

## Principals' Perceptions of Education Equity: A Mindset for Practice

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Received: October 5, 2019 Accepted: November 3, 2019 Online Published: November 11, 2019

doi:10.5539/jel.v9.n1.p1 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v9.n1.p1>

### Abstract

In an effort to define a principal education equity mindset, we initially identified six essential attributes of the construct and attempted empirically to confirm our definition by gathering a combination of quantitative and qualitative data from 128 principals. We found variations in the expression of the mindset attributes and commitment by principals to create conditions that support success for all students. In addition, we exposed two unanticipated attributes and variations on attribute commitment. The principals' personal, professional, and school variables were associated with significant differences in the mindset attributes. We provide a discussion of our findings, implications for practice, and directions for future research.

**Keywords:** mindset, leadership, education equity, principal, success for all

### 1. Introduction

Leadership has considerable influence on the climate, priorities, and personnel within a school (Gardner & Eirosova, 2006). School principals can inspire or suppress a climate of assuring equitable education for all students (Theoharis, 2008). Principals supporting equitable education create a climate and culture of equity through their instructional leadership, collaboration, advocacy, encouragement of transformation, and engagement in evidence-based practice (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). We maintain that if principals are going to be effective at supporting educational equity, they must hold an education equity mindset. We consider a principal education equity mindset to be the embrace of a philosophy that motivates engagement in actions that increase opportunities for all students to achieve to their highest capacity.

In our search of the literature, we were able to find multiple reports on measuring aspects of education equity (e.g., Hernandez & Kose, 2012), but we were not able to locate any studies empirically documenting an education equity mindset of principals. Since there is a need for principals to have the mindset to effectively implement an education equity culture, there is justification for creating and empirically documenting a model for principals' education equity mindset. The gap in the literature and the warrant for our research lead us to wonder: what are the attributes of a school leader education equity mindset model, how are the attributes related, how does the mindset manifest in principals' work, and how are the attributes related to differences in personal and professional variables.

### 2. Review of Literature

#### 2.1 Educational Equity Mindset

School leadership is a complex endeavor that can maintain status quo or lead to system transformation (Grigaly, Schumacher, DeCraan, & Saraioua, 2010). The mindset of a principal is likely to provide insight into their priorities, vision, and anticipated actions, and into the personal philosophy they use to guide their work (Rowley, 1991). Mindsets, particularly in association with a complex situation (e.g., education equity), are typically multifaceted constructs that can be conceived in multiple ways through different lenses (Arnor & Taylor, 2003; French, 2016; Gollwitzer & Bayer, 1999). Through French's (2016) review of different mindset conceptions he argues that mindsets should be considered as being on a spectrum rather than constrained to a specific set of criteria. Embracing French's recommendation, we define mindset as a combination of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, dispositions, that can be used to explain personal actions and/or choices. Thus, a mindset is reflective of the identity of individuals—how they perceive themselves—which in turn influences how they interact with others, and how they perceive their environment and responsibilities (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995).

Structuring our conception of mindset within the perception of education equity, we created a model of an education

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