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INNOVATION

Creating strategies for a more equitable and less violent future

The Equity Scholar in Residence Model



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A New and Effective Resource for Supporting Educators to Drive Social Equity in K-12 Schools

The Institute for Liberatory Innovation developed the **Equity Scholar in Residence model** to address critical gaps in current approaches to advancing social equity in K-12 schools, and to mitigate unintended negative consequences that can arise from approaches focused on policy, training and singular leadership.

In practice, the model embeds a uniquely prepared, independent contractor, an Equity Scholar in Residence, in a school or small district. With oversight from school leaders, the **ESR** has workspace in the school, attends staff meetings and school events, and works responsively with educators to support their efforts to address social equity opportunities and challenges unique to their school community.

The Equity Scholar is supported by the ILI through an ongoing relationship with a Scholar-Mentor, and a cohort of Equity Scholars embedded in other schools. The ILI provides presentations, information, and consultation to support the success of the model in each school community, and engages in ongoing evaluation and research to understand the impact of the model, reporting results regularly to schools.

An independent evaluation of a two-year pilot indicated that implementation of the ESR model increases educators' willingness and confidence to address social equity, increasing reflection on social equity, and likelihood that educators will seek help for personal and professional challenges related to social equity.

The pilot also indicated a strong possibility that the model drives sustained engagement and change, and reduces concern about and resistance to social equity efforts in schools.



“As educators grapple with a constantly shifting terrain of social equity, the **ESR** has been our rock, providing us with resources, wise counsel, steady support, and an active presence.”

– Middle School Educator

“ In Vermont, children from low-income families, students with disabilities, and students of color score worse on standardized tests, are more likely to be suspended or expelled, are less likely to graduate on time, and are less likely to reach college or career-readiness, go to college, and graduate from college. ”

-Education Matters Report (2016)



The Challenge

Lack of educational equity for historically underserved students is well-documented, with deeply harmful, long-term individual and systemic impact. Despite the best efforts of many educators and policy-makers, educational inequity remains stubbornly persistent.

Efforts to date to drive and sustain social equity in schools have largely depended on three basic approaches: training, policy, and leadership, often relegated to individuals who are part of under-served populations themselves, e.g. teachers and administrators of color or with disabilities. Research and experience in the past decade have demonstrated that while each approach has merit; they also have limitations and unintended negative consequencesⁱ. Leadership models, for example, often further isolate already marginalized staff, and can distract from necessary systemic interventions.

There is no small amount of honest fear and anguish in community and school dynamics around issues of social inequity, especially racism. If not well-met, those dynamics can result in deepened concern and resistance, while sharp inequity and harm continues in schools. Moreover, understandings about equity change quickly, and educators rightly struggle to keep up with emerging knowledge and community demands.

At the same time, creating cultures of equity has become more urgent as the consequences of inequitable education become more widely apparentⁱⁱ. As the scale of social consciousness increases, so does the desire of schools and communities to drive equity, but their options for help are limited, generally failing to address community-specific, day-to-day equity challenges or to mitigate unintended negative consequences.

The Model

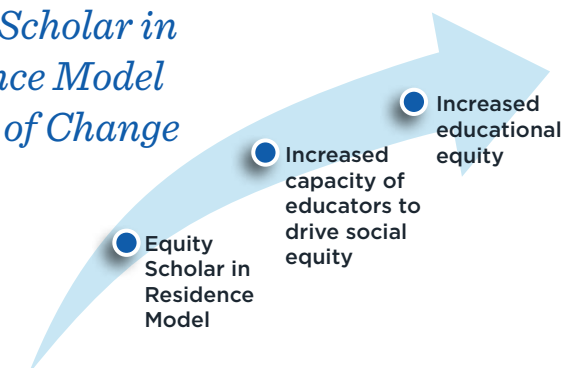
The Equity Scholar in Residence Model was developed to address these challenges, combining four equally critical components,

- Embedded, genuine relationship. An individual Equity Scholar (ESR) is an independent contractor embedded in a school or small district, working on a daily basis with school staff, intentionally developing genuine relationships with colleagues in the school and with community members.
- Learner-centered education. The ESR works from a learner-centered pedagogy, responding to context-based questions and challenges identified by educators and community members, rather than with pre-determined information, programs or solutions.
- Compassionate and restorative interaction. The ESR responds to equity challenges and questions with kindness and without pre-judgement, and works to strengthen relationships through respect and mutual accountability.
- Responsive Scholarship. The ESR has a deep knowledge of history, information and emerging insight about issues that drive inequity, knows how to find information they don't already have, and works collaboratively with educators to identify resources specific to their emerging, day-today equity challenges.

