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English Language Arts: Spotlight on Equity Resources

Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources, opportunities, and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, whatever their race, gender/identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, language, ability, family background, or family income may be. (Adapted from CCSSO, Leading for Equity)

The Spotlight on Equity provides a list of considerations for the purpose of supporting equity and access in English Language Arts (ELA) education, emphasizing high quality and culturally sustaining ELA learning for all students. These considerations can help provide an equity literate and socially conscious lens to teaching and learning that recognizes the historic exclusion and marginalization of groups and communities and supports social justice.

The ultimate goal of this work is to ensure equitable educational outcomes for all students. These considerations, along with their compiled resources below, are not a complete list, but rather a starting point from which educators can design culturally relevant and sustaining learning opportunities in ELA, bringing education in Vermont one step closer to reaching that goal.

Feedback on the draft versions of the Spotlights on Equity were solicited from the field between October 11th and November 22nd of 2021. A link to a Cognito form with focus questions created by content specialists at the Vermont Agency of Education was sent out through their networks. Additionally, feedback was requested from members of the Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association (VTCLA), the Equity Literacy and Equitable Education Systems grant awardees, the Vermont Foreign Language Association, the Vermont Principals Association, and the chairperson of the Act 1 Advisory Working Group. Thirty-two educators submitted feedback that was used to improve and refine the draft documents.

Reading Critical Proficiency

Comprehend, interpret, analyze, and evaluate complex literary and informational texts.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations

- Representative authors, characters, and topics in classroom libraries
- Access to texts in home languages
- Access to multiple formats (braille, audio, etc.) for students with visual impairments
- Potential for biased content
- Strategies for vocabulary acquisition (e.g., cognates to connect with home or heritage language)
- Diversity of background knowledge and lived experiences that affect comprehension
- Proficiency level of foundational reading skills and subsequent readiness to access complex texts
- Access to books at home



Content and Curricular Considerations

- Diversify classroom library and required reading list by replacing or supplementing canonical texts with those that center the voices and lives of diverse people.
- Use text sets to build vocabulary, develop background knowledge, and expose students to multiple perspectives.
- Pre-teach important vocabulary and necessary background knowledge to make complex texts accessible to readers of all ability levels, including Multilingual Learners.
- Teach students about implicit bias and how to evaluate sources for biases.
- Teach vocabulary strategies (e.g., using cognates to connect new vocabulary with similar words in a student’s home or heritage language).
- Teach and reinforce foundational reading skills to support student access of complex texts.
- Include lessons about how to access books (e.g., school library and public library).
- Use the school library collection to provide access to more diversified texts.

Resources for Reading:

| Resource | Why it Matters |
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| <p>Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts (Extended Edition) – This interactive tool from Learning for Justice provides educators with a multi-dimensional approach to the text selection process that includes considerations that prioritize text complexity, critical literacy, and cultural responsiveness.</p> | <p>Books provide “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” to students. Representative texts allow all students to see themselves in the books they read. They also introduce students to cultures, experiences, perspectives, and identities that are different from their own. This helps students develop empathy for others. Educators should evaluate their classroom libraries and either replace or supplement their current texts with those from a diverse range of authors and protagonists. Diverse texts sets are an authentic and practical way to do so.</p> |
| <p>The Danger of a Single Story – In this TED Talk, author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about the fact that a person’s cultural identity is made up of many stories and the risk involved in making assumptions about a whole culture based on a single story.</p> | <p>It is important for students to understand that a person’s cultural identity is multidimensional and that one should not make assumptions about a group of people based on one identity marker or stereotypes associated with that marker.</p> |
| <p>Early Reading Accelerators (K-2) – This collection from Student Achievement Partners provides resources to support implementation of the two critical components of systematic early reading instruction: Foundational Skills and Building Knowledge and Vocabulary.</p> | <p>To comprehend complex texts, students need foundational reading skills as well as background knowledge and vocabulary. Students come to the classroom with different skill levels and lived experiences; teachers can ensure all students are prepared to access complex texts by strengthening these skills and knowledge bases.</p> |

