
CENTRE FOR
URBAN
SCHOOLING

ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR
STUDIES IN EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

EQUITY **CONTINUUM:**

ACTION FOR CRITICAL
TRANSFORMATION
IN SCHOOLS AND
CLASSROOMS

INTRODUCTION

GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

Across North America, issues regarding equitable educational experiences and outcomes are at the forefront of educational priorities. For example, in Ontario, the Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, as well as several other educational policies, recommendations, and educational bodies, are calling on educators to explore their practice and the outcomes of schooling by asking critical questions of themselves and their work. In Toronto, specifically, standardized provincial assessment data, school-based achievement data, and students' voice are alternate vehicles that address differential experiences and success for various groups, predominantly, those racialized and historically marginalized in our world and, thus, in our school systems.

At the Centre for Urban Schooling (CUS), OISE/University of Toronto, we created a Framework for Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP). This framework is based upon literature and theoretical tenets from the United States, known as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Its core belief connects pedagogical practice to high expectations, regardless of social identity. It deals with issues regarding broadly defined culture and cultural competence within the classroom and teaching environment, and engages students to develop critical consciousness and questioning of the status quo. This framework was developed to rethink the work in schools in order to create more equitable experiences and outcomes for ALL students. It extends the discourse to whole-school pedagogical approaches and practices.

This Framework covers seven areas of equitable practice: i) Classroom Climate and Instruction, ii) School Climate, iii) Student Voice and Space, iv) Family/Caregiver-School Relations, v) School Leadership, vi) Community Connections, and vii) Culture of Professional Development. These seven areas ask key questions regarding the thinking/practice of equity.

When creating this new Equity Continuum, we used the CUS Framework for CRRP as a basis. We incorporated the key components of these tenets as indicators on a Continuum. Then, in collaboration with those previously acknowledged from the Toronto District School Board Model Schools for Inner Cities, we began to tweak and re-shape the key components to create what we have come to call, the "look-fors" within classrooms and schools. These will indicate a baseline for the equity work we believe will be evidenced in moving this practice forward.

The CUS Framework, and related Equity Continuum, is one tool that can be utilized to move equity agendas forward in schools. Although no tool is all-encompassing, we feel that the indicators noted are, at minimum, ideas for consideration. Additional areas that schools can explore are: identity-based data collection tied to academic and social outcomes and achievement; issues of over-representation of racialized groups in special education and under-representation in gifted programming; numbers of staff representing various social identities;

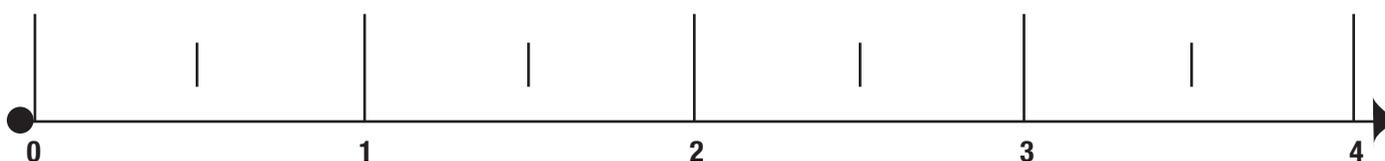
CLASSROOM CLIMATE AND INSTRUCTION

For each of the following indicators, please use the Continuum to identify your current position. Utilize the equity look-fors associated with each indicator to support your decision on the Continuum. There is a space to add additional look-fors, if needed.

0 = NOT AT ALL	1 = BEGINNING	2 = SOME	3 = MOSTLY	4 = FULLY IN PLACE
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Indicator:

Issues of social justice - anti-racism, anti-classism, anti-sexism, anti-ableism, and anti-homophobia - are central to the classroom curriculum and building students' critical thinking skills.



Equity Look-Fors:

School	Classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulletin boards and display cases represent issues of social justice. • Resource materials (library, bookrooms) represent issues of social justice. • Students' work displayed in halls demonstrates critical thinking tied to big ideas that focus on issues of equity and social action. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher order thinking skills and critical thinking are taught and consistently integrated into classroom lessons and activities - demonstrated through the class learning goals and success criteria. • Units and lessons are developed based on "big ideas" that focus on social justice issues – exemplars, resources, anchor charts and student work are displayed as artifacts. • Posters/displays/signage connects to equity and social justice. •

Notes:

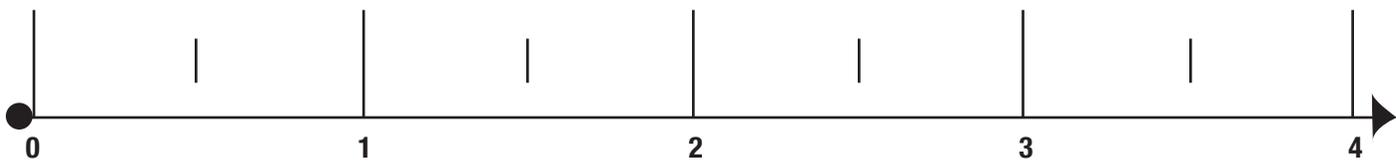
STUDENT VOICE AND SPACE

For each of the following indicators, please use the Continuum to identify your current position. Utilize the equity look-fors associated with each indicator to support your decision on the Continuum. There is a space to add additional look-fors, if needed.