The first three of these components are familiar to many educators: The positive impact of genuine, respectful relationships is well-known, and the effectiveness of learner-centered pedagogies are well established. The impact of compassionate and restorative practice is increasingly well-documentedⁱⁱⁱ. The fourth component of the ESR model, responsive scholarship, is a new innovation, offering educators a dynamic, credible, on-site source of information and support to meet the constantly-changing challenges of social equity in the school setting.

The theory of change behind the Equity Scholar in Residence model is that when educators' capacity (defined in this case by willing confidence, and knowledge) to engage social equity in school increases, students' experience of equity and equitable access increases. This theory is supported by previous research establishing correlations between teacher capacity and school culture.^{iv}

Equity Scholar in Residence Model Theory of Change



“ The ESR works with humor, love, and criticality, encouraging us to dig deeply. I am a better teacher, colleague, and human as a result. ”

-High School Educator



Model Development

The model was developed in a two-year pilot (2019-2021) with educators at U-32 Middle-High School in Montpelier, Vermont; and the Professional Development Committee of Rumney Memorial Elementary School in Middlesex, Vermont.

At the end of the first year of the pilot, 96% of respondents to an informal survey indicated that their interactions with the ESR helped them feel better or more confident in meeting equity and identity challenges, that they had learned something new they could apply directly to their work with equity and identity, and/or that the ESR had directly and successfully helped them address a specific equity or identity challenge.

The first pilot year established a theory of change, expected model outcomes, and four core components of the Equity Scholar in Residence Model. At the end of the second pilot year, a formal pre-and post survey and an independent qualitative evaluation affirmed the model outcomes, the four core components, and the replicability of the model^{vi}.


In Practice

- The Equity Scholar serves the school “in residence,” that is, embedded in the school on a half or full-time basis (depending on the size of the school), working daily with teachers, administrators and other educators to support their efforts to address social equity issues specific to their school community.
- The ESR is an employee of the ILI, contracted to serve the client school or district for an academic year. The ILI collaborates with the school or small district to hire an Equity Scholar appropriate for the specific school or small district setting.
- The roles and responsibilities of the ESR, School or District, and ILI are established in a Contract/Memorandum of Understanding between the ILI and the school or district.
- Depending on the size of the school or district, the ESR is embedded as part of the school community full or part-time for the school year, and during the summer in support of school-year planning and preparation.
- The ILI provides
 - Support, training and ongoing mentoring to the Equity Scholar throughout the contract year.
 - By request, presentations about the ESR model to educators, school boards, parent and community groups before and during the contract period.
 - One credit- or certificate-bearing course, offered in the spring by an ILI Senior Scholar-Mentor to educators in schools served by Equity Scholars in Residence. The course provides a learner-centered deep-dive into pedagogy and practice in support of social equity in schools, informed by contemporary thinkers.

“When I reached out for suggestions and guidance on how to manage a controversial topic and where to find grade-appropriate books, the **ESR** responded immediately, and was encouraging and supportive. Her honesty, wealth of knowledge and insights concerning equity are invaluable.”

-Elementary Teacher





“ Having a dedicated equity scholar means I have a go-to person to help me do the work. She brings deep perspective, asks critical questions and enlarges the scope of our equity work so we can grow stronger as a school. ”

-Middle-High School Administrator

Typical ESR Activities

The Equity Scholar's specific activities in each school setting are always in response to requests from educators, or offered in the context of genuine and respectful relationship. The kinds of support available to educators, and activities in which the ESR engages in the pilot district include, but are not limited to:

- Identifying emerging issues and up-to-date information and resources to support policy-making, curriculum development, instruction, classroom dynamics, professional development and responses to emerging, social equity related events and challenges.
- Consultation with Individual educators as they work through personal and professional challenges related to social equity.
- Joining consideration of responses to specific, social equity-related events at the school, in the school community, and in the larger world.
- Collaborating with school staff to develop and facilitate learner-driven professional development opportunities.
- Supporting educators' work with co-curricular activities, e.g. student groups, athletics, and student publications.



