GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION: EQUITY AS A TOOL

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Introduction

This module is in succession to the module titled Guiding Principles for School Transformation: Equity as a Concept. In the earlier module, equity was discussed as a concept with three dimensions to it- providing students with equal opportunity, need-based support and fair treatment. The module also explained how equity acts through mindsets; if mindsets are deficit-oriented, these need to be transformed into equitable belief systems, questioning old assumptions and fixed world views of approaching who children are and how do they learn? It gave an insight to school leaders on how to develop their self and support other stakeholders to create an equitable school culture, with focus on shaping equitable mindsets. This module goes further in operationalizing the concept of equity in the context of a school and equips the school leader with necessary frameworks, skills and tools that are needed for initiating equitable steps towards school transformation. The first section discusses the idea of equity groups and encourages school leaders to identify students who need additional support. The second section of the module provides examples on how data may be used as evidence for bridging equity gaps in student participation and student learning. The third section provides an equity tool that a school leader can use as a basic rubric for assessing the school on the principle of equity.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, school heads will be able to:

- Identify equity groups in school
- Bridge equity gaps in student participation and student learning
- Develop an equity tool for the school

Sections	Topic
Section 1	Identifying equity groups in School
Section 2	Bridging equity gaps in student participation and learning based on data
Section 3	Constructing an equity tool for school to guide school transformation

SECTION 1

IDENTIFYING EQUITY GROUPS IN SCHOOL

Learning Objective: Support school heads in identifying equity groups among students in school

Keywords: Equity; Equity groups; School

Introduction

The concept of equity has remained a cherished goal of education systems across the globe, acquiring centre stage in evidence-based research, global policy documents and school-based interventions (UNESCO 2021, OECD 2012, OECD 2008, Ishimaru and Galloway 2014, Secada 1989). The OECD Report 2012 states that highest performing education systems have placed equity at par with quality; equity being a necessary pre-requisite for achieving quality, not only structurally but also procedurally. Further, "Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion)" (OECD 2012). Creating an equitable education system/school entails concerted efforts towards upholding and practicing values of equal opportunity, fair treatment, a just frame of reference for provision, processes and outcomes that are favourable for all, irrespective of any socio-economic, cultural or gender- background factors.

The National Education Policy 2020 also envisages achieving equitable and inclusive quality education for all. The policy calls for a renewed commitment of bridging gaps in access, participation and learning outcomes at all levels of school education. In the document, the principle of equity is understood as an inclusive notion, embracing the educational concerns of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) (NEP 2020, p24-25). More specifically, at the school level, the policy lays emphasis on improving and equalizing access to educational opportunities and to achieving inclusive and equitable learning outcomes for all. By way of categorizing equity groups, the NEP 2020 brings in the notion of SEDGs. The "SEDGs are categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages,

small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor)" (NEP 2020).

Policy makers, educational administrators and school-based practitioners often negotiate with the identity of providing a certain group of students the status of an 'equity' group. Even though, the ascription of a group with the equity status may lead to stereo-typification, yet it is necessary as a policy imperative, be it at the national, sub-national, local or institutional level. This helps in devising target-based strategies for meeting out the needs and aspirations of certain groups of students who may have been struggling to come at par with other students. Equity groups are those categories of students who require additional support or need-based opportunities, over and above what is provided to all. In addition, students belonging to these groups might be at the receiving end of discrimination or prejudices, and hence they may deserve fair treatment by school authorities, teachers or peers.

Generally, in literature on educational policy and planning, these groups are referred to as students belonging to SCs, STs, minorities, girls, children with special needs etc. In fact, a few of these groups are beneficiaries of government sponsored scholarship programmes and incentives in India. But these categories are not exhaustive, and we shall see that there can be several equity groups, depending on the school context or the geographical area where the school is located. For instance, the notion of disadvantaged or marginalized is also inclusive of street children, orphans, runaway children, working children such as rag pickers or construction workers, children of migrant labourers, living in urban slums and the like.

However, probing from the perspective of an educationist, any *single* student can be vulnerable on any defined criteria. For instance, an

adolescent student may belong to a higher socio-economic stratum but may face mental health issues, hence, s/he qualifies to receive equitable treatment, in terms of additional support from a counsellor. Hence, one cannot always work with a pre-defined criteria of who belongs to an equity group; rather, at times, a single student can also be deserving of support and processes that are contextualized for her/his needs.

