

Basic Principles for Equity Literacy

An important aspect of equity literacy is its insistence on maximizing the integrity of transformative equity practice. We must avoid being lulled by popular “diversity” approaches and frameworks that pose no threat to inequity—that sometimes are popular *because they are no real threat to inequity*. The basic principles of equity literacy help us ensure we keep a commitment to equity at the center of our equity work and the broader equity conversation.

1. The **Direct Confrontation** Principle: The path to equity requires direct confrontations with inequity—with interpersonal, institutional, cultural and structural racism and other forms of oppression. “Equity” approaches that fail to directly identify and confront inequity play a significant role in sustaining inequity.
2. The **Equity Ideology** Principle: Equity is more than a list of practical strategies. It is a lens and an ideological commitment. There are no practical strategies that will help us develop equitable institutions if we are unwilling to deepen our understandings of equity and inequity and reject ideologies that are not compatible with equity.
3. The **Prioritization** Principle: In order to achieve equity we must prioritize the interests of the students and families whose interests historically have not been prioritized. Every policy, practice, and program decision should be considered through the question, “What impact is this going to have on the most marginalized students and families? How are we prioritizing their interests?”
4. The **Redistribution** Principle: Equity requires the redistribution of material, cultural, and social access and opportunity. We do this by changing inequitable policies, eliminating oppressive aspects of institutional culture, and examining how practices and programs might advantage some students over others. If we cannot explain how our equity initiatives redistribute access and opportunity, we should reconsider them.
5. The **“Fix Injustice, Not Kids”** Principle: Educational outcome disparities are not the result of deficiencies in marginalized communities’ cultures, mindsets, or grittiness, but rather of inequities. Equity initiatives focus, not on “fixing” students and families who are marginalized, but on transforming the conditions that marginalize students and families.
6. The **One Size Fits Few** Principle: No individual identity group shares a single mindset, value system, learning style, or communication style. Identity-specific equity frameworks (like group-level “learning styles”) almost always are based on simplicity and stereotypes, not equity.
7. The **Evidence-Informed Equity** Principle: Equity approaches should be based on evidence for what works rather than trendiness. “Evidence” can mean quantitative research, but it can also mean the stories and experiences of people who are marginalized in your institution.

Equity Literacy for Educators: Definition and Abilities

Equity literacy is a comprehensive approach for creating and sustaining equitable schools. The foundations of equity literacy are (1) a commitment to deepening individual and institutional understandings of how equity and inequity operate in organizations and societies, and (2) the individual and institutional knowledge, skills, and will to vigilantly identify inequities, eliminate inequities, and actively cultivating equity. At the individual level, when we embrace equity literacy we learn to become a ***threat to the existence of inequity*** and an active ***cultivator of equity*** in our spheres of influence.

More than cultural competence or diversity awareness, equity literacy prepares us to recognize even the subtlest forms of bias, inequity, and oppression related to race, class, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, language, religion, immigration status, and other factors. Through equity literacy we prepare ourselves to understand how *experience* disparities, not just quantitatively measured outcome disparities, affect student access to equitable educational opportunity free of bias, inequity, and discrimination.

According to the equity literacy framework, equity is not merely about *giving every student what they need to succeed* in an individual sense. This way of imagining equity obscures our responsibility to address institutional bias and inequity. Instead, equity is a process through which we ensure that policies, practices, institutional cultures, and ideologies are *actively equitable, purposefully* attending to the interests of the students and families to whose interests we have attended inequitably. By *recognizing* and deeply understanding these sorts of disparities, we prepare ourselves to *respond* effectively to inequity in the immediate term. We also strengthen our abilities to foster long-term change by *redressing* institutional and societal conditions that create everyday manifestations of inequity.

We constructed the core of equity literacy around the following five critical abilities. We believe that professional learning related to equity, diversity, and inclusion should focus first on cultivating these abilities in all educators.

Abilities	Examples of Knowledge, Skills, and Actions
1. Ability to <i>recognize</i> even the subtlest biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies	<p><u>Equity literate educators:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notice subtle bias in learning materials and classroom interactions; • are curious about ways school policies and practices disadvantage some students in unintentional (or intentional) ways; and • reject deficit ideology, or the view that outcome disparities (in test scores or graduation rates, for example) are caused by the cultures or mindsets of students of color, students experiencing poverty, or other students from marginalized communities.

<p>2. Ability to respond to biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in the immediate term</p>	<p><u>Equity literate educators:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop the facilitation skills and content knowledge needed to intervene effectively when biases or inequities arise in a classroom or school; • cultivate in students the ability to analyze bias and inequity in classroom materials, classroom interactions, and school policies and practices; and • foster conversations with colleagues about equity concerns in their schools.
<p>3. Ability to redress biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in the long term by addressing their root causes</p>	<p><u>Equity literate educators:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proactively advocate against inequitable practices and policies and advocate for equitable practices and policies, rather than responding only when individual instances of bias or inequity arise; • recognize and address the root causes of educational outcome and experiences disparities rather than addressing only the symptoms of these disparities; and • understand how biases and inequities operating in classrooms, schools, and other organizations are connected to larger societal conditions.
<p>4. Ability to actively cultivate equitable, anti-oppressive ideologies and institutional cultures</p>	<p><u>Equity literate educators:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • instinctively apply an equity lens to every policy, pedagogy, practice, program, and process decision; • prioritize the interests and needs of the students and families whose interests and needs historically have not been prioritized; and • understand that equity is a baseline commitment that should inform everything, not a program, strategy, or event to layer on top of all of the other programs, strategies, or events.
<p>5. Ability to sustain bias-free, equitable, and anti-oppressive classrooms, schools, ideologies, and institutional cultures</p>	<p><u>Equity literate educators:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand that equity progress often elicits concerns and complaints from people who are accustomed to a disproportionate share of access and opportunity, and are able to recognize these concerns and complaints as an indication of progress, not as a reason to roll back progress; • know how to communicate with certainty and confidence a commitment to equity even in the face of these concerns and complaints; and • are cautious of the constant barrage of popular programs and strategies that often pose as “equity” but have little to do with equity and stay committed to embracing a long-term transformative approach based on evidence for what makes an institution like theirs more equitable and just.