

This week's question to consider:

What exactly do people mean by equity? Is that the same as inclusion? Don't we do this work, by default, in the education sector? It is September, and I have forgotten everything I have ever known.

Pro tip: Inclusion means some specific things in this district, but at its core, it is an equitable practice. Desegregation, and including everyone in the learning experience, allowing for resources to support this. And yes, in New Brunswick we work toward this as part of our policies and best practices. Equity, however, involves more.

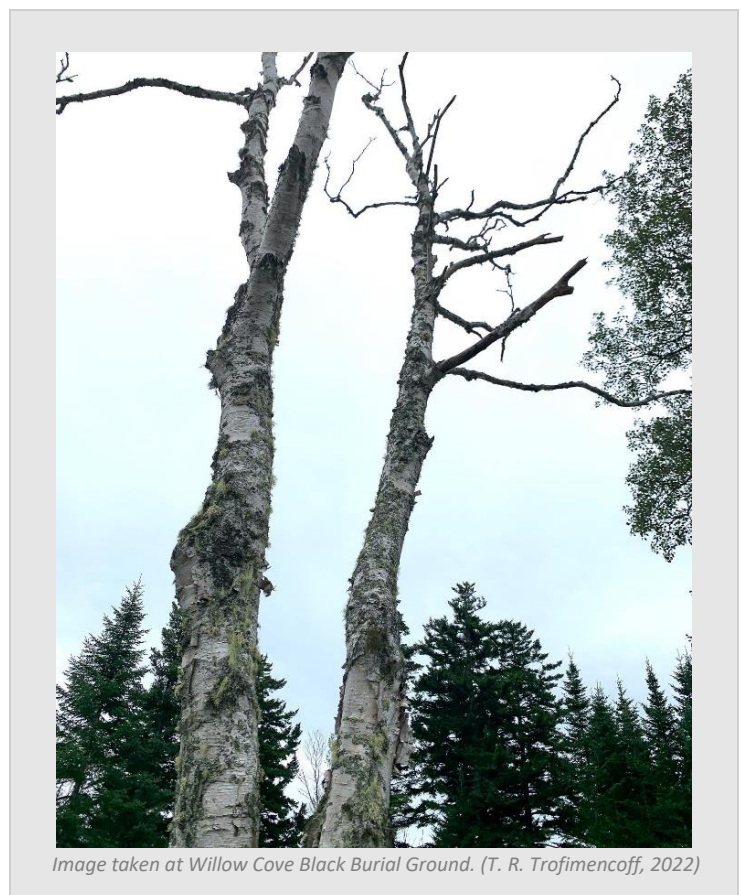
Hello, beautiful people, and welcome to a new school year of learning and teaching and existing in this gorgeous corner of the world!

September is lovely, isn't it? The beginning of the school year, where possibility and enthusiasm and the smell of the end of summer meets the beginnings of brisk temperatures in the evening. We in the education sector are ostensibly well rested and gearing up for a new school year filled with learning, and new humans to teach, and fresh school supplies that have not been used within an inch of their life. There's something magical about this season.

(I realize I'm romanticizing the smell of decaying plants, dying trees and the onset of construction season, but it's been a hot summer and I am not a hot temperatures human, so forgive me.)

With a new year comes a new wave of expectations for ourselves, to learn and grow professionally and personally, and this is true of me too. What I mean is, I have developed heightened expectations for you. You, the beautiful people who have been engaging with this work.

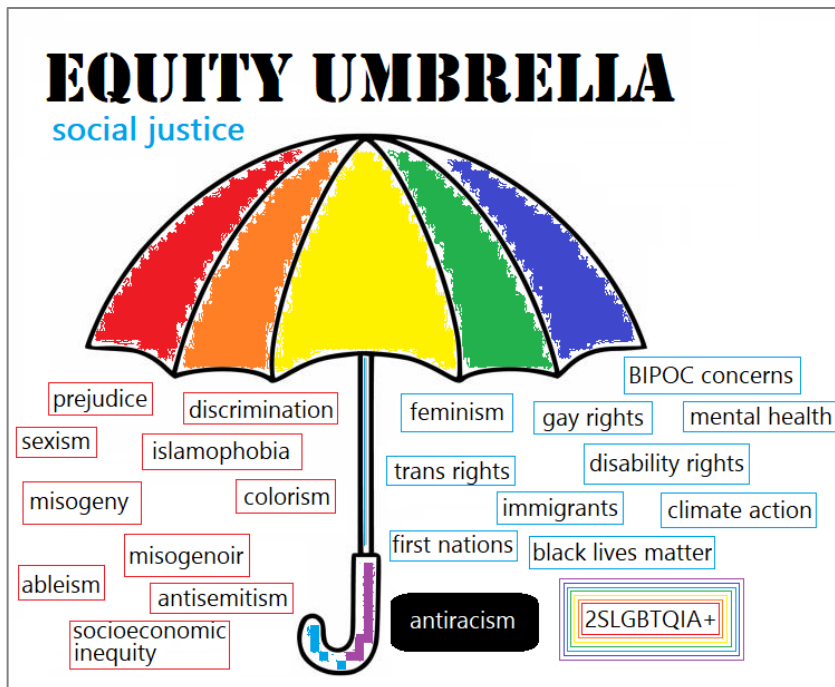
First, how about do a little refresher on equity? There are new humans in the district (hi, new humans!) and people can always do with a refresher. After all, the kids forget everything they ever learned over the summer, and... so do we. (Summer brain. It's a thing.)