Can you identify some of these equity groups? The following table provides indicative groups of students who may be part of your school and qualify for equitable treatment, in terms of counselling, resources, remedial classes, bridge courses, psycho-social support, advanced materials to study (in case of gifted students) or even financial assistance. This list is not exhaustive.

Table 1
Equity Groups in School

S. No.	Equity Groups
1.	Scheduled Castes
2.	Economically backward classes
3.	Other backward classes
4.	Scheduled tribes
7.	Girls, Transgender
8.	Children with Special Needs (CWSN)
9.	Minorities
10.	Children living in slums
11.	Children from conflict prone areas
12.	Children in trauma or stress
13.	Children of migrants
14.	Children belonging to single parent families or separated families

15.	Children from geographically inaccessible areas
16.	Gifted children
17.	Low academic achievers
18.	Deviant children
19.	Overage/underage

The above table gives you the names of equity groups based on certain criteria. In educational literature, you will also find a reference to the concept of 'double disadvantage' or groups facing multiple disadvantages. For example, a girl belonging to scheduled caste category may face double disadvantage in accessing a school. Here two criteria are over lapping that of 'gender' and 'socially backward caste.' In another case, a child with special needs residing in a geographically hilly terrain may find it extremely difficult to access the school. Here also, two categories of disadvantage are operating with the child, one his status as a 'CWSN' and the other belonging to a 'hilly' terrain. You may also come across many students who suffer multiple disadvantages, for example, a child with 'low learning pace' may be a 'girl' and belong to a 'conflict prone area.' She may require psychological counselling as well as additional support by the teacher or a few remedial courses to help her come at the academic level of her peers.

Can you think of any other groups in the context of your school? You must remember that there needs to be a strong case or criteria for calling a group of students as an equity group. They may be facing singular disadvantage or multiple disadvantages. In special cases, there may be a single student in your school who is facing one or more disadvantages. On the contrary, students (s) could be gifted or exceptionally advanced in any field for which they might need resources and support to excel further.

Activity: It would be useful to do this exercise along with your teachers in a staff meeting. You may like to orient your teachers to this module and the purpose for which this identification is essential. We are identifying equity groups in our school in order to become aware and understand their needs -–emerging out of economic condition or social discrimination; learning requirements; physiological, emotional, psychological or special needs. Once this is done, your teachers and you can collaboratively develop target-specific plans to help make these students more involved in school and classroom processes for building an equitable and inclusive culture.

Which other groups of students you can identify in your school?

1...............................

2..............................

3.............................

4.............................

Let us sum up

This section provided an understanding on different equity groups operational in educational literature as well as in the education system. There may be a few equity groups that may be peculiar to your school context. In such a case, the school leadership team needs to identify them, become aware of their needs and design strategies to support their growth and development.

SECTION 2

BRIDGING EQUITY GAPS IN CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING BASED ON DATA

Learning Objective: Equip school heads in using data for bridging equity gaps in classroom participation and student learning

Key Words: Equity; Equity gaps; Classroom participation; Student learning; Data

Introduction

In this section, we take up two examples of classroom generated data and use it as evidence to bridge the equity gap in student participation and achievement. The data that we present is hypothetical. It would help the school leader as a guide to work closely with teachers in creating and applying these learnings in real school/classroom environment. As we have seen earlier also, at times, inequitable beliefs held by school leaders and teachers may hinder the progress of student (s). A school's focus is generally on students who are more willing to participate, who shine in morning assemblies or in sports, who excel in studies, and tend to forget those who are considered as 'lacking in some way'. The idea is to challenge these beliefs and make our schools and classrooms more inclusive, by making equity groups an integral part of learning processes and creating inclusive classrooms and school spaces.

Classroom Observation

Let us assume that a school leadership team has identified a few groups of students (a group may even have only 2 or 3 students) who do not participate in classroom activities. Here is a classroom observation checklist which can be modified/extended to observe how these equity groups interact and participate in classroom processes. Table 2 gives the Areas of Observation on the left side and Equity Groups on the right side. You can make this check list as detailed as possible; this is just an example. The purpose of this exercise is to gather minute observations regarding the participation level of equity groups in a particular classroom. This would help in devising strategies to bridge the gaps in participation of those students who feel left behind or alienated. This exercise can be used as a collection of observations, useful as data points for the school leadership team to sit and discuss after classroom processes. The data can be used as evidence to modify classroom processes to become more inclusive.

