

Practices and strategies that promote equity are intended to ensure fairness by:

1. Countering biased behaviors that cause harm to specific groups;
2. Countering unfair policies, programs, practices that consistently result in negative outcomes for groups who are disadvantaged by these actions; and
3. Negotiating, re-allocating and sometimes re-imagining resources, opportunities, and supports when the equal distribution of these things (one size fits all) results in unequal outcomes that do not adequately meet specific needs and interests of all groups of students.

FIGURE 1.2 What Educational Equity Initiatives Look Like

Inequality of Outcomes for Groups Within the Same Classification	The Equity Initiative Goals and Activities
<p><i>District Level:</i> Suspension is three times higher for Black students in comparison to White students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpack biases and other root causes that contribute to the current reality. • Change policies and practices in ways that will reduce disproportionality (e.g., decrease office referrals by training teachers in strategies to respond to low-impact behaviors). • Increase restorative interventions that strengthen social efficacy and increase opportunities for students to develop a positive attachment to school and peers.
<p><i>School Level:</i> 90% of the students who participate in clubs, sports, and extra-curricular activities after school live in just two of seven zip codes of students who attend the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpack biases and other root causes that contribute to the current reality. • Reconfigure the school day to include a designated period for extra-curricular activities open to all students. • Set an initial target outcome of at least 40% of students from every zip code participating in an extracurricular activity.
<p><i>School and Classroom Level:</i> Over 40% of all students in 9th grade are failing at least one course, and 25% of all 9th graders are failing two or more courses. Failing students comprise a disproportionate percentage of boys, students of color, and students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpack biases and other root causes that contribute to the current reality. • Reduce the overall failure rate by 30% by the end of two years through changes in classroom and schoolwide academic support practices, structures, and interventions. • Examine and monitor student grades and GPAs systematically at regularly scheduled times during the year.
<p><i>Classroom Level:</i> Twice as many girls as boys earn As and Bs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpack biases and other root causes that contribute to the current reality. • Engage in research and professional learning to build an understanding of boys' developmental needs. • Implement practices that align with the developmental needs of boys.

Equity-Centered Classrooms

This book is focused on equity-centered classrooms that are culturally responsive and developmentally informed. *The Equity-Centered Classroom* communicates, “I believe in you and your ability to be successful, and I will support you to navigate the complexities of rigorous and meaningful learning and social experiences.” When teachers consider how cultural background, race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, language, learning preferences, and ability/disability impact students’ learning, students feel affirmed; their voices are heard and honored. When teachers acknowledge and respond to the ways in which adolescents are beginning to establish their own identities, become more intimate with peers, and grow their sense of autonomy, control, and mastery in the world, students are better able to engage cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally.

As curators of *Equity-Centered Classrooms*, we:

1. Embrace the range of developmental and cultural differences among adolescents with curiosity, creativity, and passion. These differences include the ones we are born with, the ones connected to our family background and culture, and the ones shaped by our preferences and experiences.
2. Create a culture that is simultaneously rigorous and safe intellectually, socially, and emotionally; emphasizes relationships, relational trust, and caring communication; includes relevant content and student work; values student voice and choice; accommodates diverse learning strategies; and scaffolds learning that meets students where they are and pushes them to excel.
3. Are mindful of how personal biases shape our interactions with different groups of learners, our choice of learning strategies and learning tasks, and our approach to discipline and student support.²
4. Aim to directly counter racial, cultural, behavioral, and developmental biases with explicit practices that help reduce favoritism, preferential treatment, and discriminatory behaviors.

We invite the readers of this book to hold two questions: (1) In the face of structural and systemic racism, and other prejudices based on gender, class, culture, religion, and able-ness: In what ways might I model a way of being that communicates my commitment to be an advocate and ally to all students and their families? and (2) For the many adolescents who come to me already impacted by prejudicial experiences that have shaped their perceptions of and their performance at school: How will I incorporate culturally responsive and developmentally informed practices that interrupt cycles of prejudice and academic struggle to help students re-capture a vision of themselves as successful learners?

