

Report of the April 2006 NNER Equity Task Force

I. History

At its January 29, 2006 meeting, the NNER Governing Council elected to appoint an Equity Task Force of no fewer than 5 and no greater than 7 members to study the current state of progress toward more equitable practices throughout the NNER, as a follow-up to the work of the 2003 Equity Study Group and its report adopted by the Governing Council in 2004. Governing Council members nominated individuals for this task force from each group of the tripartite council (school, college of education, arts & sciences), the governing council, the executive board and two members from the original 2003 Equity Report Task Force. The following were nominated and served on the Equity Task Force:

- Julie Canniff
- Paul Chaplin
- Ann Foster
- Maughn Gregory
- Barry Newbold
- Carol Wilson
- Leslie Wilson

In addition, DeBorah Zackery was nominated and agreed to attend and Margit Watts was planning to attend to connect the Task Force work with the session being developed by the Hawaii setting to address equity issues. Both were unable to join the group due to health issues.

The Equity Task Force met April 28-29 at the Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI) in Seattle. NNER Governing Council Chair Carol Wilson gave the Task Force its charge. She and NNER Executive Director Ann Foster served as resources to the Task Force, which elected to work without a chair.

II. Charge and Guiding Principles

The charge of the Equity Task Force was to collate findings from the NNER member settings' annual reports relevant to progress toward improving equity and challenges to furthering equity, and to formulate more focused questions for the member settings, that could provide the foundation for specific research, direction, and action to be taken by the Governing Council.

The Equity Task Force adopted the following paragraphs from the NNER Mission Statement and NNER Equity Statement as guiding principles:

The National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) leads by example in its commitment to improve simultaneously the quality of education for participation in our

democracy and the quality of preparation of educators for our schools through university and school partnerships.¹

The NNER embraces a vision of educational excellence for all. This vision, described in the Agenda for Education in a Democracy, bring to light the symbiotic relationship between educational excellence and equity. The NNER believes that educational excellence involves knowledge, practices and structures that support the full participation of all individuals in teaching and learning opportunities, and in educational decision-making and policy setting.²

III. Findings from Annual Reports

In its deliberations, the Task Force considered it important to distinguish between two broad categories of democratic human values: Diversity – inclusion of historically oppressed groups; and Equity—treating all individuals on a basis of equal respect and fairness. On reviewing the NNER member settings’ annual reports, the Equity Task Force found there was progress toward improving equity in the following areas:

- Culturally responsive practice
- Equitable policies
- Research on equity
- Grants, financial aid and other funding resources
- Curriculum relevant to equity
- Collaborations with community, e.g. service learning
- Equity in recruitment and retention
- Equitable culture and climate of institutions
- Recognition of identities
- Self-studies

The Task Force noted that much of the effort proffered in the annual reports as progress toward greater equity was actually progress related to diversity, i.e. recruiting for a more diverse faculty. Some reports made mention of specific challenges to improving equity in areas of immediate concern locally. The Task Force, after studying the reports and the NNER Equity Report noted that the areas listed below were less evident in many reports and recommends using them as guides to provide a rich foundation for settings’ self-studies and to strengthen our collective action toward greater equity.

- Attention to internal policies and practices of organizations that make up the member settings (i.e. classroom, school, district, department, university)
- Attention to actual practices, efforts, stories, etc. that support policy efforts.
- Distinguishing between deliberate and inadvertent discrimination

¹ NNER Mission Statement, linked from http://depts.washington.edu/cedren/nner/governance/gov_mission.htm, last accessed May 8, 2006,

² NNER Statement on Equity, linked from <http://depts.washington.edu/cedren/nner/governance/minutes.htm>, last accessed May 8, 2006.

