

HARMONY EDUCATION SERIES

EDUCATOR'S EQUITY COMPANION GUIDE

Second Edition

HARMONY MOVEMENT

Educator's Equity Companion Guide (Second Edition)

This guide is part of Harmony Movement's *Harmony Education Series*. It has been developed with support from the Ontario Ministry of Education.

While the *Educator's Equity Companion Guide* has been written with a focus on the school system, it is relevant and useful in other contexts, such as the workplace, human services or the community in general.

For more information about Harmony Movement's equity education programs and training resources, please visit www.harmony.ca

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1 THE BASICS

| | | |
|----|------------------------------|----|
| 1. | A Love Story | 3 |
| 2. | Are All Asians Good at Math? | 6 |
| 3. | The Best Intentions | 9 |
| 4. | The New Girl | 14 |
| 5. | Don't You Speak English? | 16 |
| 6. | The Right Man for the Job | 21 |
| 7. | The Toothache | 26 |
| 8. | I Am Not Your Mascot | 29 |

PART 2 IDENTITIES

| | | |
|----|----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Ability | 43 |
| 2. | Faith | 50 |
| 3. | Mental Health | 56 |
| 4. | Race | 63 |
| 5. | Gender | 70 |
| 6. | Sexual Orientation | 79 |
| 7. | Gender Identity | 88 |
| 8. | Sex | 95 |
| 9. | Socioeconomic Status | 100 |

PART 3 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. | Being an Ally | 109 |
| 2. | Equity or Equality? | 115 |
| 3. | Equity-Based Analysis | 120 |
| 4. | Equity in the Classroom | 124 |
| 5. | Building Capacity, Making Change | 129 |

APPENDIX A

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Useful Terms | 139 |
|--------------|-----|

APPENDIX B

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Works Cited | 147 |
|-------------|-----|



PART

1

THE BASICS



CHAPTER 5

Don't You Speak English?

Alasan recently immigrated to Canada from Senegal. No one in his family speaks English. He speaks and writes several languages fluently, including French and Wolof.

In class, a group of students talk about the fact that Alasan doesn't speak English and they call him stupid and slow. The teacher, who feels overwhelmed by the number of English language learners in his class, overhears these comments, but doesn't address them.

Immigrants often experience difficulty expressing themselves in a dominant language that is not their native tongue. Alasan is being treated poorly because of his English language abilities, despite speaking multiple other languages.

- What are the stereotypes at play in this situation?
- What are the social and historical roots of these stereotypes? Where do these ideas come from?
- What impact could these stereotypes have on Alasan's sense of self? On his access to education?
- What impact could they have on other students?
- Is this prejudice?
- Is this discrimination?

Discrimination

Clearly, Alasan is facing prejudice based on stereotypes that people who don't speak English are intellectually inferior. But is he experiencing discrimination? In order to answer that question, let's define discrimination.

A stereotype is an idea that sparks prejudiced attitudes and behaviours; but prejudice alone does not lead to acts of discrimination. Prejudice must be combined with institutional power to lead to discrimination.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*, discrimination is an action based on prejudice that "whether intentional or unintentional, has the effect of preventing or limiting access to opportunities, benefits or advantages that are available to other members of society".

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) describes discrimination as "the denial of equal treatment, civil liberties and opportunity to individuals or groups with respect to education, accommodation, health care, employment and access to services, goods and facilities...resulting in unequal outcomes for persons who are perceived as different...the denial of cultural, economic, educational, political and/or social rights of members of non-dominant groups".

While discrimination affects everyone, it doesn't affect us all in the same way or to the same degree.

The Toronto District School Board's *ESL/D Leadership Camp Facilitator's Handbook* (1993) presents the example of a child who grows up as a

Vertical Mosaic

Canada is known as a cultural mosaic, where people of different religions, languages and cultures live together. This is distinct from the melting pot in the United States, where there is an expectation that everyone will assimilate.