Table 2
Assessing Participation in Classrooms
Observation Checklist (Example)

Areas of Observation	Sub-areas	Equity Groups (Examples)		
		Girls belonging to marginalized community	Low achievers who have exhibited deviant behaviours	Students belonging to Scheduled castes
Spatial placement	Seating arrangement			
Knowledge content	Content Understanding of the subject			
	Expression in class (written/verbal) of Students			
	Clarifying doubts			
Peer interaction	Working in group/peer Activities			
Teacher behaviour	Initiating dialogue			
	Encouraging			
	Checking any Discriminatory behaviour by peers			
Any other	Any other			

Reflective Questions

The School Leadership team can brainstorm on data collected through classroom observation on some critical areas, such as

1. How students felt while interacting with teacher and their peers during classroom processes? Were they comfortable conversing with their peers? Did a few students feel left out and deliberately sat at the back of the classroom out of fear/insecurity?

2. Do students belonging to equity groups feel confident in articulating their thoughts and engage in clarifying their doubts etc?

3. Is the teacher proactive in conversing with students on issues of discrimination (if any) being faced by any student belonging to an 'equity' group? What strategies does she employ to talk about such issues? Is she able to modify the behaviours of students who engage in discriminatory practices?

4. Do students belonging to an equity group feel free while participating in any collaborative activity and do they engage in collaborative knowledge generation?

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Student Learning

Table 3 provides a few variables on which a school leadership team can assess progress in student learning. The tables give the Areas of Observation on the left side and Equity Groups on the right side. As an example, three groups of students have been mentioned here - students belonging to migrant community, overage students and students who speak in a language that is different than the medium of instruction. These groups of students may be different in the context of your school. Further, this exercise can be developed with as many variables as the school leadership team deems fit; this one just being an example. The purpose of this exercise is to gather minute observations regarding the procedural aspects of student learning, largely gathered through qualitative data points. The data collected can be very useful in assessing the learning needs of students belonging to equity groups and devising strategies, innovating new and relevant pedagogical interventions, and improvising teacher practices to best suit the challenges arising from learning gaps. The critical aspect to remember is that assessment of student learning is more important for the teacher and the school leader, who then builds modifications in teaching-learning processes to address the learning needs of each student, especially those who are disadvantaged on any of the parameter (s). Achieving equity in learning outcomes would necessarily mean that no student is left behind and each student learns progressively from where he/she is currently to higher levels of cognition and competencies.

Table 3
Assessing Student learning
In a particular subject (Example)

Areas of Observation	Sub-areas	Equity Groups (Examples)		
		Students belonging to migrant community	Overage students	Students speaking language different than medium of instruction
Knowledge content	Comprehension of the concept (s)			
	Conceptual clarity while articluating during classroom processes			
	Paraphrasing thoughts			
Application of concepts to real -life	Correct application of concept (s) to real-life problem solving			
	Exhibition of misunderstanding with regard to concept (s) in application			

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Exhibition of Multiple competencies	Verbal articulation			
	Decision-making in collaborative activity			
	Assertion of thoughts/opinions			
Any other	Any other			

Reflective Questions

The School leadership team can collectively analyse and draw inferences on data points captured through the above tool:

1. In which area of observation, are the learning gaps visible and for which equity group?

2. What are the levels of conceptual clarity for different groups of students?

3. How do students conceptualize application of new knowledge? Where are the gaps? Are concept-related misunderstandings high for any specific group of students?

4. What are the competencies gained by different equity groups during the entire learning process?

5. How has the teacher (s) worked through previous days and months to build student confidence, conceptual clarity and learning outcomes of students belonging to equity groups?

6. What do teachers need to do now to improve student competencis further?

Let us sum up

This section focussed on equipping school leaders with frameworks to operationalize the notion of equity in building inclusive classrooms where each student feels free to participate, gain confidence and improve her competencies. This may require identifying groups of students who need equitable treatment by the school leadership team, so that their progress is supervised on various parameters, modifications are made in teacher practices and classroom activities to suit the learning needs of equity groups, and each student progresses.