Culturally Responsive Classrooms

The practices and strategies described in the Domains of the Engaged Classroom in Chapters 4 through 8 include many “best practices” associated with culturally responsive teaching.³ Here we would like to highlight six practices recommended by prominent thought leaders in the field of culturally responsive teaching:⁴

1. Affirm students’ multiple identities (See Chapter 6);⁵
2. Support and guide students for how to “do school” by learning the “cultural capital” of school success (See Chapter 7);⁶
3. Introduce stories, texts, people, places, and visible symbols that reflect the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups (See Chapter 6);
4. Make connections between content topics and students’ lived experiences, families, peers, neighborhoods, and cultures and invite students to think critically about the social-racial-political context of their own realities (See Chapter 6);⁷
5. Create opportunities for students to work together in mixed groups (See Chapter 6);⁸ and
6. Counter disproportional disciplinary practices by reframing discipline problems into teaching-learning opportunities (See Chapter 8).⁹

For a deeper look at how cultural competency supports an *Empowered Teacher Presence*, please see Chapter 3. For a comprehensive and extremely accessible resource on culturally responsive teaching, we recommend downloading “Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Guide to Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching All Students Equitably” from the Equity Center Education Northwest.¹⁰

Developmentally Informed Classrooms

In *Developmentally Informed Classrooms*, principles of positive youth development drive day-to-day interactions between students and teachers. We are mindful of how we provide a saturation of opportunities and supports that foster three benchmarks of the adolescent experience:

Being—defining who I am; **Belonging**—finding my place in school, with peers, and family; and **Becoming**—achieving my personal goals, hopes, and aspirations. Helping to grow happy, healthy, and successful young people is informed by what we know about adolescent development. This includes the phases and stages of adolescents’ physical, emotional, social, cognitive, ethical, and spiritual growth and maturity, and the conditions that enable adolescents to thrive.¹¹

The concept of resiliency is a key lever for embedding youth development into everyday classroom practices. Resiliency is the capacity to bounce back from adversity, recover from loss and personal setbacks, and adjust to new challenges in ways that help young people achieve positive outcomes and life chances. Resilience reflects the “self-righting tendencies that move children toward normal adult development under all but the most persistent adverse circumstances”¹² (See Figure 1.3 Fostering Resiliency).

FIGURE 1.3 Fostering Resiliency

Four personal strengths foster resiliency:	Three protective factors (in schools, at home, and in the community) support the development of these personal strengths:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social competence; 2. Problem-solving; 3. Autonomy (positive identity, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and mastery); and 4. Sense of purpose (goal direction, achievement motivation, hope in the future, and optimism). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Caring relationships; 2. High expectations and consistent boundaries; and 3. Opportunities to participate and contribute.

Developmentally informed teachers build students' assets, strengths, and resiliency through social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and moral development. They adjust and differentiate instruction in ways that consider students' learning readiness, personal preferences and interests, prior knowledge, and developmental maturity. They provide a saturation of opportunities and supports to meet the needs and interests of different learners. See Appendix 1.1 – Adolescent Development Essentials.

Equity-Centered Classrooms that are culturally responsive and developmentally informed provide opportunities for adolescents to:

1. See themselves and their lives and communities in the curriculum content;
2. See the relevance of what they are learning in relation to their growing and changing sense of identity;
3. Construct knowledge socially through cooperative, experiential, and interactive learning;
4. Construct knowledge through mediated conversations with adults that push their learning beyond what they already know and can do;
5. Challenge rules and assumptions by critically examining the arguments of others, making their own, and discovering the “grey” areas on a given issue;
6. Make meaning of abstract concepts in the concrete contexts of their life experience;
7. Use their evolving ability to reason in order to examine and take on multiple perspectives;
8. Experience choice and develop their capacity to make responsible decisions about their own learning; and
9. Experience a sense of mastery and efficacy in their learning.¹³