However, sociologist John Porter pointed out in his influential study that Canada is not a classless society and the various cultures in this country do not enjoy equal treatment, opportunity or respect. For example, he found a disproportionate number of elites in Canada were of British origin, while First Nations and Inuit people were at the greatest disadvantage. He identified this as this our "vertical mosaic."

dominant group member and is taught that she is “normal”, while those who do not look or act like her are “abnormal”. This gives her a skewed understanding of reality that limits her capacity and imagination. Her distorted perceptions build a foundation for discriminatory ideas later in life about non-dominant groups.

On the other hand, the child of a non-dominant group will be taught, in countless subtle or overt ways, that she is “abnormal”. Through all of the struggles she experiences in life, she will be conscious of the power relations that inform her status as a “minority”.

This child may grow up believing that she is somehow inferior, which will affect her capacity to explore her potential. She may become angry about the many barriers she faces. As the *Handbook* explains, “In both cases, human potential is stunted and our deepest emotional lives are being affected.”

Prejudice and Discrimination: What’s the Difference?

Being oppressed means the absence of choices.

~ bell hooks, author, social activist and educator

Prejudice can occur between any two people. Discrimination, on the other hand, takes place between dominant and non-dominant groups. One group must have economic, political or social power over another in order to discriminate against it. Prejudice with institutional power leads to discrimination.

Is Alasan experiencing discrimination? To decide, we can address the following questions, based on the definitions of discrimination from the Ministry of Education and the CRRF. If we answer yes, then Alasan is experiencing not only prejudice, but discrimination.

The prejudiced attitudes and actions of his classmates and teacher are hindering Alasan’s access to the educational opportunities, benefits and advantages available to other students. This denies his educational rights and is based on his membership in a non-dominant group.

Alasan is facing discrimination because of his language ability, which relates to his country of origin and citizenship status. He is confronting systemic obstacles and barriers as an English language learner and a newcomer to Canada. The institutional power of his classmates and teacher is having an impact on his human rights and his opportunities because he is a member of a non-dominant group.

By ignoring the comments, Alasan's teacher is discriminating against him and is creating an unsafe environment for all students.

At the same time, it is important to note the teacher's frustrations. The systemic nature of discrimination means there is often insufficient support for teachers who must find time to instruct students with vastly different skills, knowledge and learning styles.

Prejudice or Discrimination?

1. Does the prejudice prevent or limit the person's access to opportunities, benefits or advantages that are available to other members of society?
2. Does the prejudice deny the person's cultural, economic, educational, political or social rights?
3. Is the prejudice based on the person's membership in a non-dominant group?

★ APPLY THE IDEAS

Let's compare Alasan with Céleste, the student in the previous chapter.

Reflecting on the questions above in relation to Céleste's story, we see that her experience is not necessarily one of discrimination because it is not based on systemic disadvantage. Her classmates assume she is "rich, spoiled and mean", a prejudgment based on her membership in a dominant group.

This membership affords her advantages. Céleste's socioeconomic status is institutionally rewarded in Canada, while Alasan's proficiency in Wolof is not. Céleste's socioeconomic status will present her with opportunities, while Alasan will face institutional barriers in a society that affords privileges for English language proficiency. Though the feelings of exclusion may be very hurtful to Céleste, there is no systemic disadvantage for wealthy people.

Because all forms of prejudice can do damage, it is essential to address any hurtful comments to build a safe classroom community. Education built on the principles of equity and inclusion goes one step further: in order to challenge the systemic nature of discrimination, it is important to distinguish it from prejudice.



PART **2**

IDENTITIES



CHAPTER 4

Race

William is an African Canadian student entering high school. He is 6'2".

On orientation day, the track coach encourages him to join the team. William is too embarrassed to tell him he is a terrible athlete and would rather join the math club. The coach says he looks forward to seeing William at tryouts and is sure he'll be a fantastic addition to the team.

Before William has even attended a class at his new school, he feels that people are making assumptions about his abilities.

- What are the stereotypes at play?
- How might these stereotypes influence William's academic path and his desire to join the math club?
- What impact might this approach have on students of other races?
- Is this prejudice?
- Is this discrimination?

Race as a Social Invention

The races of men will be designated by the use of W for white; R for red, B for black and Y for yellow. The whites are, of course, the Caucasian race, the reds are the American Indian, the blacks are the African or Negro and the yellow are the Mongolian (Japanese and Chinese). But only pure whites will be classed as whites; the children begotten of marriages between whites and any of the other races will be classed as red, black or yellow, as the case may be, irrespective of the degree of colour.