| Resource | Why it Matters |
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| <p>Text Complexity – This collection from Student Achievement Partners focuses on the research behind text complexity as well as strategies to support teachers’ selection of appropriately complex texts.</p> | <p>For deep learning and increased appreciation of reading to take place, all students must be exposed to rich and vibrant complex texts. Additionally, the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts require students to read a range of appropriately complex texts.</p> |
| <p>Text Analysis Toolkit – This collection of resources from Student Achievement Partners supports educators in selecting and analyzing texts based on complexity and cultural relevance, taking into consideration the identities of educators as well as their students.</p> | <p>Students should have access to texts that are complex as well as culturally relevant and sustaining. These Sample Text Analyses and Planning Guides illustrate ways in which educators can use the tools provided in the toolkit.</p> |
| <p>“Book Deserts” Are Real. Here’s What Schools Are Doing to Help Kids Who Live in Them. – This article from We Are Teachers describes ways schools can help students gain access to print material, regardless of where they live.</p> | <p>Students do not always have access to books at home. To provide equitable opportunities for all students, schools must provide different ways for students to access print material.</p> |
| <p>Who Are Your Readers? Getting to Know Your Students and the Books They Love – This article from We Are Teachers provides ways for teachers to find out about the reading habits and capabilities of their students.</p> | <p>When teachers know what inspires and motivates each student, they can help them select reading material at an appropriate reading level that will engage them and encourage them to keep reading.</p> |
| <p>Kids Can’t Wait: Strategies to Support Struggling Readers – This article from the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity presents strategies to support students who struggle with understanding classroom reading assignments, written expression, and written assessments.</p> | <p>Some students need more targeted supports to access complex texts. It is important to provide these supports so that students can engage with written materials that are appropriately complex.</p> |

Writing Critical Proficiency

Produce clear and coherent writing for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations

- Social, historical, and cultural factors that influence how students write
- Perceived value of some types of writing over others
- Culture and home or heritage language of the writer
- Relationship and power structure between writer and reader
- Perceived value of academic classroom English over other forms of English
- Importance of explicit instruction and modeling for authentic purposes and audiences
- Varied and representative models of excellent writing
- Variety of writing tools (e.g., voice to text, pen and paper, or computer)
- Option to write in home or heritage language
- Personal or sensitive nature of writing topics and expectations around sharing work
- Bias of source material
- Access to texts in home or heritage language
- Access to multiple formats (braille, audio, etc.) for students with visual impairments
- Multiple perspectives and interpretations of materials
- Sensitive nature of some topics to specific communities
- Expectation of background knowledge
- Culturally dependent parameters around plagiarism and “text borrowing”

Content and Curricular Considerations

- Allow students to explore writing through their own cultural lens and honor their work.
- Explicitly teach about purpose and audience.
- Teach about the evolution of the English language and historical language movements (e.g., [plain language](#)).
- Place equal value on diverse forms of English that differ from standard academic classroom English (e.g., [Ebonics](#), etc.).
- Include varied and representative models of excellent writing.
- Use the school library to provide representative models of writing from diverse cultures and voices, and for diverse purposes and audiences.
- Use a rubric or scoring criteria to make expectations clear for each assignment.
- Encourage and accept use of a variety of writing tools (e.g., voice to text, pen and paper, or computer).
- Allow students to choose topics and whether or not to share (and with whom).
- Make sure students are aware of sharing requirements before they begin writing.
- Teach students about implicit bias and how to evaluate sources for biases.
- Use text sets to build vocabulary and background knowledge and to expose students to multiple perspectives.
- Explicitly teach expectations for [citations](#), paraphrasing, and avoiding plagiarism.
- Partner with school library media specialists to provide students with access to a greater variety and volume of research materials as well as share their expertise in the research process.

