
Introduction

Open Minds to Equality embodies the potential for educators and students to create more caring, fair, and just classrooms and schools that can help shape a more equitable and generous world. It offers ideas and tools to sustain educational communities where students and teachers feel supported, where difference is appreciated, and where inequity is challenged. In such classrooms and schools all students have equitable access to resources and opportunities, reflective of a similar society that we all can contribute toward.

We come to the 4th edition of *Open Minds to Equality* having worked for decades with educators and students in classrooms where difference is named and appreciated. We know that elementary and middle school students can understand discrimination and privilege, and can foster socially just alternatives. They need adults to provide safe space, language, and opportunities to talk about their lives, struggles, and visions. By participating in educational communities that strive for equity, young people, teachers, and parents can know through lived experience that alternatives are possible to what society offers people today. To that end, *Open Minds to Equality* offers a sequenced process, skills, and activities to empower students to understand and change their lives and the world around them.

Addressing bullying behavior has become a priority of many states and school districts. Much bullying behavior is rooted in bias, and unfortunately this is not adequately addressed in standard anti-bullying programs. Students' misinformation about people from social groups not their own, their own experiences of bias, and the unequal treatment of social groups in their school, community, or our society are at the base of much bullying. Among the most effective approaches for preventing bullying is to educate young people to better understand and value those perceived as different from themselves and to work collaboratively for social justice, an approach offered in *Open Minds to Equality*.

This edition of *Open Minds to Equality* builds on the previous three editions by including a wealth of updated information and resources. New lessons have been added that address immigration, anti-Muslim discrimination, gender identity, and bullying. The comprehensive, annotated Bibliography is revised and updated.

As co-authors we have followed different, but connected, paths that have maintained our commitment to this work.

Nancy's path:

My educational experiences are reflected in the principles and practices in *Open Minds to Equality*. As a high school social studies teacher in Philadelphia, my students heightened my education about black history, racism, and resistance. In turn I supported them in finding meaning and hope through respect and a relevant curriculum that addressed their life experiences in the small, alternative public school at which I taught. Through field-based courses, like "Community Change," they learned to critique and challenge injustice in their community.

Fortunate to attend a graduate program with an experiential, social justice orientation at UMass Amherst, I've since taught teachers and provided professional development opportunities for K–12 students and educators using the sequential process for teaching about diversity at the heart of *Open Minds to Equality*. What keeps my hope alive, even in the current oppressive times in public education, are the myriad examples of students and teachers who through this process became more conscious of the inequities around them and took creative steps to change them.

For example, after learning about prejudice and the "isms," music students analyzed songs in their music books/curriculum for bias and omissions, rewrote the songs and then performed them, showcasing multicultural and gender-fair lyrics. In one district a group of teachers collaborated to develop a pamphlet, "Diversity Education: A Reflective Guide for Teachers," for the entire district faculty that contained questions for reflection about classroom practice, curriculum, and administrative action, to serve as reminders of ways to be mindful of equity day by day. Another elementary teacher created a process for students to act out for their classmates both "discrimination stories" and "ally stories" that they had experienced. After insightful teacher-led group processing, students wrote their individual stories, building both writing skills and personal empowerment. This "Act It Out" process was

published by Karen Cathers so other educators could replicate the experience. One elementary student wrote: “Let’s never forget what we’ve learned here about bias. When we’re in high school let’s not forget how to treat each other with respect.” This book and my work seek to honor and encourage the possibility and power of such education and action for social justice.

Ellen’s path:

My educational experiences, as a child and as an adult, as a student and as a teacher, are interwoven into the ideas in *Open Minds to Equality*. My teaching experience began in rural West Virginia with low-income Appalachian middle school students. My years in West Virginia introduced me to warm and generous families with parents who had had little access to schooling themselves and who cared a great deal about their children having better opportunities.

My commitment to equity grew out of my upbringing with my parents and grandmother. At the heart of their lives was this commitment. As a child I remember my mother talking with a neighbor who held racist beliefs and helping this elderly woman understand the effects of those beliefs. When I asked my mother about these conversations with a 90-year-old woman, my mother said, “Never too late for someone to change.”

More than 40 years into teaching, I am blending my teaching of preservice teachers with my work two or three days a week with elementary school children and teachers in urban and suburban schools in the Boston area. Whether teaching college or elementary school, my teaching is with a multicultural lens regardless of what I’m teaching. The ideas in *Open Minds to Equality* are infused in my practice, be it with 9-year-olds or be it with adults. When I teach mathematics we uncover the strengths of mathematicians from *all* continents. We use data to understand inequities and to understand movements leading to a fairer world. For example, children are uncovering patterns as they make bracelets with Ghanaian beads, and then use different kinds of averages to price these bracelets to raise money for a school in Ghana. They are working successfully to make a difference in the world.