~ The Fourth Census of Canada's "Instructions to Officers", 1901

Race is a modern idea with a complex history. As the International Human Genome Project and many other studies have revealed, race has no scientific basis, but it has a powerful impact on the world today.

Although the social impact of race and racism is very real, there is in fact much more genetic diversity within so-called races than across them. Genetically, an Ethiopian person could have more in common with a Russian than with another Ethiopian.

In fact, humans have the least genetic variation of any species on earth. What's more, there is no specific group of genes that defines a person's race. Genes for skin colour, nose shape, hair texture, height or build are not linked to each other. There are, of course, no particular genes for athletic or math ability.

Race is a social and cultural invention. Some people refer to it as a social construct, created at a particular moment in history and revised over the years by dominant groups for their economic, social and political gain.

As early as the 1600s, Europeans increased contact with other parts of the world and began to create racial categories. As liberal democracy flourished in Europe, these categories were used to justify the colonization and slavery of other human beings. The emerging sciences of anthropology and biology helped to make these categories seem natural and biological rather than political.

Racial classification is part of a long history of classifying humans—and human societies—into hierarchies, mainly to justify positions of power, privilege and responsibility.

Racial categories helped slave traders rationalize their treatment of Africans. They could be treated as the property of their so-called “superiors” (Europeans) because they were supposedly biologically inferior and were not capable of being Christianized or civilized.

Defining Racism

People know about the Klan and the overt racism, but the killing of one's soul little by little, day after day, is a lot worse than someone coming in your house and lynching you.

~ Samuel L. Jackson, actor and civil rights activist

Racism is discrimination based on race. Men in hoods burning crosses, apartheid laws in South Africa, residential schools and racial slurs are overt examples of racism; these examples can lead us to view racism as the actions of a few evil people or governments, rather than as a manifestation of the Power Triangle.

Understanding racism in terms of good and evil can lead people to think, “I don't have to worry about racism because I'm not a racist.” Equity education is about addressing racist actions, not simply labelling people as racists.

Racism often works on a subconscious level and is challenging to identify. It's important to be aware of this as educators because subtle racism can have even more insidious effects, as Samuel L. Jackson pointed out. Some social scientists call these incremental incidents of discrimination micro-aggressions. Here are a few examples:

- asking a person where she is from because of the colour of her skin;
- avoiding a person because of the colour of his skin because you suspect he might steal something from you or hurt you;

- assuming someone doesn't speak English because of the colour of her skin.

While these actions may not seem explicitly racist or may not be intended as racist by the person involved, they reinforce racial norms and the superiority of one race over another.

Many Canadians believe racism is not as bad in Canada as it is in the U.S. We remind ourselves that Harriet Tubman's famed Underground Railroad followed the North Star to the land of freedom, Canada.

What many of us don't know is that racial segregation and slavery existed in Canada as well. Roughly 3,000 black people came to Canada as slaves between 1628 and the early 1800s.

Racism has been a major factor in the founding of our country. The segregation of Aboriginal peoples was formalized through the Indian Act, which prevails to this day. The racism that First Nations, Inuit and Métis people experience is unique because of the way colonization attacked their communities and social fabric. The residential school system, the reserve system and the continuing barriers to basic housing, infrastructure, healthcare, education and other basic services are examples of this unresolved problem.

Other communities have also faced legislated racism. For example, during World War II, the Canadian government seized the property of Japanese Canadians and forced them into internment camps. Many Ukrainian and Hungarian Canadian men were interned during World War I and forced to build the infrastructure for several of our national parks. Immigration policies have restricted the entry of black, Chinese, Indian and Jewish people.

Education has been racially segregated for long periods of time, as have certain professions. Ontario closed down its last segregated school in 1965; and the last segregated school in Canada, located in Nova Scotia, didn't close until 1983. The last residential school in Canada operated until 1996. Considering the legacy of racism in education, recognizing and challenging it today is even more important to ensuring the achievement of all students.

Debunking Myths

Myth 1: Racism is human nature.

This implies that racism has always existed. Racism is a system with a history that is short in the context of human history.

