Reconceptualizing the Equity Audit for Expanded Learning Organizations

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Connecting educational equity to expanded learning programming

Expanded learning programs are important sites of youth development that can provide academic enrichment, supportive relationships, skill building, and emotional safety. However, Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color (BIPOC), queer, and young people with disabilities often experience educational inequity when they participate in these programs. For example, there are well researched inequities stemming from staff holding deficit perceptions of diverse youth, discriminatory resource allocation, and staff that are not properly trained to work with diverse youth.

Scholars have suggested that educational inequity exists because educators and leaders do not take steps to understand systemic inequity or develop plans to address problems in a consistent and intentional manner. The continuance of educational inequity in expanded learning organizations suggest that educators and leaders need to better understand injustice in their organizations and create action plans that specifically address the challenges that diverse youth face.

What is an equity audit?

One tool that expanded learning educators and leaders can use to understand and address persistent educational inequity is the equity audit. The equity audit was developed as a tool for compliance and accountability to assess conformity with civil rights statutes, examine areas of school curriculum and document targeted areas of data. Early equity audits were exhaustive documents taking multiple months to examine several areas of organizational effectiveness like discipline practices, promotion and tenure, and staff development activities. More recently, scholars have developed equity audit frameworks that provide educators and leaders with focused data to examine persistent equity issues. This focused data is used to engage educators and leaders in conversation so they can better understand equity issues and devise action plans to address opportunity gaps.

7 steps to putting the equity audit into practice

The equity audit framework in this article is based on concepts developed by Skrla and Colleagues (2010) that helps practitioners describe injustice, critique educational systems, and develop plans to transform the system. These authors recommend seven steps for conducting an equity audit.

Relevant steps	Example actions

1 Recruit relevant stakeholders to engage in the equity audit process

In order to shift the learning occurring in a specific program area to become more culturally responsive to BIPOC youth, you must bring together key stakeholders who are impacted by or engaged in the program. These might include the program director, frontline staff members, youth, and community members.

2 Obtain descriptive statistics and other relevant data about the program area

Relevant data could include demographics about the youth that participate in the program area, how often BIPOC youth attend the program, the demographics of staff that run the program, lesson plans that staff create, and the authors and origins of books that are read in the program area.

3 Analyze descriptive statistics and other relevant data about the program area

Stakeholders should ask questions about why the data looks the way it does and then examine how organizational policy and processes are contributing to problems. From there, stakeholders can establish a targeted area for change.

4 Develop an action plan to address the targeted area

Since the targeted area in this case is creating more culturally responsive learning opportunities, the stakeholder's action plan might be to shift the organization's curriculum to incorporate books made by and about BIPOC youth and engage with BIPOC community elders.

5 Implement the action plan

The action plan should be implemented consistently over the course of several weeks, to months, to properly collect data and understand impact.

6 Monitor and evaluate the results of the action plan

As part of the action plan, stakeholders should establish formative and summative evaluations. For example, stakeholders may create exit tickets at two or three different times to determine how youth and staff are feeling about the new culturally responsive learning activities. Stakeholders might ask youth if they notice (or appreciate) the new learning and what areas within the target area they would like to learn more about. While staff might be asked about their ability to plan learning activities and if they need new professional development to create culturally responsive curricula.

7 Evaluate if the action plan has been successful or needs to be modified

Step 7 is a decision point where stakeholders determine if the action pan has been successful. Together, stakeholders will discuss if they should continue instituting their plan or return to step 3 and reengage the equity audit process.

Bringing the equity audit to your organization

Although the example given was about shifting the learning occurring in a program area, the equity audit can be applied to multiple areas including hiring and retaining staff, discipline, professional development activities, etc. The goal of the equity audit is to define an area that the organization is interested in learning more about and create a targeted plan to address the issue. The equity audit does require allocating meeting time to address the issue and bringing relevant stakeholders together. However, it can become an incisive tool to incorporate into organizational change efforts that leads to greater educational equity for Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color, queer, and young people with disabilities.

Citations APA Style

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