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Indicator:

There are processes and structures in place that allow and encourage students to become involved in decision-making, in both the classroom and school; and to learn that their participation has real impact.



Equity Look-Fors:

School	Classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student leadership positions are filled by a diverse group, representative of the demographics in school population. • Student advisory council reflects and represents the demographics in the student population. • Student advisory council is developed with the expectations that decision-making by students is valid and valued. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom-based activities and lessons provide opportunities for students to develop leadership and teamwork skills. • Students are at the forefront of constructing and determining the focus of any advocacy or community-based project. • Classroom structures/organizations are developed that allow students to become involved in genuine decision-making with real outcomes (e.g. if a conflict arises in the classroom, students are sent to a discussion table to generate next steps). •

Notes:

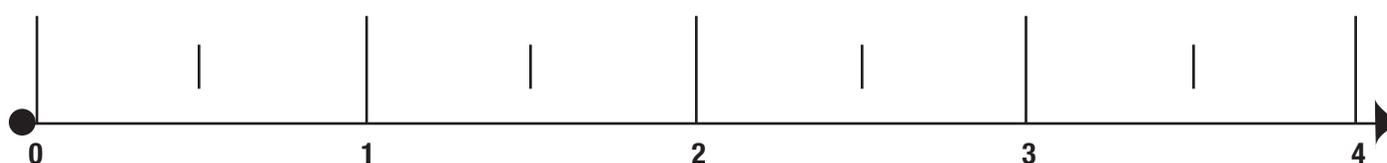
CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For each of the following indicators, please use the Continuum to identify your current position. Utilize the equity look-fors associated with each indicator to support your decision on the Continuum. There is a space to add additional look-fors, if needed.

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Indicator:

Professional development must also support and encourage school staff to focus on their own social identities and privileges.



Equity Look-Fors:

School	Classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics in professional development for staff are intentionally designed to address issues of privilege and explore how this plays out in school. • Space is provided at staff meetings to discuss how different stakeholders holding diverse social identities and positions of privilege are impacted by school policies and practices. • Posters and visual displays that represent diverse identities are visible in the school environment. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing aspects of identity within the classroom is common practice. • Issues of identity and diversity are included within the curriculum to allow students to see themselves and their lives in a positive light. • Students are exposed to, and learn from a variety of resources that focus on different aspects of social identity. •

Notes:

"The Equity Continuum developed by the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE provides schools and educators with a smart and effective means to evaluate the work of schools and insure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, are well served. The continuum provides clear guidance on the issues that often prevent schools from reaching racial and linguistic minority students and can serve as an opportunity for thoughtful reflection. I encourage all educators to embrace this continuum and put it to good use in pursuit of equity and excellence for all children."

Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D., Executive Director, Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, NYU

"The CUS Equity Continuum is a practical, clear mechanism that will allow educators, students and communities to analyze their school environments. That analysis will help school communities develop strategies to address the equity and inclusion challenges that are most pervasive in their own schools. Kudos to the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE for this piece of work!"

Kathleen Wynne, Ontario Minister of Transportation and Former Ontario Minister of Education

"The seven areas covered by the framework are an invaluable resource for teachers and school leaders to assess their readiness to address issues of equity and social justice in an intentional way. The look-fors move from ideas to specific changes in practice, and this is the key that makes a real difference in the day-to-day lives of our students and families."

Jack Nigro, Co-chair of the Toronto and Area Equity and Inclusive Education Network

"As a Principal of a Model School for Inner Cities in the Toronto District School Board, I had the privilege of working with the Equity Continuum as it was being developed. Principals, teachers, parents, and other community members conducted a walkthrough of my school using the look-fors as talking points. Since equity is a key goal of the Model School Program, it was useful to have a document to work with to guide our discussion. The continuum facilitated a variety of courageous conversations that encouraged us to look closely at the work we were doing and to examine our own practices critically. The look-fors also generated ideas and practical strategies that we could implement in our efforts to continually improve the educational environment and experiences we were providing for our students. We plan to revisit this continuum regularly as a springboard for discussion about the issues that really matter to us as educators, as community members, and as global citizens."

Nancy Steinhauer, Toronto District School Board, Principal, George Webster ES

"The CUS Equity Continuum provides educators with a variety of practical strategies to enhance equity and opportunities for all students. Recognizing the hazards of reified approaches to complex, ever-changing realities, the continuum emphasizes that difficult questions must be addressed if educators are to create genuinely inclusive learning environments. As a TDSB educator and facilitator, I strongly believe that the CUS Equity Continuum represents a valuable contribution to the ongoing task of generating pedagogical strategies that nurture all students."

**Sharron Rosen, Toronto District School Board Educator
Teaching and Learning Coach - Model Schools for Inner Cities**