Myth 2: Racism is just ignorance.

With education and social progress, the argument goes, racism will go away. But many educational institutions and systems teach in racist ways. For example, for decades, University of Western Ontario professor Philippe Rushton used sophisticated research methods to justify his theories about the genetic failings of black and Muslim people.

Myth 3: The new kids will always have to deal with racism—it will disappear when they've been around for a while.

Aboriginal people were the First Peoples of what is now known as Canada, but many nations, such as the Haudenosaunee, received European settlers by creating agreements such as the Two Row Wampum Belt to convey their desire for peace, friendship and mutual respect. Many Aboriginal communities showed hospitality to European settlers, however First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities continue to experience racism and discrimination in Canada.

Myth 4: Race is simply biological difference. There's no avoiding the fact that there are differences in skills and aptitudes between races.

An overwhelming amount of research by the International Human Genome Project—by biologists Joseph L. Graves, Richard Lewontin and many others—has proven this to be a myth. As discussed earlier, there is no scientific basis to race.

“I Don’t See Colour”

It upsets me when [my teacher] says we're all equal, because I know she gets treated better than me because of the colour of her skin, she's white...I know people look at us differently.

~ Ontario high school student

What does it mean to not see colour? Of course, equity-minded educators aim to treat each other with respect regardless of skin colour. While we strive to respect people of all social identities, part of this respect requires that we acknowledge the potential impact of their skin colour and perceived race on how they are treated by society. This may seem counterintuitive; but ignoring skin colour means we are ignoring the impact of racism.

To say that racism has an impact on each of us doesn't mean that we are affected equally or in the same way. Racism benefits white people and disadvantages other races; and some racialized people benefit from racism at the expense of others. Shadeism is an example of this—a lighter-skinned racialized person may experience privileges that a darker-skinned racialized person doesn't, yet both may still be discriminated against on the basis of race.

To challenge racism in a meaningful way, it is essential to learn about its impact. If we are not aware of the privileges and disadvantages that racism brings to our lives, we will not be able to eliminate it.



Revisiting William's Story

Using the "Prejudice or Discrimination" tool, we can see that William is experiencing discrimination. The track coach assumes he is athletic, based on stereotypes about black men. The idea that black people are good at sports often goes hand-in-hand with other stereotypes about physical abilities and performance in school. These beliefs are rooted in systemic racism.

Stereotyping has had a significant negative impact on black youth. It harms their self-esteem, limits their prospects, blocks their career pathways and limits their exposure to positive role models.

Stereotypes about black men being better at athletics than academics could influence the support William receives from teachers, which could affect his self-image and his enthusiasm for math. If teachers approach him with lower academic expectations because of these stereotypes, they could be helping to create a self-fulfilling prophecy.



Taking Action

As always, building your awareness about race is the first step in the process:

- Talk about race as a social construct rather than as a biological reality.
- Recognize that systemic racism is still very much a part of the fabric of our society. In Canada, its subtlety is part of its power.
- Learn and share the history of racism in Canada and connect it to present-day racism, locally and globally.
- Learn about and teach First Nations, Métis and Inuit history and the colonization of what is now Canada. Connect this history to modern expressions of colonialism and racism.
- Discuss immigration and refugee issues with an understanding of the impact of racism on legislation and public opinion.

Generally, the social construction of race and gender informs our views, structures our perceptions, formulates our attitudes and programs our behaviours. Thus, what informs individuals' behaviours with regard to race is not only their experiences, but how our society has educated us about the various ethnic and racial groups that live here.

~ Dr. Carl James, professor, anti-racism scholar, community worker



PART

3

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



CHAPTER 3

Equity-Based Analysis

As a gay teacher who has experienced homophobia all his life, Dmitri is committed to making his classroom a positive space for LGBTQ and questioning people.

When Toni first arrived in his class, she was happy to see a rainbow triangle on the wall and to read classroom materials depicting same-sex couples. But as time passed, she realized she never saw any women of her skin colour—of any sexual orientation—in class materials or in the curriculum.

When Dmitri started a school Gay-Straight Alliance, Toni hoped to connect with other racialized LGBTQ students or allies; but after four months, she was still the only racialized person there.