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SECTION 3
CONSTRUCTING AN EQUITY TOOL FOR SCHOOL TO GUIDE SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

Learning Objective: Help school heads understand an equity tool to guide school transformation

Key Words: Equity; Equity tool; School transformation

Introduction

In the school education sector, equity implies universalisation of both access and participation. With a renewed focus on quality, the notion of equity has expanded to include achievement of learning competencies by each child. This implies that every child is able to access school, is deeply engaged with the learning-teaching processes and achieves her full potential (including competencies), irrespective of socio-economic, gender or (dis-) ability background. The school leadership team, led by the school leader has to create favourable conditions of equitable access, participation and outcomes in the school. To provide direction to the school leader, Ishimaru and Galloway 2014 identify seven critical leadership actions for building an equitable school (adapted):

1. Developing an equity vision for the school

2. Creating an Inquiry culture

3. Understanding disparities and devising startegies for equitable instructional improvement

4. Designing an equitable instructional programme

5. Allocating resources

6. Networking with families and communities

7. Influencing the socio-political context

Leadership Action 1: Developing an equity vision for the school

The school leadership practices are governed by the overarching values and progressive direction as codified in the school's vision. An equity vision for the school must entail the inclusion of "all" students, and put forward a strong message for addressing disparities or any form of discrimination.

Leadership Action 2: Creating an Inquiry culture

Often in schools, students might face discomfort, either because of

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home-background factors or arising within school processes. The role of the school leader and teachers must be to remain alert and aware towards each student, communicate and support a culture in schools where each voice is heard and valued. The school must consistently build a trustworthy culture where a student, who is hitherto, not open about her feelings is also able to articluate, question and seek answers in the school.

Leadership Action 3: Understanding disparities and devising strategies for equitable instructional improvement

This encourages the school leadership team to identify learning needs of each student - especially those who are at a disadvantaged position with respect to social, cultural factors or learning levels. The school leader must build the capacities of self and teachers on practices that cater to specific learning needs of equity groups of students. It is important to develop a school culture where professional development activities for teachers operate with an equitable lens and the school leader is adept at providing support and supervision to teachers on equitable practices.

Leadership Action 4: Designing an equitable instructional programme

The instructional programme of the school must be inclusively designed to provide opportunities to high quality and vibrant curriculum that is age-appropriate and progressive. It must focus on learner competencies in all field of the curricula - covering academic, non-academic and vocational streams. For instance, a student in Grade 6 belongs to a marginalized community but is keen to explore opportunities with respect to arts and aesthetics. In this case, the school must be able to provide learning chances for the same. Exposure to such opportunities might assist the student in dialoguing with his context and overcome the systemic disparities he has faced.

Leadership Action 5: Allocating resources

Allocating resources equitably might imply providing resources additionally to certain groups of students based on specific challenges

emerging from their contexts. In this action of allocating resources, the school leader might also have to network and collaborate with communities and families to seek support in providing aides and other support for specific equity groups of students.

Leadership Action 6: Networking with families and communities

In ensuring that schools are aligned to an equitable vision, the role of families and communities cannot be relegated. In fact, having an open door policy for parents and community members can go a long way in fostering strong school-parent-community partnership for student self-worth and well-being. When parents of disadvantaged communities are welcomed in school functions and are able to communicate with school staff, they feel a sense of trust and belongingness in school. This has positive influence on student retention and learning.

Leadership Action 7: Influencing socio-political context

The school leader and teachers act as change agents in building an equitable and inclusive school. Using various methods of critical pedagogy, the teachers can be professionally developed to investigate socio-political context of students while transacting themes of the syllabus. The students can be involved in meaningful conversations on contested issues, so that they can build their ideas and opinions based on facts and evidences.

These leadership actions can help the school leaders in creating an equitable school. However for each of the actions, school leaders must collaborate with teachers, families and communities to devise strategies that best suit the needs of each student.

The Table 4 provides an equity tool as a basic rubric for school leaders to assess if the school is addressing the equity issues of its students at three levels - input (before entry and during admission to school), processes (access and treatment during schooling) and outcomes (after schooling is complete).

