

Cultivating Equitable Learning Environments for All Students

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Ideology to Action

My ideology

How I interpret
a disparity

Solutions I can
imagine for the
disparity

Extent to which
I'm a threat to
inequity or to the
possibility of
equity

Actions I choose
to address the
disparity

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Objectives

1. Consider what it means to "cultivate equity" deeply and robustly
2. Learn equity literacy tools that help guide deep and robust equity work
3. Practice applying those tools

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Understanding "Equity"

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What you know:

What is inequity?

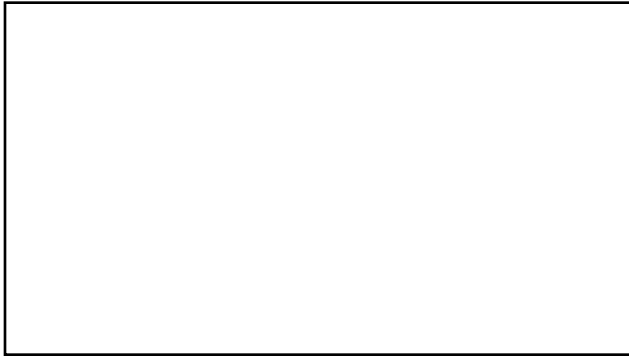
What is equity?

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Components of Equity

1. Distinguishing *equity* (fairness or justice) and *equality* (sameness)
2. Identifying and eliminating racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of bias and discrimination
3. Fairly distributing access, opportunity, and participation

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1. Distinguishing Equity and Equality

From NAME:

"...an equitable education that benefits all students **by providing each learner with the specific type and amount of resources**, which serve as access to opportunities, needed to be successful."

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1. Distinguishing Equity and Equality

- Acknowledging unlevel playing field in and out of school
- How offering *equality* reproduces *inequity* (example: stringent tardy policies)

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1. Distinguishing Equity and Equality: Awareness Activity

- What is an example of a policy or practice in your classroom, school, district, or organization that is applied *equally* but still has a disproportionately negative impact on students experiencing poverty?

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2. Identify and Eliminate Inequity

From NAPE:

"...**eliminate educational barriers** based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age, or other protected group status..."

Also: gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and more.

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2. Identify and Eliminate Inequity

- Not just "giving each student what they need" in terms of individual attention, but also in terms of access to just policies, practices, and institutional culture
- Equity as *identifying and eliminating inequity*

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3. Fairly Distribute Access and Opportunity

From the Canadian Education Association:

"...to enable all students to ... have a range of options [and] take part in [and] contribute to society."

- Who has a say in policies, practices, and institutional culture? Based on whose interests are these formed?

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Equity Literacy Definition of "Equity"

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Defining *Inequity*

An unfair distribution of *material* and *non-material* access and opportunity resulting in *outcome and experience disparities* that are predictable by race, socioeconomic status, gender identity, home language, or other dimensions of identity.

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Defining *Inequity*: "material and non-material"

- Material access
- Non-material access

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Defining *Inequity*: "outcome and experience disparities"

- Outcome disparities (grades, test scores, graduation rates)
- *Experience disparities* (access to feelings of belonging, bias-free learning environments)

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The Importance of Experience Disparities

- Can you think of a student who is doing well academically, but is experiencing a lot of bias and inequity on the way?
- Does that look or sound like "equity"?

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Bit of Reflection

- Based on our definition of *inequity*, what is an example of a persisting inequity in your school, district, or organization? Who does the inequity harm? Who does it benefit?
- If you know it's an inequity, why does it persist?

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Defining Equity

A commitment to action: the process of redistributing access and opportunity to be fair and just.

A way of being: the state of being free of bias, discrimination, and identity-predictable outcomes and experiences

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So:

An *equitable* classroom or school is not just one where we focus on individual students' needs, but one where we are:

1. actively identifying and eliminating all forms of bias and inequity, and
2. actively developing anti-bias, equitable policies, practices, and cultures.

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Four Common "Equity" Approaches

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Four Common "Equity" Approaches

Approaches:

1. Diversity appreciation
2. Cultural competence
3. Inclusiveness
4. ***Equity literacy***

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Approach 1: Diversity appreciation

Characterized by:

- Emphasis on surface-level diversity celebrations
- Often stereotype-laden depictions of people from marginalized communities
- Lack of attention to bias and inequities



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The Trouble: Diversity appreciation without equity

- On the equity scale of 1-10: 1.5
- What sorts of activities have you done in your classroom or school that resemble diversity appreciation without equity? What can you do instead that might be more substantive?

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The Potential: How we can appreciate diversity equitably

- Engage local communities in conversations about how best to celebrate their cultures and histories.
- Be sure not to use stereotyped depictions of particular groups of people; remember that **individual cultural or identity groups are vastly diverse**. Be sure to emphasize the diversity within diversity.

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The Potential: How we can appreciate diversity equitably (cont'd)

- Celebrations of diversity are more meaningful if we also address the ways some people are marginalized because of their "differences."
- Be careful not to use students from groups that are marginalized as "props" in the diversity education of their peers.

