

**CCR #3:**

**Literacy in Connection to Equity**

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EDUC 393: Foundations of Education

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I have been eagerly looking forward to our session on effective literacy instruction since the beginning of Block 1. Developing foundational skills is such a vital part of continued student success and it is something I care deeply about. After reflecting on some of my literacy-related experiences and our discussions around equity in both EDUC 393 and EDUC 390, I am developing a deeper understanding of how all these pieces fit together.

I grew up the oldest of six and the first three of us were born within two and half years of each other. My mother was a preschool teacher before she started an in-home daycare that allowed her to become a hybrid stay-at-home mom. She went to lengths to ensure my siblings and I grew up in a rich, literacy-focused environment. We benefitted from all the enrichment activities she built into her daycare program, she read to us daily, and we had a stable, structured home environment. Yet, even still, not all of us learned to read easily. My closest sister and I could read by the time we went to Kindergarten but my brother struggles with basic reading and writing to this day. I remember, even as a child, questioning why it was so easy for me to learn to read and why he just could not seem to get it. If we grew up in the same environment, went to the same school and had the same teachers, what was the hangup? He was eventually assessed and diagnosed with dyslexia. As he progressed through school, he experienced increasing levels of frustration and difficulty because at a certain point, you are no longer learning to read, you are reading to learn. His lack of foundational literacy skills has created additional obstacles in the workplace and meant that he relies on others to help him navigate things like buying insurance, applying to post-secondary trades training, and reading his mail. I now see that the different outcomes he and I

achieved within very similar environments demonstrate the difference between equality and equity. Building equity in the classroom means making an effort to provide each child with what they need to reach their potential – and that will not look the same for every student (Safir, 2016). This understanding will help me to uphold Standards 1 and 5 in my teaching practice (BC Teachers' Council, 2019).

The trauma and science-informed approach to literacy presented in our recent EDUC 393 lecture deeply resonated with me (M. Baerg, personal communication, November 13, 2023). It links back to the theme of my first cross-curricular write which was focused on accepting that learning does not happen in isolation. There are so many visible and invisible factors in students' lives that affect their learning. The textbook by Jo Chrona (2022) we have been utilizing in EDUC 346 has helped me to realize the power and importance of considering personal, historical, and societal contexts as an educator. The connection between literacy and equity is also something I have been reflecting upon in the last few weeks. As she reflected on the realities of Indigenous education, Jo Chrona (2022) posited that we must work to accept that education is not yet the great equalizer in society but it has the potential to be if educators do the necessary work to create change. I have reflected on that sentiment in the back of my mind since I read it and I think it applies to the conversation about literacy gaps as well. If educators take the steps to embrace and implement effective literacy instruction in a way that genuinely centers student success and prioritizes equity, education will have a much greater chance of acting as the great equalizer in society. Literacy has so much power and it gives students the key to unlock a wealth of knowledge.

Determining how to best bring high expectations, effective literacy instruction, and equity together is something I am on a quest to discover. When the idea of being a “warm demander” was introduced in class, it was an “aha” moment for me (M. Baerg, personal communication, November 6, 2023). Striving to be a warm demander involves holding a genuine belief in student capability bolstered by high expectations and reinforced by a structured environment which sums up so much of what I value as a future educator. Something interesting I read as I was diving into what it means to be a warm demander is that high expectations help to create a sense of respect within student-teacher relationships (Alexander, 2016). High yet attainable expectations communicate your belief in your students’ capability which helps them to realize it themselves. Rita Pierson is a wonderful example of a warm demander who firmly believed in the power of instilling self-efficacy in her students. The idea that every child deserves a champion is such an impactful and nourishing message for teachers and students alike (Pierson, 2013). I am beginning to see how vital creating an equitable, stable, structured, predictable, and calm classroom environment is to effective literacy instruction.

I was alarmed to learn that almost anything can be labelled as research-based because it left me wondering what can truly be trusted. After learning about the issues with the three cueing approach in our EDUC 393 lectures, I have been able to pick up on its impacts in the classroom. During one of my observational practicum days, I worked with a Grade 2 student who is struggling to learn to read and frequently acts out to cope with his frustrations. I was asked to read in a small group setting with him and another student. When I prompted him to read the sentence in front of him, he refused

and said that he just is not as smart as everyone else in the class and that is why he cannot read. It was clear as he tried to read that he was just guessing at the words based on the illustrations and the first letter in the word. His mindset was closed and lacked a sense of self-efficacy in those moments. Looking back on this situation with what I know now, I can see that this student would benefit from guidance from a warm demander and additional time spent focused on phonemic awareness.

It was both encouraging and discouraging to learn that 95-97% of students can learn to read with the right supports (M. Baerg, personal communication, November 13, 2023). It was encouraging in the sense that this potential exists but it was discouraging to think of the reality of the situation comparatively. When 25% of non-Indigenous and 40% of Indigenous students are not testing as proficient readers, there is a clear gap between the potential and the achieved outcomes (M. Baerg, personal communication, November 13, 2023). There is a considerable amount of work to be done to change the landscape of literacy outcomes in British Columbia's education system. Warm demanders armed with the right knowledge and tools to provide effective literacy instruction have the potential to enact real change. I hope to grow into an educator who participates in that change.

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