Table 4
Equity Tool: A Guide for School Transformation

Initial Input		School Processes		Outcomes	
Learner Attributes	**Admission Policies**	**Access**	**Treatment**	**Learner outcomes**	**Educational outcomes**
How does the school team (teachers and staff) perceive different groups of students in the socio-economic, cultural context?	What are school's admission policy? Does it cater to all groups alike?	Are all students able to access resources of the school?	What kind of treatments do students get in the school and within classroom processes?	What are the non-behavioural outcomes for various groups of students? (aspirations, cognitive achievement)	School climate, school effectiveness
What is the ratio of different groups of students such as boys, girls, CWSN?	What is the school's policy to admit underage/ overage students?	Do all students have opportunities to participate in school processes?	Do students face discriminatory behavious in the school?How to create a fair school culture for all students?	What are the various behavioural outcomes for various groups of students? (attitudes, confidence, citizenship behaviours)	Satisfaction and learnings of students
What kind of assumptions does the school have regarding differences among groups of students?	What bridge courses are available to students at entry level to upgrade their knowledge and skills?	What kind of additional support do we need to provide to equity groups?	What kind of pedagogical interventions are led by teachers for addressing differences in learner attributes?	What are the levels of competencies gained by different equity groups?	Cost analysis- did the school incur any additional costs for equalizing opportunity for equity groups?

Initial Input		School Processes		Outcomes	
Learner Attributes	Admission Policies	Access	Treatment	Learner outcomes	Educational outcomes
Any other...	Any other...	Any other...	How do we know what will work for whom?	Equity group based cognitive outcomes: Same, proportional, minimal standards, equivalent	Where did students get placed after completing secondary education? (Career Avenues and career placements)
Any other...	Any other...	Any other...	Are school practices designed to cater to different needs of learners?	Any other...	Any other...
Any other...	Any other...	Any other...	Any other...	Any other...	Any other...

Source: Adapted from Figure 4: Educational equity measurement framework, pg.62-63 from Harvey and Klein (1989)

Activity: The above tool provides certain guiding questions to assess the perspective on equity in school at each of three levels - input, processes and outcomes. Considering the context of your own school, what will be your action steps to achieve equity at each of the levels?

Initial Input
- Learner attributes
- Admission Policies

What will be your action steps to achieve equity based on the context and input variables for your school?

1.

2.

3.

School Processes
- Access
- Treatment

What will be your action steps for guiding equitable school processes?

1.

2.

3.

Outcomes
- Learner outcomes
- Educational Outcomes

What will be your action steps for shaping equitable outcomes for your school?

1.

2.

3.

Exercise

What leadership attributes are important to become a champion for Leadership for Equity?

Fill the blanks

Collaboration

Having higher expectations from each student

Upholding dignity of each student

Developing equitable mindsets

Professional upgrade of teachers on equity

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Let us sum up

This section provides a comprehensive equity tool for school leaders to assess the school processes on the principle of equity. It also helps the school leadership team to reflect upon their views with respect to different equity groups of students even before they enrol in the school. Further, the notion of equity extends to outcomes, to assess if each student has achieved competencies, during and towards the completion of schooling process, and is equipped to lead a productive and dignified life in future.

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Assessment: Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ)

Q1.   Which of these is not an SEDG group identified by the National
       Education Policy 2020?
       a.Groups based on gender identities
       b.Groups based on socio-cultural identities
       c.Groups based on geographical identities
       d.Groups based on different talents

Q2.   What is meant by multiple disadvantages?
       a.Students who cannot access school
       b.Students not being aware of their context
       c.Students facing more than one type of disadvantage
       d.Students who excel academically

Q3.   Which of these is not a correct assessment of learning gaps of
       students belonging to different equity groups?
       a.Classroom observation
       b.Participation in collaborative learning activities
       c.Assessing learning levels
       d.Strict cross-questioning

Q4.   What is an equity tool for the school?
       a.It is a tool to assess discrimination
       b.It is a comprehensive tool for assessing equitable function
         of a school

c.It is a tool to assess student data

d.It is a tool to address teacher grievances

Q5.   Which of these are not equitable leadership actions as described
        by Ishimaru and Galloway (2014)?

a.Constructing an equity vision for the school

b.Creating an inquiry culture

c.Assessing disparities in instructional programme

d.Not providing resources

Ans: Q.1-d, Q.2-c, Q.3-d, Q.4-b, Q.5-d

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