Resources for Writing:

| Resource | Why it Matters |
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| Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing – This position statement from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) points out that writing is affected by complex social relationships and languages, including relationships of power and those in which one person’s voice or language is valued more than another’s. | Many cultural factors influence a student’s writing, including linguistic, racial, economic, geographic, and ideological. Keeping these factors in mind, educators should explicitly teach and model expectations as well as provide clear evaluation criteria. |
| Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers – This resource from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) provides suggestions for supporting multilingual writers throughout instruction and assessment. | Multilingual writers can have different understandings of expectations of writing based on their own cultural assumptions and experiences. They may also pull from knowledge of multiple languages when writing. Cultural and educational backgrounds can affect background knowledge, interpretation of materials, and sensitivity to certain subject matter. |
| The “Other Side” of the Story: Designing Multiple Perspective Inquiries – This resource from the National Council for the Social Studies includes information about how to include multiple perspectives and diverse voices in the curriculum. | It is important for students to be presented with multiple perspectives and diverse voices when learning about a topic or investigating an inquiry. |
| 10 Smart Ideas for Integrating Language Arts and Social Studies – This article from We Are Teachers explores ways in which ELA educators can integrate social studies into their curriculum. | Educators can expand the background knowledge, vocabulary base, and critical thinking skills of their students by integrating social studies concepts, practices, and texts within their ELA curriculum. |

Speaking and Listening Critical Proficiency

Participate effectively in a range of discussions, collaborations, and presentations.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations

- Voice and choice in topic
- Diverse and flexible groupings to build knowledge and explore perspectives
- Opportunities to share in home or heritage language
- Ensuring all voices are heard
- Modeling inclusive thinking and respectful use of language
- Social, historical, and cultural factors that influence how students speak and interact

- Creating a safe space for honest sharing
- Sensitive nature of some topics to specific communities
- Opportunities to present in multiple formats

Content and Curricular Considerations

- Teach about civil discourse and respectful communication.
- Create a culture of community at the beginning of the year.
- Provide opportunities for students to present in multiple formats and languages.
- Use a rubric or scoring criteria to make expectations clear for each discussion, collaboration, or presentation.

Resources for Speaking and Listening:

| Resource | Why it Matters |
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| Community Inquiry - This resource from Learning for Justice includes teaching strategies to help students develop speaking and listening skills by asking them to draw upon texts during meaningful and respectful classroom discussions. | The ability to draw upon texts during discussions is essential when forming an argument that is supported by evidence and not simply opinion. |
| Toward a More Civil Discourse – This resource from Learning for Justice provides educators with tools for teaching civil discourse. | To become active and engaged global citizens, students need to be able to communicate effectively and respectfully. |
| Critical Practices for Social Justice Education: Culture and Climate – This section of a publication from Learning for Justice focuses on ways to honor the experiences of all students. | It is important to provide safe spaces for all students to feel comfortable sharing their unique stories as well as help them build necessary communication skills. |
| Why Group Work Could Be the Key to English Learner Success – This article from KQED Mind Shift describes ways to maintain cognitive rigor engagement for students for whom English is not their home or heritage language through multilingual discussion groups. | It is just as important for Multilingual Learners to have the opportunity to engage in cognitively rigorous educational experiences as it is for students for whom English is their home or heritage language. |
| How to Have an Equitable Class Discussion – This article from Usable Knowledge provides information about how teachers can be intentional about calling on a diverse set of student voices. | Having an equitable discussion means exploring multiple perspectives. This allows students to express their own unique perspectives while giving them the chance to hear, consider, and respond to the diverse perspectives of others. |

Language Critical Proficiency

Demonstrate understanding of the conventions of English, effective language use, and breadth and depth of vocabulary.

Spotlight on Equity:

Instructional Considerations

- Relationships among group affiliation, identity, and language
- Differences among patterns in English dialects, other languages, and more conventionally written English
- Perceived value of academic classroom English over other forms of English
- Multilingual writers
- Evolution of language
- Linguistic resources of all students
- Strategies for vocabulary acquisition (e.g., cognates to connect with home or heritage language)
- Differences of grammar, usage, and syntax based on purpose and audience
- Option to write or speak in home or heritage language

Content and Curricular Considerations

- Explicitly teach about differences among patterns in English dialects, other languages, and more conventionally written English.
- Explicitly teach and use a rubric or scoring criteria to make expectations for the conventions of English grammar and usage clear for each assignment.
- Teach about the continued evolution of the English language.
- Teach vocabulary strategies (e.g., using cognates to connect new vocabulary with similar words in a student's home or heritage language).
- Teach about the ways in which purpose and audience dictate differences in grammar, usage, and syntax for written and spoken communication.
- Use the school library to provide representative models of writing from diverse cultures and voices, and for diverse purposes and audiences.