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Approach 2: Cultural competence

Characterized by:

- Efforts to understand our own cultures and identities and how they inform the way we interact with people who have cultures and identities that are different from ours
- Focus on learning about the "cultures" of students and families so we can relate to and communicate with them more effectively cross-culturally



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The Trouble: Cultural competence without equity

On the equity scale of 1-10: 3

Limitation of cultural competence:

- We want to make sure we have **equity** competence, not just *cultural* competence.

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The Potential: An equity approach to cultural competence

- Focus not just on group-level cultures, but also on individual cultures of students and families.
- Focus on deep-level culture like values and beliefs, not just on surface-level culture like food and dress.

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Step 3: Inclusiveness

Characterized by:

- Providing a welcoming, engaging school environment that ***meets the needs of each individual student.***
- Ensuring that curricula, learning materials, policies, and practices reflect the diversity and interests of the student body.



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The Trouble: Inclusivity without equity

On the equity scale of 1–10: 6.5

Limitations of inclusivity:

- Without a specific focus on equity, we might not recognize all the ways our classrooms and schools are not “inclusive.”

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The Potential: Inclusivity with equity literacy

- Make sure curriculum is inclusive holistically, not just during special weeks or months.
- Make sure policies and practices do not unintentionally alienate or exclude students.
- What is an example of a school policy that does not take into consideration that challenges and barriers a particular group of students experiences outside schools?

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Step 4: Equity

Characterized by:

- Identifying and eliminating all elements of bias and inequity—related to race, class, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, (dis)ability, language, and other dimensions of difference—from all aspects of education
- Creating **actively equitable** policies, practices, and institutional cultures

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Another View of the Steps

1. **Diversity appreciation:** We host a cultural festival about Mexico based on surface-level culture and artifacts
2. **Cultural competence:** We learn about Mexican American culture and the diverse individual cultures of Mexican American families in our school in order to communicate with them more effectively

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Another View of the Steps

3. **Inclusiveness:** We make sure Mexican American students see themselves reflected deeply in curricula, policies, and practices
4. **Equity:** We eliminate the biases and inequities Mexican American students and families experience in our classrooms and schools; we enact actively equitable policies, practices, and institutional cultures

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Where is your institution?

Approaches:

1. Diversity appreciation
2. Cultural competence
3. Inclusiveness
4. ***Equity literacy***

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Equity Literacy

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Story 1



Perspective 1: There's racism here and nobody's doing anything about it.

Perspective 2: What we need to do here is celebrate the joys of diversity.

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Story 2

Transgender student: "The most adverse experiences I've had have been at this school."

Counselor: "Unfortunately there aren't any questions about that on this [ACEs] survey"

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The "Literacy" in Equity Literacy

Knowledge, Skills, Will

- Not a list of practical strategies or an additional thing to do, but an **ideological commitment** applied to *everything* we do
- Based on a **depth** of understanding how equity and bias operate and how to cultivate equity

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The Central Focus in Equity Literacy

- Identify inequity
- Eliminate inequity
- Cultivate equity

Why does it seem we work so hard to figure out how to do equity in every possible way but these?

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Five Abilities

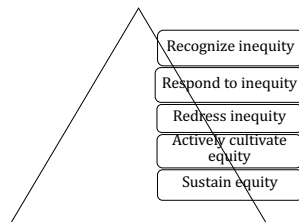
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Purpose of the Five Abilities

- They allow us to apply a strong equity lens to everything we do
- They provide an outline for what the thrust of equity professional learning ought to focus on

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Equity Literacy Abilities



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1. Recognize Inequity

- Do I **recognize** even the subtlest bias and inequity in my sphere of influence?
 - I can't respond to or redress an inequity I don't recognize

Example: *interpretation of behavior referral data*

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2. Respond to Inequity

- When a bias or inequity becomes apparent in a particular instance, do I have the skills and the will to **respond**?
 - Reactive, in the immediate term

Example: *adopting online platform for family communication*

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3. Redress Inequity

- Do I have the knowledge and skills to understand how individual instances of inequity are usually related to bigger sets of conditions related to *individual ideology* and *institutional culture*? Am I able to **redress** those instances by proactively addressing their root causes?

Example: *transphobia in the hallways*

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4. Actively Cultivate Equity

- Do I have the knowledge, skills, and will to apply an equity lens to every discussion, every decision? Is equity an add-on or afterthought or do I **actively cultivate** it through every policy and practice and throughout institutional culture?

Example: *family engagement*

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5. Sustain Equity

- As we progress toward a full equity commitment, people who are used to the advantage of extra access and opportunity are going to complain and attempt to slow or reverse that progress. Do I know how to sustain equity efforts in the face of this push-back? Do I have the will to do so?

Examples: (a) GSA, (b) raised money

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Case Study

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Family Night

<http://edchange.org/case.pdf>

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Reflection Questions

What are the equity concerns?