A major focus in *Open Minds to Equality* is creating a classroom culture of support, of bonding across both similarities and differences, and learning to be allies and upstanders. In my work with adults and children we consistently practice these skills, growing together as we also focus on more traditional content. As schools change and as society changes, we encounter new reasons to celebrate and new challenges to overcome. We continue to need to learn and revise our practice to meet these changes. It’s an ongoing process and often a joyous one.

OUR APPROACH TO EDUCATING FOR EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Open Minds to Equality reflects goals and practices of social justice education. It envisions a society in which all groups have equal participation and resources, all individuals can develop their full potentials, and people act collectively and democratically for the common good. Processes that support the development of social justice reflect values that are similarly participatory and equitable. Students’ experience in classrooms where teachers and young people strive to create fair relationships and equitable structures enables them to envision what a just society could be. Such a vision is valuable for all of us to maintain direction, energy, and hope as we collectively work for change.

Both classroom content and process are important for teaching about diversity and democracy. *Open Minds to Equality* explores many of the different forms of discrimination that inhibit equity. Young people as well as adults are affected by discrimination and privilege based in race, gender, class, age, physical/emotional/learning ability, sexual orientation, language, and religion, nationality, and gender identity, among others. These forms of difference are used to maintain social inequality. Through activities in this book, students learn how this happens and also explore actions that could instead help change these unequal structures to foster greater social justice.

The content of the lessons encourages students to be critical; to raise complex questions; to explore different sources of information and various points of view; and to consider how knowledge can be constructed to maintain inequality. Lessons raise issues in a way that gets students thinking, rather than putting them on the defensive. In turn, activities encourage students to do the same when talking about these issues with others.

The lessons in *Open Minds to Equality* reflect a classroom process that is experiential and cooperative. Students explore their own experience as a source of learning about equality. If, for example, they are studying racism, they think about ways racism has affected their lives. In this way their learning is personally meaningful. It is also participatory: students work with others to share experiences, investigate problems, answer questions, and act for change.

Since competition maintains inequality and cooperation fosters equity, classroom norms are cooperative. Students are taught skills for communication, cooperation, and interpersonal understanding. The class may engage in a community meeting to solve a common problem. The learning process is equitable in that all voices and ideas are encouraged and differences are dealt with by listening, talking, and opening minds and hearts to each other. We describe in

more detail our approach to educating for equality in Chapter 2.

A SEQUENTIAL PROCESS FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS

From our many years of teaching and research we have developed a “Sequential Process for Creating Inclusive Classrooms and Schools,” a process through which people can gain greater understanding about personal and institutional inequality and develop the skills and commitment to foster change. The sequence of this book follows that process. Since dealing with diversity integrates both cognitive and affective learning, we’ve found it important to follow this sequential process to enable people to engage with the issues in a nonthreatening way rather than alienating them.

Step A. Create an Inclusive, Trusting Community Where Students Appreciate Diversity in the Classroom

Initially, we’ve found a supportive, caring environment is important for students to feel safe enough to examine their attitudes and to explore ideas that may challenge preconceived notions. It takes very intentional work on the part of a teacher to create that environment. Students need to be taught skills for working together, just as they are taught reading or math skills. Through activities in Chapter 3, “Building Trust and Communication,” students can develop self-efficacy, build trust, improve listening skills, and learn to give and receive feedback.

In Chapter 4, “Developing Skills for Creative Cooperation,” students can gain skills for cooperation, decision-making, critical thinking, interviewing, equitable group work, and community meetings. When students feel secure, accepted, and respected by their teacher and peers, they will be most honest and willing to take risks to learn.

Step B. Enable Students to Empathize with Others’ Life Experiences and Explore Why and How Inequality Based on Difference Exists

Students benefit from opportunities to explore how their own social identities—race, gender, religion, class, and so forth—shape their experiences and perceptions of reality and to understand how they’re a combination of different social identities, some similar and some different from their peers. Lessons in Chapter 5, “Expanding Our Vistas: Our Lives to Others’ Lives,” help them do this, as well as enable them to get into other people’s shoes and empathize with feelings of those hurt by bias.