And so, I present to you, a refresher by way of a helpful diagram! The diagram is on the next page.

We are fighting for causes, and we are fighting against inequity. You can probably guess what we are fighting for, and what we are fighting against, in the diagram.

The point is, equity work is social justice work, and all sorts of things fall under the umbrella of equity. Antiracism is a part of it, as is climate action, as is addressing BIPOC concerns. In this metaphor, all the things we do to further social justice fall under the umbrella. All of us do social justice work, whether it is to promote the cause or to do nothing to contribute to equity. We are, after all, part of this system.



Last year, the goal for antiracism and equity across the district was awareness. Makes sense, of course. To teach students, we must know what they already know, so that we can build on that knowledge. Similarly, to change things, we must know where they stand. Last year, was a year of education, and realization, and learning. And possibly, this is where you are still, in the 'taking it all in' stage. Or possibly, you're in a new building, and that is where the people in your new building are. Luckily, there is room for everyone on the continuum of equity work. The point is to continue working together.

The goal this year is to further our efforts. More learning, more awareness, sure, but adding measurable change. To that end, we as a collective must do more than we did before. Embed equity in lesson planning. Seek resources. Engage in our own learning. Familiarize ourselves with existing policy.

To illustrate what I mean by more, I'd like to tell you a story.

I was at the dinner table recently, invited to eat with my family and some friends. It was mixed company, which for me, often means I have to choose whether or not to engage, and to what extent, if someone makes a racist comment or says something that I know to be completely inequitable. A side effect of being steeped in this work is that we do not move away from it. You have to learn things deeply to actually change how you approach things. When we know better, we do better, and that is true all the time, not just during work hours.

At this dinner, a guest said something that was uncomfortable and offensive. To be honest, if it had happened a few years ago, I probably wouldn't have said anything, would simply have frowned (frown power!) and gotten up to get a glass of water or something, to get away from the conversation without derailing the evening. I wouldn't want to embarrass anyone. Especially not someone else's guest.

But... I just can't do that anymore. The cost of my silence has become unacceptable. I've been explicitly teaching, actively researching, and talking openly about the work I do in social justice, equity, and antiracism (I often use these interchangeably) with my family. Like others before me who have been doing this work, I began openly teaching those who are closest to me and want to learn. I've been examining specific aspects and angles around antiracism and equity. There's more to explore, but once you start down this road, there is no going back. There is no un-seeing once things are seen. There is no undo-realization button. And so, I can no longer remain silent in most contexts when inequity is overtly floating around me. And ultimately, I have come to expect more from my family, who I've worked on educating in this area by virtue of the fact that I am close to them and talk to them.

It's not easy, by the way. I *did* end up derailing the moment that day. It was uncomfortable and disappointing for everyone, me included. There was a pointed confrontation at dinner, and two separate conversations that had to happen afterward with family to debrief and be okay with each other again. This is the nature of equity, though. We can't reach equity through light, pleasant conversation. The counter-messaging has to be strong to have a hope at fighting the pervasive inequity and racism that permeates our world. We can't be hesitant; whenever possible, we must participate in the social discourse.

My request for you, then, beautiful people who care about equity, who want to help further the cause of antiracism, of equity, is to do something more than before. Push further. Expect more.

Leverage your privilege like the crowbar it is and speak for those who can't. In all contexts.

If last year you laughed at racist jokes in the staff room, this year you frown. Because you have learned that your laughter reads as permission, furthers racism via microaggressions, and it doesn't feel good to contribute to that.

If last year you frowned at vaguely homophobic statements from your uncle, this year you speak up. Because you have learned that the most vulnerable of our society are queer kids, and because we need to protect trans kids, and because gay kids deserve to feel safe in the world, and because everyone is deserving of dignity and recognition of their humanity, regardless of their gender identity.

If last year you spoke up when a student said an ableist thing, this year it becomes a teachable moment, and you explicitly teach why the thing was ableist. Because there is stigma associated with disability, and you know that silence in those moments perpetuates stigma. Also, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." (Did I just quote Benjamin Franklin? Maybe. Maybe yes.)

All of this to say, do more. Figure out a way to do a little bit more, a little bit more than before. Achieving equity requires self-reflection and action. Reflection... and *action*.

Cheering you on,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach
Therese Trofimenoff (*she/they, elle/iel*)