- Attention to current local equity issues and how they fit into the larger framework of NNER values
- Candid commentary on particular barriers, struggles, challenges settings face locally in working on equity, and what their needs are, e.g. resources, help
- Making distinctions between diversity (inclusion of historically oppressed groups) and equity (treating those included fairly)
- Acknowledgement that there are equity issues that:
 - We are working hard on, focusing on, doing a lot about
 - We are aware of and doing something toward but not a focus for us right now
 - We aren't aware of in our setting or aren't doing much / anything with right now
- Acknowledgement of different levels / sites of equity issues, e.g. in classrooms, in schools, in colleges, in the larger community
- Evidence of perspectives or and/or participation by all organizations of each setting in the equity reports

IV. Recommendations

1. Building on the above observations, the Task Force further recommends the following four-stage process of inquiry into equity issues:
 - A. A formative self-study by each member setting of equity issues currently facing the setting and efforts being made to address them .The member settings will submit their findings each year in the annual report.
 - B. A process of “critical friend” analysis in which a member setting may request assistance/critique from another setting that is further along the continuum of equity practices.
 - C. An annual review of all equity reports and critiques by an ongoing NNER Equity Review Committee, for the purpose of publicizing and recommending NNER-sponsored research into promising practices as well as problem areas that the NNER governing council will address and act upon.
 - D. A coordinated process of sharing settings’ and the NNER’s collective work on equity at NNER conferences and meetings.

The purposes of the above process of inquiry into equity issues include the following:

- First, to facilitate a process of formative self-assessment around equity, diversity, and moral stewardship for all
- Second, to facilitate greater collaboration among member settings in learning about and from each other’s work;
- Third, to provide the NNER with data regarding work being done on equity across the Network, to know how support and further such work

2. The Equity Task Force assumes that the four-part mission of the Agenda for Education in a Democracy³ is reflective of the aspirations and work of NNER member settings, that no setting is able to do substantial work on all equity issues at once, and that progress toward equity takes sustained effort over a long time. Therefore, the Equity Task Force recommends that implementation of equity initiatives be charted by member settings along the following Continuum of Equity Practices, in their self-studies:

Continuum of Equity Practices

	No Action at This Time	Acknowledging & Defining Issue	Making Plans	Beginning to Implement	Sustaining Progress	Promising Practice to Share
Age						
Disability						
Gender						
Language						
Locality						
Personal Appearance						
Political Ideology						
Race						
Religion						
Sexual orientation						
Socio-economic status						
Other						

3. The Equity Task Force recommends that the following questions be used to guide the self-studies of member settings:

1. Are the organizations in our member setting in agreement with and committed to the NNER Equity Statement?

³ See “Agenda for Education in a Democracy,” <http://depts.washington.edu/cedren/AED.htm>, last accessed May 8, 2006.

2. To what extent has our setting reviewed internal policies regarding equity to identify overt or explicit elements of discrimination and/or anti-democratic values? If such policies or practices exist, what have we done to attempt to change them? If they cannot be changed, what have we done to mitigate their effects?
3. How have we studied and addressed the culture and climate of our institutions (e.g. democratic values, academic experiences, student retention & satisfaction, faculty satisfaction, and employee satisfaction), as related to equity? Might practices of organizations in our setting result in inadvertent discrimination or inequity?
4. What do colleges and schools (including faculty, students, parents) and other community organizations say are the most urgent equity issues as listed on the *continuum of equity practices* in our setting currently?
5. What efforts have we undertaken in our setting to address these issues by promoting equity in each of the dimensions of the *Continuum of Equity*? (Examples of effort and initiatives that support promoting equity in our partner institutions and community include: culturally responsive practice; policies and research; grants, financial aid, and funding resources; curriculum; collaboration with community e.g. service learning and structures to promote a four-part alliance; recruitment and retention; addressing the culture and climate of institutions; and recognition of identities.)
6. To what extent has our setting involved the community in the above efforts to promote equity in teacher education and schooling?
7. What particular barriers or challenges do we face in addressing the issues we identified? What particular opportunities are there?
8. What kinds of resources or assistance do we need to address these issues further or more effectively? What more do we need to learn?
9. After completing the *Continuum of Equity Practices*, for any areas that are marked “No action at this time,” please explain why.