When Toni tried to talk about how her skin colour affects how she experiences homophobia, everyone looked away. She sensed she was making the group uncomfortable and she felt left out.

Dmitri's experiences have inspired him to create safer spaces for LGBTQ students at his school so that everyone feels valued and welcomed, but what feels like a safe space to Dmitri might not feel the same way to other people who identify as LGBTQ.

- What is Dmitri doing well in his effort to foster equity in his school community?
- How has Toni benefited from these efforts?
- Who is Dmitri reaching with his work? Who is feeling engaged? Who is not?
- What might be stopping Dmitri from hearing and learning from Toni's experience?

What Is an Equity-Based Analysis?

Equity-based analysis explores a situation, such as a lesson, an environment or a text, with attention to equity and diversity. It is a way of paying attention to how different groups are represented, misrepresented or invisible. This is also known as developing an equity lens or perspective. The basis of this development is reflective practice.

Reflective practice involves stepping back, observing and examining the effectiveness of what we are doing. It is critical to identify personal and systemic biases in our teaching that could lead to gaps in student achievement. Harmony Movement's *Educator's Equity Workbook* contains a variety of tools to help with this self-reflection, tools you can use every so often to take stock of your growth and set manageable goals on your path.

The Equity Check-In

Student Engagement

- What are the ways I like to learn? What are the teaching methods that do not engage me as a learner? How does this influence my practice as a teacher?
- What are the different learning styles of my students? How similar or different are they from mine? How am I appealing to the diverse learning styles in my class and how can I improve?
- What is working well in my practice? What do students most enjoy and respond to?
- Which students am I reaching in my practice? Who expresses interest and engages in activities? Why?
- Who seems less engaged? Why?
- How can I reach those who are less engaged?
- How can I introduce even more variety into my teaching practice?

Classroom Culture

- How can I foster a sense of dignity and pride in my students, both as individuals and as members of diverse social groups?

- In what ways do I focus on my students' strengths rather than their deficits? How can I sharpen this focus?
- What are the terms I use to talk about particular groups or individuals in my classroom? How does this language empower? How might it evoke pity instead of respect?
- In what ways do I encourage students to speak their truths, even if it might challenge my sense of authority or my worldview?
- How do students express respect and concern for each other in the classroom? How do I support that?
- What are the ways in which I encourage students to take leadership in the classroom?

Representation

- Who is represented in the curriculum I'm teaching? How accurate are these representations? What implications do these representations have?
- Who is not represented? What are the implications?
- How does this representation, misrepresentation or lack of representation affect my students' understanding of the world?

Goals

- What feedback do I receive from peers, students and parents or caregivers? What mechanisms do I have in place for students to provide feedback?
- Has this feedback changed over the months and years, or has it stayed consistent? What does this tell me about the evolution of my teaching?
- What am I confident I'm doing well? How can I share these skills and resources with other educators?
- What do I want to learn more about? What resources and training are available to broaden my knowledge in these areas?



Revisiting Dmitri and Toni's Story

Dmitri has made important contributions toward creating a positive climate for many LGBTQ students at the school. He has very good intentions and is clear about his goals. Toni and other LGBTQ students have benefited from the existence of the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA).

At this point, the GSA is reaching white students. The group's sole focus on LGBTQ identities is at the expense of other forms of diversity, which means members are unwilling to talk about the ways in which they are different from one another. Dmitri may feel comfortable talking about how he is targeted by systemic discrimination based on his sexual orientation, but not about his privilege based on race/skin colour.

Toni's willingness to talk about her experiences as a racialized LGBTQ woman is a leadership quality. It can be nurtured to foster an understanding of intersectionality within the GSA and to attract a greater diversity of students.

Toni's engagement at this stage, after a few months of involvement, is critical. If she continues to feel left out, she might leave the group and it could remain an exclusive space that does not benefit all LGBTQ students in the school. This contributes to the misconception or stereotype that only white people identify as LGBTQ.

Many LGBTQ racialized people do not feel welcomed or included in a lot of mainstream LGBTQ spaces. This can compound their feelings of exclusion. Paying attention to intersectionality can help create spaces that are more inclusive of all students.