Resources for Language:

| Resource | Why it Matters |
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| Teaching Strategies: Word Work – This resource from Learning for Justice includes vocabulary strategies to help students build comprehension and language skills by using key words from specific texts in their own reading, writing, speaking, and listening. | To comprehend complex texts, students need depth and breadth of vocabulary. Since students come to the classroom with different skill levels and lived experiences, teachers can ensure all students are prepared to access complex texts by helping students build their vocabulary knowledge. |

| Resource | Why it Matters |
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| <p>Students' Right to Their Own Language – This statement from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) affirms students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language as part of their cultural identity and includes explanations of relevant research on dialects and usage.</p> | <p>Students come to the classroom with unique cultural identities, part of which is their use of language. Teachers should respect these differences and explicitly teach expectations when certain criteria for language use are in place.</p> |
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General ELA Resources

[12 Questions to Ask When Designing Culturally and Historically Responsive Curriculum](#) – This article by [Dr. Gholdy Muhammad](#) provides information about how to design lessons for the whole child around the five pursuits of learning in a culturally and historically responsive classroom.

[20 Ways to Bring More Equity to Your Literacy Instruction](#) – This article from We Are Teachers describes strategies for increasing equity in the ELA classroom.

[Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment](#) – This article and accompanying checklist from the Anti-Defamation League can be used to help identify strengths and areas for improvement in the creation of positive, anti-bias educational environments in which respect for diversity is taught, modeled, and experienced by all.

[Critical Practices for Social Justice Education](#) – This publication from Learning for Justice provides teachers with practical strategies for creating a learning environment that is culturally responsive and promotes anti-bias values and values of social justice.

[Instructional Practice Guide for Equitable Teaching and Learning in English Language Arts Grades 9 through 12](#) – This resource, published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in collaboration with Wisconsin English language arts teachers, provides a collection of instructional practices to ensure educational equity and help all students develop as literate individuals.

[Priorities for Equitable Instruction: 2021 and Beyond](#) – This resource from Student Achievement Partners can help educators prioritize resources and planning time in order to design equitable learning experiences and create inclusive, affirming, and academically rigorous learning environments for all students.

[Qualities of Antiracist ELA Curricula](#) – This short infographic from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) reminds teachers that “racism can be enacted through English language arts curricula” and lists the ways that ELA curricula can help sustain cultural diversity as part of educational justice.

[Screening for Biased Content in Instructional Materials](#) – This tool from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction helps educators evaluate texts and other resources for biased content.

[Teaching Strategies](#) – This collection of teaching strategies from Learning for Justice helps teachers build literacy as well as social emotional skills while exploring meaningful texts. Each strategy is aligned to the Common Core and includes a special note about English language learners and connections to anti-bias education.

[What Antiracist Language Teachers Do](#) – This short infographic from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) reminds teachers that “racism can be enacted through the

instructional choices of English language arts teachers” and lists the ways in which ELA teachers can combat racism through practice.

Additional Vermont Agency of Education Resources

[Cultural Diversity and Equity Resources \(June 2020\)](#)

[Educational Equity Webpage](#) – The Agency of Education (AOE), along with educators across Vermont, is determined to eliminate the inequity that persists between Vermont’s affluent white students, and student groups that have historically demonstrated achievement gaps within our state’s school systems, including students who are on Individual Education Plans, English learners (ELs), students eligible for free and reduced cost lunch, migrant children, children experiencing homelessness, children in the foster care system, and students of color.

[Equity Literacy Resources – Fall 2019](#) – The following list of resources, updated in the fall of 2019, is a small sample of possible opportunities for equity literacy learning that can be used to supplement the Spring 2019 resource list. We acknowledge that all groups and communities may not be represented by this list, but it provides a place to start, as you may adapt or reinterpret a resource to fit your local needs or community.

[Equity Literacy Resources – Spring 2019](#) – The following list of resources and potential partners is a small sample of possible opportunities for equity literacy learning. We acknowledge that all groups and communities may not be represented by this list, but it provides a place to start, as you may adapt or reinterpret a resource to fit your local needs or community.