Pilot Study Results

All of these activities and more were undertaken by the ILI Senior Research Associate who embodied the ESR model during a two-year pilot study at U-32 Middle-High School, and with the professional development committee at Rumney Elementary School, in the Washington Central Unified Union School District in Vermont.

Results from that pilot study, affirmed by an independent evaluation, indicate that those components work together to,

- increase educators' willingness and confidence to proactively engage in efforts to drive equity and respond to inequity,
- deepen educators' reflection and thinking about social equity,
- and increase the likelihood that educators will seek support for their own struggles with social equity, and with equity challenges in and outside of the classroom.



Promising Areas of Impact

As a research and innovation institute, the ILI is committed to deepening our understanding of the impact and workings of the ESR model. Two promising impacts emerged during the pilot study that are the subject of specific continued research,

- The ESR model encourages and supports educators in ongoing learning and change in response to emerging insights as well as national and local events, and increases willingness to address social equity. That appears to drive sustained engagement with efforts to reduce racial and other social inequity.
- Because the model is rooted in relationships characterized by mutual respect and accountability, and driven by individual and community-specific questions and challenges, it appears that the changes resulting from the model as well as the model itself are less vulnerable to community resistance to and concern about social equity efforts in schools.

Status of the Initiative

With the two-year pilot complete, this ESR Initiative has moved to the replication stage. The district in which the pilot was conducted has adopted the Equity Scholar in Residence model for the 2021-2022 school year, serving all six of its schools in an experimental application of scale. Supported by a grant from the Block Family Foundation, the Institute for Liberatory Innovation is establishing the processes and documentation necessary to support adoption of the model by other Vermont schools.

As the model begins to serve other schools in Vermont communities with varied character, the ILI will continue to study the workings and impact of the model, reporting its findings to client districts as well as to the public. The ILI is actively seeking funding partners for those efforts. Based on the continued success of the model in Vermont schools, the ILI will expand its support for model adoption to other regions and to independent schools. Starting in 2021, the ILI will begin to explore adaptations of the ESR model for other organizational contexts.

ⁱ40% of the educational staff of the school responded to the survey.

ⁱ e.g Dobbin, Frank and Alexandra Kalev. (July/August 2016.) Why Diversity Programs Fail. Harvard Business Review; and Pruitt, Allison-Scott, Brinkworth, Carolyn, Young, Joshua and Kristen Luna Aponte. (March 30, 2018). 5 Things We Learned About Creating a Successful Workplace Diversity Program, Harvard Business Review

ⁱⁱ Two reports documenting inequity in Vermont Schools: Education Matters: The Impacts of Systemic Inequity in Vermont. By Molly Goldberg and Dawn Moskowitz for Voices for Vermont Children. (2016).

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example, Ahlquist, R. (2009). Manifestations of inequality: Overcoming resistance in a multicultural foundations course. In C. Grant (Ed.), Research and multicultural education: From the margins to the mainstream (pp. 89-105). London: Palmer; Logue, J. L. (2010). The unbelievable truth and the dilemmas of ignorance: Rethinking student resistance in social justice education. (PhD Dissertation), University of Toronto, Proquest Dissertations & Theses Full text. (3392200); and McCluskey, G. , G. Lloyd , J. Steada , J. Kaneb , S. Riddella and E. Weedona. (2008) "I was dead restorative today": from restorative justice to restorative approaches in school." Cambridge Journal of Education Vol. 38, No. 2, June 2008, 199-216.

^{iv} e.g Nemet MB. A Correlation between Teachers' Social and Pedagogical Competences and School Culture. Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies / Sodobna Pedagogika. 2018;69(3):142-155.. Accessed June 23, 2020.; and Landsman, J.; Lewis, C. W. White teachers, diverse classrooms : creating inclusive schools, building on students' diversity, and providing true educational equity. 2nd ed. [s. l.]: Stylus Pub., 2011.

^v ILI Senior Research Associate Dr. Shelley Vermilya embodied the role of the Equity Scholar in Residence for the pilot study, working full time with educators at U-32 and Rumney, and keeping daily field notes about her activity, educators' responses, and results of their work together.

The Equity Scholar in Residence Model 2021

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OUR MISSION

The Institute for Liberatory Innovation creates opportunities for change-makers to think, experiment and learn together, and to generate and implement strategies for a more equitable and nonviolent future.

Please contact **ILI Director Lucinda Garthwaite** to explore adopting the ESR Model in your school, or to consider funding continued research or adoption of the model by financially underserved schools.





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