

TEN COMMITMENTS of a Multicultural Educator

By Paul C. Gorski for EdChange

I will inform myself. I will find strategies for bolstering equity based on *evidence of what works*. I will look at this evidence in light of what I know about my own community. I will not limit “evidence” to quantitative data. I will seek the voices of local communities and stakeholders. I am not the expert of their experience.

I will understand the “sociopolitical context” of schooling. I must be willing to see and understand the bigger context of societal and global inequity because, even if I don’t feel like I have the power to end global poverty or systemic racism, these conditions do have profound impacts on students and families.

I will work at intersections. I will not become so focused on a single identity or oppression—I have been focused largely on class equity lately—that we fail to consider how identities and oppressions are intersectional. I cannot work effectively for racial justice if I am not doing queer justice, gender justice, and so on.

I will refuse the master’s paradigms. I will not minimize educational inequity to standardized test scores; refer to people as “at-risk”; discuss multicultural competencies as essential to “preparing us to compete in the global marketplace”; or call something an *achievement* gap that is actually an *opportunity* gap.

I will never reduce intercultural education to cultural activities or celebrations. I will never settle for celebrating diversity or for “food, festivals, and fun.” Although they can be part of a bigger multicultural initiative, they do not, in themselves, make a school more equitable. In fact, they can strengthen stereotypes.

I will not confuse multiculturalism with universal validation. Multicultural education must never become about valuing every perspective equally. For example, multiculturalism does not value heteronormativity or male supremacy *even when one explains that these views are grounded in her or his religion*. A multicultural space—a school or classroom, for instance—cannot be both intercultural *and* hegemonic.

I will resist simple solutions to complex problems. Simple solutions are tempting, but they distract us from finding serious solutions to complex problems. I will not buy into models and paradigms that over-simplify complexities, regardless of how popular they are. That the school district next door endorses a program or an approach is not enough; it might be the best evidence that the program or approach fits snugly into the status quo.

I will work with and in service to disenfranchised communities. I must practice the ethic of working *with* rather than working *on* disenfranchised communities. I will apply my commitment to equity and social justice, not just in the *content* of my multicultural work, but also in my *processes* for doing that work.

I will reject deficit ideology. I will refuse to identify the source of social problems by looking *down* rather than *up* power hierarchies. I reject the notion that people are disenfranchised due to their own “deficiencies.” I commit to challenging any suggestion that we can fix inequity by fixing people disenfranchised by it.

I will put justice ahead of peace. Although conflict resolution and mediation programs can be useful, they should not replace efforts to redress injustice. Never, under any circumstance, should equity concerns be handled through processes that assume that parties occupy similar spaces along the privilege-oppression continuum. In the end, peace without justice renders the privileged more privileged and the oppressed further oppressed; a condition that might be understood as the exact opposite of authentic multiculturalism.