that both educators and young people have about the education system but also the ‘real’ lack of social justice opportunities for all. This is followed by chapters on a variety of themes discussing the need for conceptualisation and relevance of the curriculum. Additionally the use of arts in the form of drama, film, dance and music, all effective ways of building self-expression and social skills, is discussed in a number of chapters. The importance of the community is discussed by Will Ryan and how that resulted in a sense of belonging. Still more relevant is how the curriculum and teaching were successfully adapted

to ensure that social, cultural skills were enriched within this context, leading to better engagement, questioning and achievement. The focus on taking time, not only to listen, but also to get to know our children is the focus of the last few chapters, as well as providing a sense of ‘true understanding’ through unconditional love, leading to better self-regulation skills.

The working class at first glance might appear to be a political book but do not be fooled: rather it is an empowering and uplifting read about proven effective strategies that will change our education system to truly embrace inclusion and equality. Further it will help create future generations of children who, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, will be globally questioning creative and innovative problem solvers who can contribute positively to society and their communities.

If we want true social mobility, this comes from within and should not be founded on exclusive elite education for the few but an inclusive, just and fair education for all. And if we believe, as Paulo Freire states, that education exists not in and of itself but in order that things change for the better then we need to rethink our education system fast. ■

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