Most young people have been hurt by prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination and have observed

others being hurt as well. Activities in Chapter 6, “New Words: New Perspectives,” give students language to name and discuss their experiences. Students define and recognize prejudice, stereotypes, and the forms of institutional discrimination—the “isms.” Through these lessons they come to better understand how ableism, linguicism, classism, and so forth affect people’s feelings and life situations.

In Chapter 7, “Discrimination: Prices and Choices,” students learn about the effects both individual and institutional inequality have on the lives and opportunities of people in various social groups, exploring some of the complex patterns of systems of oppression. For example, lessons enable students to experience the dynamics of “blaming the victim” and come to see the cause of inequality in institutional discrimination rather than in deficiencies of individuals. They examine how people with few privileges can internalize their oppression, believing stereotypes about their group, rather than seeing how an unequal playing field has limited their choices.

Step C. Help Students Examine Discrimination in the Institutions in Their Lives and See How It Has Affected Them

Once students understand these ideas they are able to apply them directly to their own lives. Through lessons in Chapter 8, “Investigating Your Environment,” students explore their classroom, school, and home to see how personal and institutional discrimination have affected them, for only when people become aware of discrimination can it be changed. Students examine bulletin boards, the school calendar, and textbooks for bias, omissions, and “the isms,” and similarly at home look at their toys, books and jobs.

Lessons in Chapter 9, “More Environmental Influences and Their Effects,” provide opportunities for students to investigate the media and their community for messages that influence their assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors. Through these lessons, students investigate advertising, TV shows, news reports, and song lyrics for classism, racism, and all the “isms.” Thus students develop a critical awareness of the institutions they’re a part of and discover the ways in which stereotypes and the “isms” affect them daily.

Step D. Empower Students to Envision and Create Changes to Foster Greater Equality

By now, students have been building the knowledge and motivation to act for change. Lessons in Chapter 10, “Things Can Be Different,” show students realistic ways people have fostered equality in the past and continue to do so. They collectively read, for example, an interview with two elementary students who courageously and successfully spoke out to challenge homophobia in

their elementary school. When students see that more equal personal and societal relations aren't "pie-in-the-sky" fantasies, but can and do exist in the real world, they develop the motivation for change.

The final chapter, "We Can Make Changes!" contains resources and activities that enable students to change unequal situations and promote social justice in developmentally appropriate ways. Students who have identified bias in reading books, for example, write and illustrate non-biased stories, and read them to younger children, concurrently developing their skills in creative writing and art and educating others. They practice strategies to support each other to stand up for their beliefs and respond to bullying behavior. By creating inclusive bulletin boards, revising formerly classist book fairs, or cooperatively changing a barrier to equality in their community, students challenge the familiar mantra "You just can't change things." Through such initiatives, students gain self-confidence, personal power, and experience in collective responsibility and action.

Thus the activities in *Open Minds to Equality* help students progress developmentally and sequentially in their understanding of inequality and in their ability to foster change. This same sequenced process can be applied to learners of all ages, including ourselves.

Our social group memberships and those of our students will influence implementation and outcomes of these activities. So will classroom demographics and the interplay of the various aspects of our own and our students' social identities. If a majority of students share a common aspect of their social identity, we're particularly thoughtful about those in the minority. For example, in addressing racism in a predominantly white class, we avoid anyone expecting students of color to be experts, nor do we look to them for answers. Similarly, while we address biased statements that arise in discussion, we do so very intentionally when the comment affects the social identities of students who are in the minority. If only a couple of students with LGBT family members are in our class and other students make homophobic statements, our particularly active intervention to educate other students is important so the students with LGBT family members feel safe in the classroom.

It's sometimes difficult for us, and for students, to admit the benefits received from some aspects of our social identities and to push ourselves to explore our privilege. When in a middle class school, it's an important challenge to engage issues related to social class and then be consistent in implementing activities that help students understand their class privilege. Similarly, it's often hard to address the interplay between privilege and oppression in our own and students' own lives. Choose lessons from *Open Minds to Equality* that address some of these complexities that are reflected in your classroom dynamics. If, for example, young people in your

class bring an understanding of ageism from their life experiences, appropriate lessons can help them see the connections between discrimination they've faced and discrimination toward immigrants that some of them may practice themselves. Thus when implementing these lessons, think about the social identities of yourself, your students, school staff, parents, and community and their implications for your teaching.

USING THIS BOOK

Although *Open Minds to Equality* is geared for upper elementary and middle school students, it is very appropriate for high school students as well. Primary, high school, and college teachers have used the first three editions of this book with great enthusiasm and success. These teachers often are easily able to adapt lessons to the level of their students.