What are the ideological blockages?

What is your immediate-term response?

How would you redress the inequities in the longer term?

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Guiding Principles of Equity Literacy

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Purpose of the Guiding Principles

- Provide basic guidance for maximizing the transformative potential of our equity efforts

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Direct Confrontation Principle

- An equity commitment requires *direct confrontations* with inequity. Avoid strategies, programs, and initiatives that are not a threat to inequity.

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Prioritization Principle

- We must actively prioritize the interests of students and families whose interests historically have not been prioritized.

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Equity Ideology Principle

- Ideological shifts drive sustainable shifts in practice and policy. Equity transformation begins with ideological transformation.

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#FixInjusticeNotKids Principle

- Equity efforts never focus on “adjusting” the cultures, mindsets, values, emotions, or attitudes of students or families from marginalized groups. They always focus on transforming conditions that marginalize students and families from marginalized groups.

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Reflection Exercise

- Direct confrontation principle
- Prioritization principle
- Equity ideology principle
- #FixInjusticeNotKids principle

Which of these would be the most transformative principle for your school, district, or organization to embrace?

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Eleven Dimensions of Application

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Purpose of the Eleven Dimensions

- Ensure a *comprehensive* approach to equity rather than a reactive whack-an-inequity approach
- Understand how inequitable policies, practices, programs, and ideologies interrelate and inform one another

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The Eleven Dimensions

1. Individual ideology
2. Curriculum and co-curriculum
3. Pedagogy and student engagement
4. Classroom and school culture and values
5. Leadership and equity accountability
6. Classroom, school, and district policy
7. Programs and initiatives
8. School, family, and community relationships
9. Physical space
10. Hiring
11. Professional learning

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1. Individual Ideology

- Do members of our school community embrace equity values and commitments?
- What sorts of biases and presumptions persist and how do they influence our policies, practices, and institutional culture?
- Are strong equity-oriented values rewarded or punished?

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2. Curriculum and Co-curriculum

- Are our curriculum and co-curriculum inclusive of and validating to the voices, experiences, and communities of students from historically marginalized groups?
- Are they relevant to students' lives?
- To what extent are biased and oppressive narratives upheld in our curriculum and co-curriculum?
- Which students have access to engaging curricula and co-curricula?

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3. Pedagogy and Student Engagement

- Which students have access to the most engaging, higher-order pedagogies?
- How are students' voices, experiences, narratives, and counter-narratives incorporated into our teaching?
- How do "classroom management" strategies inform our pedagogy and student engagement?

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4. Classroom and School Culture and Values

- In whose image and based on whose values are our classroom and school culture constructed?
- What is the *implicit culture* or *hidden curriculum* of our classroom or school and whose interests does it most serve?
- What sorts of biases and inequities are embedded in our school culture, values, and procedures?

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5. Leadership and Equity Accountability

- Are school and district leaders visibly and vocally supporting equity efforts?
- Are school and district leaders visibly and vocally supporting the strongest equity advocates?
- What accountability strategies do leaders use for members of our community who resist investing in equity commitments?

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6. Classroom, School, and District Policy

- In what ways are our policies biased and inequitable?
- To what extent are our policies equitably applied?
- How quickly do we replace inequitable policies and practices with equitable policies and practices?

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7. Programs and Initiatives

- How are our programs and initiatives informed by an equity lens and commitment?
- To what extent are programs and initiatives that were not designed with equity in mind used as “equity” programs and initiatives?

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8. School, Family, and Community Relationships

- How are equity values and principles incorporated into how we perceive school, family, and community relations?
- In what ways do we center the social and cultural capital of local communities in decision-making?
- Which families and community members are most likely to believe we have their best interests at heart?

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9. Physical Space

- To what extent have we considered physical aspects of the school—how it is organized, what is hanging on the walls, and so on—through an equity lens?
- Which spaces in the school feel unwelcoming, unsafe, or oppressive to particular groups of students?

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10. Hiring

- Do we hire with equity literacy in mind?
- How do we assess interviewees' equity commitments?
- Are we committed to hiring people with an equity commitment?

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11. Professional Learning

- Do we offer ongoing professional learning opportunities designed to strengthen our equity ideologies as well as our equity practices?
- Do educators from marginalized groups feel safe and affirmed when speaking up about equity issues in professional learning contexts?

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Spheres Reflection Handout

<http://edchange.org/spheres.docx>

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Five Places to Start

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1. Drive out the deficit ideology

Equity cannot live where deficit ideology lives.

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2. Review policies and student conduct handbooks

Usually absolutely full of inequitable policies and shaming, finger-wagging language.

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3. Ask the most marginalized members of the community and *believe what they say*

But don't ask if you're not willing to change based on their feedback.

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4. Start with ideology. Ideology drives practice.

There are no practical shifts without ideological shifts.

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5. De-track

There's no justification for tracking.

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Bonus: Remember those changes you're imagining because of COVID

- Eliminating grading
- Eliminating homework
- Instituting policies about what can be assigned

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