EQUITY LITERACY: *HOW HIGHER ED AND P-12 EDUCATORS CAN WORK TOGETHER TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS INEQUITIES AND PROMOTE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN FOR ALL CHILDREN AND ADULTS*

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Quick Reflection

What is the biggest barrier to progress in educational equity today?

What is your most important resource when it comes to overcoming that barrier?

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A Few Starting Assumptions

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Starting Assumptions

1. All students deserve access to equitable educational opportunity. Race, gender identity, sexual orientation, home language, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, religion, and other identity factors should not determine what level of access students receive.

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Starting Assumptions

2. Due to bias and inequity, not all students do have equitable access.

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Starting Assumptions

3. We cannot control everything, such as the biases and inequities that exist in the wider society that have an impact on students.

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Starting Assumptions

4. But we do have the power to decide not to
   recreate those biases and inequities
   within our own *spheres of influence*.

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Starting Assumptions

5. We all have good intentions; we want the
   best for each student.

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Starting Assumptions

6. Good intentions are not enough.

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Other Introductory Stuff

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Overview

1. Learn the basics of a transformative approach to equity
   and justice in schools
2. Explore ideological barriers making that approach difficult
   to implement
3. Consider some conceptual and practical tools for
   overcoming those barriers (including the equity Bogeyman,
   critical race theory)
4. Tomorrow: Discuss challenges specific to a K-12/Higher
   Ed collaboration on equity
5. Tomorrow: Discuss opportunities specific to that
   collaboration

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**A Transformative
Approach to "Equity"**

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What you know:

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

• Acknowledging unlevel playing field in and out of school

• How offering *equality* reproduces *inequity*

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1. Distinguishing Equity and Equality: Awareness Activity

• What is an example of a policy or practice in a classroom, school, district, or higher ed institution that is applied *equally* but still has a disproportionately negative impact on students who already experience the most inequity?

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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

• Going forward, filtering everything through an equity and justice lens

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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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Bit of Reflection

• Based on our definition of *inequity*, what do you feel is the most urgent inequity that needs to be addressed in education at any level?

• How would you address it? What would equity look like?

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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* educational institutuion 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.

Very few education degree or licensure programs prepare educators for how to do this—or even to understand in deep ways what it means.

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Mitigative / Transformative

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Illustration: Addressing "Homelessness"

Mitigative . . . . Transformative

What are the most common things people and organizations do in response to homelessness—to support people experiencing homelessness?

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Illustration: Addressing "Homelessness"

Mitigative . . . . Transformative

Are we addressing the causes of homelessness or helping people who are homeless survive as people who are homeless?

(We need to do both, of course. But we actually need to **do both**.)

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Parable 1: The Starfish

- The "respond" ability of equity literacy—short term reaction
- The trouble with the Starfish approach to equity
- "Starfish" initiatives?

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Parable 2: The Babies in the River

- The "redress" ability— transformative change at the roots
- The difficulty of *transformative* approaches
- Transformative initiatives?

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Both/And

A call for the both/and, but more attention to addressing core issues rather than nibbling around the inequity edges

What we want is the *transformation* not just the series of *mitigations*

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Transition to Reflection Questions

1. What is a *starfish* equity initiative you've observed—one that gives some percentage of students a little extra access without really transforming the inequitable conditions? (Maybe identify one in K-12, one in higher ed.)
2. How could those initiatives be reimagined with a *transformative* equity approach?

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Biggest Ideological Barriers to Transformative Equity

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Barrier 1: Deficit ideology

- Identifying the source of disparities within communities marginalized by the disparities
  - Example: discipline disparities
- Quick question: How do you see deficit ideology hamper equity progress?

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Barrier 2: Grit ideology

- Identifying the source of disparities as a lack of "grit" or "resilience" while ignoring inequities
- Quick thought: Issue isn't just the individual ideology, but how this view informs practices and programs

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Barrier 3: Hyper-punitive culture

- Reactive rule-flinging
- It's notable how many teachers come out of their credential programs having "studied" SEL and trauma-informed practices, but still with an intense hyper-punitive view

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Barrier 4: Toxic positivity

- Tendency to be so positive and so desperate for everyone to "just get along" that there's a denial of equity concerns

- Note the recent obsession with "kindness" in schools and how it has replaced equity in many instances

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A Few Conceptual Tools to Guide More Transformative Collaboration

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Tool 1: Avoiding Common Equity Detours

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What Do I Mean by *Equity Detours*?

- Things we might do to create the optics of equity progress

- Ways we might avoid the hard work of racial justice by focusing on things that are more manageable, especially for white educators

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***Pacing for Privilege* Detour**

- Pacing equity work in a way that prioritizes the comfort and interests of white people over progress toward racial equity.

- Example: "We're not ready for that."

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***Deficit Ideology* Detour**

- Focusing on adjusting the cultures, mindsets, values, emotions, or grittiness of students who are marginalized rather than adjusting the conditions that marginalize students, like racism.