We've found it most effective to teach chapters, and chapter sections within them, sequentially, using learning activities appropriate for a teacher's students within the sequential chapters. Choices may depend on student needs, areas a teacher believes are important to emphasize, school and community variables, the subject matter focus of a lesson, integration into the curriculum, or the difficulty of the concepts.

After reading through this Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2, and the introduction to the other chapters, skim through the lessons. This will provide a feeling for the progression of objectives and ideas in the book. Elementary teachers who have students all day often find it possible to do an activity from each chapter section every week or two, reinforcing cognitive skills already being taught. Middle school and high school teachers similarly integrate lessons into their curriculum, particularly in social studies, language arts/reading/English, health, or home and career skills. The book is also useful for special units or courses in multicultural education, human relations, and diversity awareness. For example, in one high school, students in a peer leadership elective experienced lessons in *Open Minds to Equality* and then taught them to students in classes in the district's elementary school.

Although *Open Minds to Equality* is written to be used in the classroom, there are other ways teachers can use the book. Some middle schools and high schools have advisory or "home base." By giving careful attention to the time frame and modifying lessons or teaching them over several days, teachers can make *Open Minds to Equality* the focus of their advisory for a year. In fact, if the goal of an entire school is to encourage appreciation of diversity, this could be the program for all advisories. Similarly, these activities can be the focus of extracurricular multicultural clubs in schools

and the programs of Y's, youth groups, camps, and other organizations.

This book focuses on various forms of diversity—race, gender, class, age, religion, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, and language—and their interconnections. While all are important to address, teachers emphasize particular aspects of diversity given the composition of their class and community and the needs of their students. The “Forms of Discrimination” chart in the Resource Section pinpoints lessons that address particular types of diversity.

Open Minds to Equality includes some complex and sophisticated lessons, thought-provoking and challenging for adults as well as young people. These lessons are doable for young people whose teachers have been addressing multicultural issues with them over time. The content of most activities is accessible to students from upper elementary grades upward, although some are more appropriate for those in middle school or high school. Teachers choose lessons with an eye to their complexity and age-appropriateness.

“Integrating *Open Minds to Equality* into Your Curriculum” in the Resource Section of the book includes many ways you can incorporate lessons from this book into your curriculum, particularly in social studies, reading, language arts, math, and art. Since *Open Minds to Equality* brings a social justice perspective to teaching and learning that is more than a series of lessons, teachers infuse much of what they typically do in the classroom with the spirit of this book. For example: they give students spelling sentences that include the names and experiences of people from various cultural backgrounds; make sure that math problems include low-income people; and line students up based on creative variables like sock color rather than gender. *Open Minds to Equality*, therefore, brings a social justice perspective to all we do.

FACING THE CHALLENGES

As educators we face daunting challenges in teaching for social justice today, so many more than at the time of the first edition in 1983. At the same time we're constantly heartened by the way these challenges are met! Our government's ongoing response to 9/11 has continued to condone increased bias toward people of color, maintaining a climate of fear. The growing strength of religious and political fundamentalism creates a greater unwillingness among adherents to listen to alternative perspectives or engage in dialogue. Corporate-backed government policies have fostered vast differences in wealth between the rich and all others, making the gap greater than any other time in the past 50 years. These same policies have diminished access to well-paying

jobs, adequate health care, and affordable housing, causing people to fear for their basic survival. People seek simple answers and those perceived as “other” are easily blamed. Young people are affected by the stereotypes, hate, and oppressive policies that pervade our culture.

The tenor of public speech in the media over the past 30 years has become more crass and on many talk shows discriminatory ideas abound. The mainstream media is more consolidated, with a few corporations controlling the public's knowledge of the world. Fewer independent newspapers, radio, and TV stations mean fewer opportunities for alternative points of view. Although the internet provides more varied opportunities for understanding the world, often people only visit sites that reflect their viewpoints or that reflect mainstream perspectives. Young people think that what's in the media is reality. With examples of equity hard to find in the culture, it's tougher to teach about social justice.

At the same time, these challenges have brought opportunities. In a post-9/11 world, teachers have learned more about Arab people and about Islam, educating their students as well. They have used the experiences, ideas, and language of the Occupy Wall Street movement for teaching about economic inequality and its alternatives. More and more educators are teaching media literacy to their students so they can critique what they see and read. Students analyze talk shows and the media for bias, and seek out information from the noncorporate, independent media. For example, by comparing the coverage of the Trayvon Martin case in a mainstream news source and an independent media source like *Democracy Now!*, students not only analyzed this case of institutional racism but also developed critical media skills that are long-lasting.

