

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, EQUITY, AND HEALTH¹

Lesson Plan 3: How are Equality and Equity Different?

Goal: Participants will be able to distinguish between equality and equity

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson plan, participants will be able to:

- Explain equality and give at least one example
- Explain equity and give at least one example
- Discuss the benefits of equitable solutions for diverse communities

Materials:

- Pen, pencil, colored pencils
- Paper

Time Required: 20-40 minutes

Background:

Equity and equality are related terms and often used as synonyms, but since the word equity is appearing more and more in the news and in policies, we believe it is important to distinguish between the two. Whether one is listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, or attending a conference, we are hearing “calls to action” such as “we need gender equity;” “embrace racial equity” or “we demand education equity.”

“Equity is the process and equality is an outcome.” In other words, “equity is essential to achieve true equality” (<http://edglossary.org/equity/>). The Race Matters Institute says, “The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone *equally*. It will be achieved by treating everyone *equitably*, or justly according to their circumstances (<http://racemattersinstitute.org/blog/Racial-Equality-Racial-Equity-Whats-the-Difference-What-Difference-Does-It-Make>).

Some teachers may note that this lesson plan is more about equity than it is about environmental justice. However, these terms are fundamentally linked. We include this lesson because current King County and City of Seattle policies (and policies all over the U.S.) are increasingly using the term equity and addressing challenges in communities with EJ concerns through an equity lens outlined in the King County Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) Ordinance (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/vision.aspx>). King County recognizes that many environmental benefits and burdens in the county are not distributed equally, that inclusive and collaborative decision making has been absent, and that many of these effects have crossed generations. It is working to remedy these issues through its equity-based policies. We use King County’s ESJ Equity Impact Review Tool in Lesson Plan 8 and thus feel it is important to be able to understand what the word means.

¹This product was funded through a grant from Washington State Department of Ecology. While these materials were reviewed for grant consistency, this does not necessarily constitute endorsement by Ecology.

Note: Environmental justice and environmental equity are not interchangeable and a nuance that we have not parsed out with our students in this curriculum. The *Principles of Environmental Justice*, as they were written by the Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in October, 1991 (<http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>), is a rights-based declaration for ALL peoples. It covers many important issues related to the environment including but not limited to: the sacredness of Mother Earth; the protection of Native Americans; the opposition to land exploitation; the experimental medical testing on people of color; etc. (the document is extraordinarily inspiring and could be a wonderful lesson plan all by itself). On the other hand, achieving environmental equity is a smaller piece that aims for actions that can remedy disproportionate impacts and establish inclusive, collaborative decision-making.

Word Wall:

Note: it is hard to find a good definition for equity versus equality without a preceding descriptor (e.g., education, gender, racial). We would like to recommend that posting equality and equity examples (sentences and pictures) on the word wall may be very helpful.

Equality: “the quality or state of being equal: the quality or state of having the same rights, social status, etc.” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equality>)

Equity: “fairness or justice in the way people are treated” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equity>).

“Everyone has an equal opportunity to attain their full potential. It implies a need for fairness in the distribution of benefits and burdens, and the entitlement of everyone to an acceptable quality and standard of living”

(<http://www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/tools-resources.aspx>).

Teacher/facilitator preparation

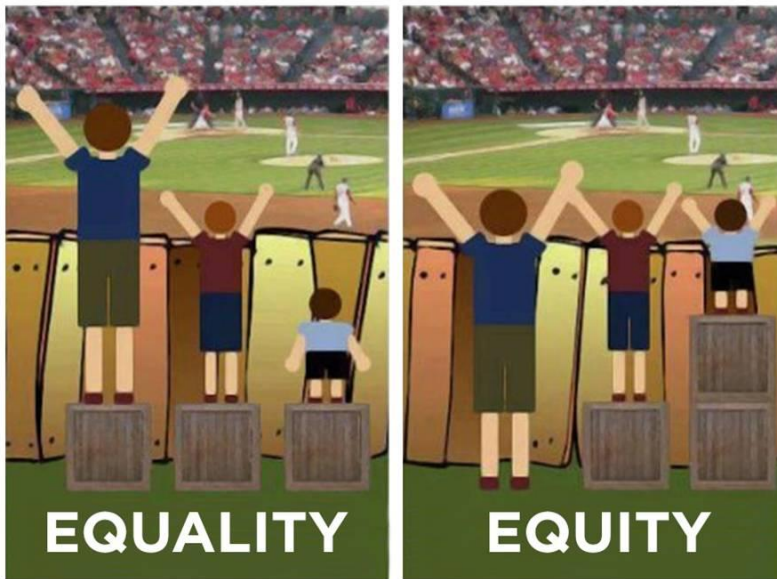
Kids at a baseball game example²: The graphic shown below is quite well known and commonly used when teaching equity concepts. On the left, three kids are watching a baseball game from behind a fence: all three are given the *same* size box (equality) to stand on but only two can see the game over the fence. Equality only works if all three children are the same height. In the picture on the right, equity (fairness) is promoted because the shortest child is given a second box to stand on so he can also see the game.

²We prefer the baseball game example, but there are several other examples of the difference between equality and equity available on the web.