- Example: Gap between strategies to address discipline disproportionality and the *actual causes* of discipline disproportionality.

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Celebrating Diversity Detour

- Mistaking celebrations of diversity for progress toward equity.

- Example: "Diverse Friends Day" and why *celebrating diversity* in the absence of *racial justice* is for white people.

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Shiny New Thing Detour

- Counting on popular programs and initiatives that were never created with racial equity in mind to do the racial equity work.

- Example: grit (Duckworth) and growth mindset (Dweck)

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Poverty of Culture Detour

- Focus on vague notions of "culture" as a way around confronting racism.

- Example: cultural competence/proficiency

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Culture Fetish in Education

- Intercultural education
- Cross-cultural education
- Multicultural education
- Culturally relevant
- Culturally responsive
- Cultural competence
- ***Cultural proficiency***
- ***Culture of poverty***
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)

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Individualizing Detour

- Focusing exclusively on individual biases and actions, ignoring institutional conditions

- Implicit bias, microaggressions, even white privilege in some cases

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Spotting the Detours

Which of these are operating in your sphere of influence?
- Pacing for privilege detour
- Deficit ideology detour
- Celebrating diversity detour
- Shiny new thing detour
- Poverty of culture detour
- Individualizing detour

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Using the Detours

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A Few Thoughts

- Develop a habit of naming the detours as they happen *(Did we just take the deficit ideology detour?)*

- Use the naming to stay focused. (The equity principles will help.)

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Tool 2: Transformative Equity Principles

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Direct Confrontation **Principle**

- A racial equity commitment requires *direct confrontations* with inequity—with racism. Avoid strategies, programs, and initiatives that are not a threat to racial inequity. Identify racism, eliminate racism.

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Prioritization **Principle**

- We must actively prioritize the interests of Students and Families of Color. Equality is not enough.

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Equity Ideology **Principle**

- Ideological shifts drive sustainable shifts in practice and policy. Offering five teaching strategies to educators with racial bias results in racism. Racial equity transformation begins with ideological transformation.

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Redistribution Principle

- Racial equity requires redistributing access and opportunity. We do this by identifying and eliminating all the ways racism operates. If we can't describe how our decisions are redistributing access and opportunity, we should rethink them.

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One Size Fits Few Principle

- No racial 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.

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#FixInjusticeNotKids Principle

- Racial equity efforts never focus on "adjusting" the cultures, mindsets, values, emotions, or attitudes of Students or Families of Color. They always focus on transforming conditions that marginalize Students and Families of Color.

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Reflection Exercise

- Direct confrontation principle
- Prioritization principle
- Equity ideology principle
- Redistribution principle
- One size fits few principle
- #FixInjusticeNotKids principle

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

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Tool 3: Critical Race Theory (a few tenets)

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Longstanding Conceptual Distinction

- Conservative approaches
- Liberal approaches
- Critical approaches

(See Peter McLaren's and others' discussion of conservative, liberal, and critical multiculturalism from the 1990s, for example)

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Longstanding Conceptual Distinction

- Conservative approaches - assimilationist
- Liberal approaches – celebrating diversity, learning about cultures, individualistic
- Critical approaches – examination of power; accumulative and structural in nature

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Some Basic CRT Tenets

Note that all the tenets were constructed to address inadequacies and limitations in common ways of thinking about, talking about, and responding to racism

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Some Basic CRT Tenets

Racial realism and the "permanence of racism" (Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell):

Examine racism, not as a series of occasional racist attitudes or events, but as a set of accumulative conditions that are operating all the time. Note that because they're operating all the time, they become normalized institutionally. We threaten racism when we expose all the ways it's operating.

Example: racial discipline disparities and PBIS

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Some Basic CRT Tenets

Story-telling and Counter-storytelling (Bell, Delgado):

Emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge of People of Color in understanding and analyzing racism. Raises questions about theoretical constructs created in traditional academia for studying and understanding the experiences of People of Color without the voices of People of Color. Challenges deficit ideology.

See "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research" by Daniel Solorzano and Tara Yosso

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Some Basic CRT Tenets

Suspicion of Liberalism as a Response to Racism

We need big, sweeping, structural changes, not just celebrating diversity, learning about cultures, integration into racist systems, etc. Much of the "liberal" response sustains structures of disadvantage while creating narrow pathways to limited access.

Example: Anti-bullying without antiracism

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Some Basic CRT Tenets

Interest Convergence (Bell)

Historically, civil rights legislation has actually benefited white people. Generally, antiracism progress happens when white people benefit from it.

Note common research on diversifying education that is often used in court focuses on its benefit to white students.

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A Couple Resources

Just What Is Critical Race Theory and What's It Doing in a Nice Field Like Education? – Gloria Ladson-Billings

Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research

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Tomorrow: K-12/Higher Education Partnership Challenges and Opportunities

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