Schools are the sites of other challenges. By 2050 the public schools in the United States are projected to be 50 percent white, 25 percent Latina/o and the remainder a mixture of black, Asian American, and Native American. In fact, since 2012 white births have become the minority in the U.S. Educators need the culturally relevant knowledge and materials grounded in social justice education to effectively teach their increasingly diverse student populations.

Federally and state-imposed mandates No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT), developed by government leaders and corporate executives with minimal input from educators, have focused on excessive use of high-stakes tests, encouraging “teaching to the test” and a narrowing of the curriculum, approaches contrary to developing broad, deep, and complex understandings and the acquisition of democratic skills that multicultural education encourages. Schools serving low-income communities

of color face the harshest budget cuts and often have been “turned over” to private corporations and charters, evidencing no improvement in students’ education. In this educational context many educators find little institutional support for social justice education.

Despite this context, we are heartened by the many committed educators who still keep education for equity a priority in their classrooms and integrate ideas from *Open Minds to Equality* and other social justice resources into their teaching. Some join or create social justice teacher groups for support and to advocate for changes that will help children learn—like closing the opportunity gap, smaller class size, and professional development for teachers. Some use materials from *Rethinking Schools*, *Teaching for Change*, *Teaching Tolerance*, or *Facing History and Ourselves*. Some are members of the National Association for Multicultural Education or one of its regional affiliates. In some cities others are members of independent groups—Portland Area Rethinking Schools, Teachers 4 Social Justice in San Francisco, New York Collective of Radical Educators, and others—that offer conferences, develop curriculum, and organize around equity issues. In other cities teachers have formed social justice caucuses in their unions—like the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) in Chicago or the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) in New York City. In Chicago CORE candidates were voted into the leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union. Others are actively working on issues of social justice in national or local teacher unions. Despite the challenges, educators are fighting to keep spaces for authentic social justice teaching in these turbulent times.

TEACHER LEARNING

We hope that this book will be as valuable a source of learning for readers as it was for us as authors. We’ve interspersed intriguing “boxes” of information and challenging ideas for teachers throughout the book, and a “Background Reading for Teachers” section in the Bibliography. Teachers have found helpful, when possible, to teach *Open Minds to Equality* with support by finding a colleague who will also use the book and share feedback and ideas. We’ve found when a number of teachers in a school use *Open Minds to Equality*, it’s helpful to try to garner administrative support for concurrent professional development. This and periodic support groups where teachers can share successes and problems are valuable for working through the challenges of teaching for social justice.

In the process of using *Open Minds to Equality* we’ve sometimes come to realize we’ve been

unintentionally reinforcing inequality in our teaching and lives. Yet we see this awareness as positive, in that only when a problem becomes visible can it be rectified. For example, only when a white teacher becomes aware that dealing with white privilege is crucial in addressing white racism can that teacher effectively confront racism. Implicitly and explicitly we’ve been taught prejudice, and we’ve been socialized not to examine and challenge institutional practices that support inequality. This is not our fault. Once aware of those behaviors and practices, however, it becomes our responsibility to change them. Guilt is disempowering, so instead of becoming guilty or defensive when we see ways we contribute to oppression, we try to tell ourselves, “I’m glad I’m aware of this; now I can change it.”

Making changes in our classroom may increase our efforts to make changes in our school, our community, and the broader society. Linking students with community activists and involving students with issues beyond the school can be empowering. It also reinforces the reality that social change is a collective process, bringing diverse groups of people together to work toward common goals.

OUR VISION

As teachers advocating personal and social change through education, we distinguish between long- and short-term goals. We share a vision of an equitable society where personal and institutional discrimination based on any form of difference has been eliminated and where people cooperate toward goals that benefit all. Although we know that this vision is far from realized, it is important for us to know what we are striving toward. We formulate short-term goals, those small, day-to-day changes that are building blocks toward the future. *Open Minds to Equality* provides ideas and activities to achieve such short-term goals.

Finally, we try to keep hope alive! Paul Rogat Loeb writes in his book *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen’s Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear* that hope can provide ordinary people the courage and commitment to speak and act on their values, vital to maintaining a democracy in times of fear. “The antidote to paralysis is hope: defiant, resilient, persistent hope, no matter what the odds may be.” By looking at the world with hope, we can sustain our lives with that orientation. “Nothing buoys the spirit and fosters hope like the knowledge that others faced equal or greater challenges in the past and continued on to bequeath us a better world,” Loeb writes. We can become part of that legacy and carry it into the future.