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Provocative Prompts for Equity

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.

Essential Question: What does it really mean to do “equity work”?

“There are many ways to do diversity work. The most exciting, the most effective entry point as I see it, is helping people learn how to talk and listen to one another. Everyone has a story to tell about the impact of differences on their lives and careers. Most people want to tell their story. The heart and soul of this work is giving people the chance to talk.”

Barbara Walker, Teaching Diversity, Gallos, et al, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1997.

“...groups can often avoid unproductive situations if members recognize that inequity and prejudice have grown out of societal oppression or distressing earlier experiences. People need opportunities to work through the feelings from these hurts. Participants also need to be reminded that emotional release (through tears, trembling, laughing and talking, for example) is the natural healing process from the distress they have experienced. It is also important for people to be able to talk about the first time they encountered prejudice and inequity and their feelings at the time.”

Julian Weissglass, “Deepening our Dialogue About Equity,” Educational Leadership, ASCD, April 1997.

“We agree with Mr. Weissglass’s concise diagnosis, but he does not go deeply enough into the structures and policies that allow racism to be active in the lives of children and the business of our schools. We have to change the facts, not just the feelings that nurture and are nurtured by deep and historic social engineering that divides races and economic classes in America. It will take honest dialogue and leadership, but also much more than that to put our society and our students on equitable footing.”
National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, National Advisors: Alan E. Farstrup, Peter Gerber, Asa Hilliard, III, Lisa Delpit.

“I worry that in this country, we’ll only learn to value differences one at a time — work on each separately, difference by difference by difference. We view life in terms of its dualism: good (my way) or bad (your way). Instead, I wish we could learn, truly learn, that the fundamental problem is our basic attitude toward difference.”

Barbara Walker, Teaching Diversity, Gallos et al, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1997

“Even in schools with very small populations of color, educators are becoming more aware of the need to prepare white students to live in a multiracial society. Yet this is a world with which the current teaching force has limited experience. Most white teachers were raised and educated in predominantly white communities. Their firsthand knowledge of communities of color and their cultures and histories are quite limited.”

Sandra M. Larence and Beverly Daniel Tatum, “White Educators as Allies: Moving from Awareness to Action”, from Off-White, edited by Fine et al

“Because of the prejudice and racism inherent in our environments when we were children, I assume that we cannot be blamed for learning what we were taught (intentionally or unintentionally). Yet as adults, we have a responsibility to try to identify and interrupt the cycle of oppression. When we recognize that we have been misinformed, we have a responsibility to seek out more accurate information and to adjust our behavior accordingly.”

Beverly Daniel Tatum, *“Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: the Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom,”* Harvard Educational Review, Spring, 1992.

“For White students, the internalization of a newly defined sense of oneself as White is the primary task of the Autonomy stage. The positive feelings associated with this redefinition energize the person’s efforts to confront racism and oppression in his or her daily life. Alliances with people of color can be more easily forged at this stage of development than previously because the person’s antiracist behaviors and attitudes will be more consistently expressed.”

Beverly Daniel Tatum, *“Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: the Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom,”* Harvard Educational Review, Spring, 1992.



Activities to Use With Provocative Prompts

Essential Question: What does it really mean to do “equity work”?

Using the attached list of quotations from various sources, choose one of the following activities:

1. Each member of the group chooses one quotation and shares why it is their choice in a go-round—five minutes each.
2. Members of the group walk around and find a partner; each person shares with that partner one quotation which has made them think differently. Variation: After sharing with the first partner, finding a new partner and now taking on the point of view of the first person talked with. And so on.
3. Members of the group answer the essential question referring to the quotations.
4. The paper is cut into individual strips with one quotation each. Quotations are given out randomly and each person reads the one they get and responds to it.
5. The quotations are used with a text-based protocol (e.g. The Final Word).