Track Example: *Equity and Equality* by Nicole Dussault; <http://columbiaspectator.com/2011/11/02/equity-and-equality>;

Open door example: <http://sgba-resource.ca/en/concepts/equity/define-equity/>;

Shoe example: A lesson in Equality, Equity, Fairness, and Justice: <https://lensofdiversity.wordpress.com/2013/12/01/244/>

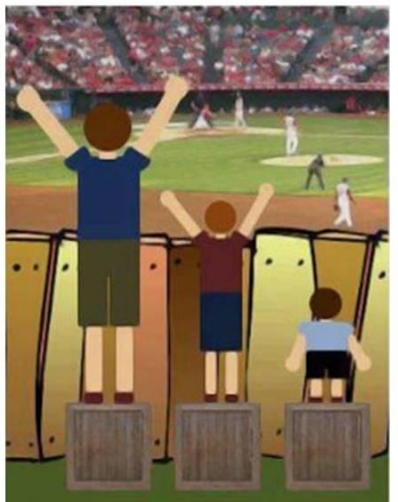


Activity Instructions:

1) Equality versus equity³ (10-15 minutes)

Prompt:

- a) When I show the picture below, what do you see? (all three children have the same box despite the differences in their height - equality.
- b) Does it seem fair? What is unjust about it? (An equal distribution of resources does not necessarily achieve an equal outcome)



- c) If the picture doesn't seem just, how could you fix it so it would be more fair? (Give the shorter child the tall child's box so that he can see the game too - equity)

³Many thanks to Darlene Flynn, Policy Lead- Race and Social Justice Initiative at the Seattle Office for Civil Rights who gave me her teaching points for this graphic.



- d) Why do you think the fence is there? Who do you think built it? Does it have to be that tall? Does it have to be there at all?
- e) Imagine that the fence is a metaphor for the shorter child's life experiences. What are some examples of resources that some kids have that others lack? (education, parks, wilderness, cell phone)

2. (In)Equality versus (In)Equity examples

Prompt:

Now we are going to do some real life examples that are a little bit harder (see worksheet on the next page)

Note 1: Depending on your audience level, you could read these out loud or hand out work sheets.

Note 2: There is a teacher worksheet with sets of examples at the end.

2) (In)Equality vs (In)Equity Exercise (15-20 minutes)

Instructions: Review the examples below. Does the situation described seem fair? How is it unjust? If it doesn't seem fair, what are some things that could be done to make it more just (equitable?). Note: there might be different solutions to reach an equitable solution.

Example	Fair? If not, what could be done to make it more just (equitable)?
A city has three times more park space per resident in its north part than in its south part.	
Access to computers and to the internet is not the same in all schools in the city.	
A city is having financial problems and has made a decision to cut its budget for its 25 community centers. It cuts the budget by having the same reduction in closing hours for all centers.	
A community with lower income and a higher percentage of people of color compared to the rest of the city has the highest air pollution levels and the highest asthma hospitalization rates in the city.	
A meeting has been planned to discuss the cleanup of a contaminated site in a community; it will be held in English. However, approximately 25% of people in the community do not speak English as a first language.	
One community has less access to healthy and affordable food than the rest of the city and has requested funding and assistance to build a community garden. The City has recognized that there is an issue of historically unequal treatment in this neighborhood and has agreed to the request.	
Develop your own example	

Teachers guide: Participants may have multiple ideas on how to respond

Example	Fair? If not, what could be done to make it more just (equitable)?
A city has three times more park space per resident in its north part than in its south part.	No. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop more park space in the southern part of the city
Access to computers and to the internet is not the same in all schools in the city.	No. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more money to schools where there are less computers or less access to the internet • Make sure that computer labs stay open for kids who may not have computers at home.
A city is having financial problems and has made a decision to cut its budget for its 25 community centers. It cuts the budget by having the same reduction in closing hours for all centers.	No. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is equal treatment but it assumes that all community centers need the same hours. • Determine which communities might need more hours due to other concerns
A community with lower income and a higher percentage of people of color compared to the rest of the city has the highest air pollution levels and the highest asthma hospitalization rates in the city.	No. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government agencies work to reduce pollution in that area by tightening regulations • Support the affected community to address pollution concerns
A meeting has been planned to discuss the cleanup of a contaminated site in a community; it will be held in English. However, approximately 25% of people in the community do not speak English as a first language	No. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire translators • Have one meeting in another language
One community has less access to healthy and affordable food than the rest of the city and has requested funding and assistance to build a community garden. The City has done some research and found that this area has a history of unequal treatment and agreed to the request.	Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City is responding to fairness concerns. But this does not absolve them from solving other issues of inequity in the community
Develop your own example	

3. Make up your example of (in)equality and (in)equity⁴ (20-30 minutes)

Note: This is great on index cards. The best ones can be attached to the Word Wall.
Hand out two index cards per person.

Prompts:

- a) Put together your own examples. On one index card, write one sentence that describes (in)equality; and on another index card, write a sentence that describes (in)equity.
- b) Share (read out loud) with a partner to review your examples. Make sure they make sense and revise, if necessary.
- c) Share one of the sentences with a group of 4-5 people and vote on the group favorite to share with the larger group.
- d) Pick someone from your small group to read your favorite out loud to everyone.
- e) Attach class favorites to the Word Wall

⁴ We adapted this exercise from Heidi Schillinger from Equity Matters
(<http://www.equitymattersnw.com/>)