

10/14/25 Want to Be an Equity-Centered Educator Look at Classroom Design

Friday, September 19, 2025 7:19 PM

Want to Be an Equity-Centered Educator? Look at Classroom Design

Would you be surprised to hear that equity is more than curriculum or policy? It also lives in the physical spaces we create. It matters how a classroom is designed. Classroom design is a way to communicate values. For equity-centered educators, classroom design can be a way to either reinforce or disrupt systems of exclusion. In this article, we invite educators to reflect upon what their classrooms say about who belongs and who is being left out.

Exploring the Meaning

Educators should keep in mind the fact that classroom design is a pedagogical tool. It shapes how students feel, move, and engage themselves in the learning process. In culturally responsive classrooms, the classrooms reflect the voice, identities, and histories of all students, not only a select few. Flexible classroom environments support diverse student needs and reduce barriers between students and educators. When students have a voice in classroom design, their stories are more visible and students are more likely to feel valued and included.

belle hooks talked about classrooms becoming sites of radical possibility. Equity-centered educators should welcome the notion of their classrooms being places where radical possibilities are present. Part of the idea of radical possibility can be addressed by finding ways to add Indigenous and Afrocentric models of learning spaces to the classroom. This may include things like circle groups, creating community, and looking for ways to foster and strengthen relationships between students and between students and educators.

Classroom Applications

There are many ways in which educators can use equity-centered classroom design to make classrooms more equitable and better for students. Some of these ways include:

- **Visual Representation** - The use of student work, culturally affirming images, and multi-lingual signage can help all students feel as if they and their voices have a place in the classroom. When students see themselves in the classroom, they are more likely to feel comfortable and have better educational outcomes.
- **Flexible Seating** - When students have a choice in how and where they sit in the classroom they have choice and agency. To make this work, educators can rearrange desks or allow students to change seats on a regular basis.
- **Ritual Spaces** - Providing classroom space for reflection, journaling, affirmation, or quiet self-reflection also serves to give students agency and sense of belonging. Having these spaces in a classroom helps

In elementary school classrooms, it is easier for educators to do creative things like labeled visuals, comfy seating, and identity-based book displays. In secondary classroom spaces, students can be part of the design process for bulletin boards. These older students can also help create classroom agreements. Even educators in virtual spaces can create equity-centered classrooms. They can do things like create digital backgrounds, collaborative whiteboards, and institute personalized check-in rituals.

Real World Impact

In the real world, equity in classroom design looks like teachers rearranging desks into a circle so that students are in equitable power positions and their voices have the power to be increased. It may look like a school administrator working to redesign hallways so that student art and affirmations are given prime placement. This type of work may lead to increased engagement.

Check out the following "Equity-Centered Classroom Design Checklist." You may [click here](#), to download the checklist and use it in your classroom.



Equity-Centered Classroom Design Checklist

Reflect. Reimagine. Reaffirm belonging.



Section 1: Representation & Visibility

Soft background: muted sage green or soft coral

- ☐ Student work is displayed and regularly updated
- ☐ Visuals reflect racial, cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity
- ☐ Books and posters include historically marginalized voices
- ☐ Multilingual signage affirms all learners
- ☐ Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and environment



Notes / Reflections:



Section 2: Layout & Accessibility

Soft background: pale lavender or sky blue

- ☐ Seating supports collaboration and flexibility
- ☐ Pathways are clear and accessible for all bodies
- ☐ Quiet or regulation spaces are available
- ☐ Materials are within reach for all students
- ☐ Sensory needs are considered (lighting, sound, textures)



Notes / Reflections:



Section 3: Rituals & Belonging

Soft background: warm beige or blush pink

- ☐ Space for community rituals (e.g., affirmations, check-ins)
- ☐ Students co-create classroom norms
- ☐ Visual cues communicate safety and welcome
- ☐ Student voice is visible (e.g., suggestion box, reflection wall)
- ☐ Celebrations are culturally responsive and inclusive



Notes / Reflections:



Section 4: Power & Participation

Soft background: light teal or goldenrod

- ☐ Students have choice in how they use the space

- ☐ Multiple learning modes are supported
- ☐ Students co-design or personalize parts of the room
- ☐ Teacher's desk does not dominate the space
- ☐ Layout addresses power dynamics intentionally

 **Notes / Reflections:**

Section 5: Reflection & Iteration

Soft background: soft gray or parchment cream

- ☐ I ask students how the space feels and what could improve
- ☐ I reflect on how my identity shapes the environment
- ☐ I adapt the space based on student needs and seasons
- ☐ The classroom is a living archive of our learning
- ☐ I revisit this checklist each term to stay aligned with equity

 **Notes / Reflections:**

Final Reflection Prompt

What does your classroom say about who belongs, who leads, and who is seen? What one small change can you make this week to move closer to equity?

References

Hooks, B. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

5. Conclusion

- **Final Reflection:** Equity lives in the details. When we design with intention, we create spaces that whisper, *You belong here*.
- **Encouragement:** Invite educators to walk through their classrooms with fresh eyes. What's working? What's missing? What's possible?
- **Call to Action:**
 - *Journal Prompt:* "What does my classroom design say about my values? What one change could make it more inclusive?"
 - *Engagement:* Encourage readers to share photos or stories of their own equity-centered design shifts in the comments or on social media.

References

Hooks, B. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

Further Reading

[The Best Educators Strive to Create Equity-Centered Classrooms](#)

[Unlock Your Doctoral Success: Coaching & Resources That Work](#)

[Unleash the Fire Within: Maya Angelou's Lifegiving Wisdom for Educators](#)

[We Love Our Kids Too: Black Parents Supporting the Academic Success of Their Children in Affluent, Predominantly White School Districts](#)

About the Author

Dr. Janeane Davis is Founder and Principal Consultant at Janeane Davis and Associates: Educational Consultants. She designs equity-centered strategies that speak to both heart and structure—supporting educators who refuse to leave justice at the classroom door. Her writing invites reflection, courage, and the kind of clarity that shifts culture.

Desk light on. Equity in focus. Always listening.

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31 Equity-Centered Teaching Practice Blog Titles

1. Xxx What Is Equity-Centered Teaching? A Narrative Approach
2. Xxx Beyond Inclusion: Designing Classrooms That Honor Every Story
3. The Power of Ritual: Morning Practices That Center Equity
4. Reframing Rigor: Academic Excellence Without Erasure
5. Teaching for Joy and Justice: A Pedagogical Balancing Act
6. Culturally Responsive Teaching Starts with Listening
7. From Bias to Belonging: Building Reflective Educator Habits
8. Equity Is a Verb: Daily Actions That Shift the Classroom
9. Designing Curriculum That Reflects Student Identity
10. Feedback as Liberation: Rethinking Assessment Practices
11. Narrative Pedagogy: Teaching Through Story and Self
12. Creating Brave Spaces: Dialogue, Dignity, and Discomfort
13. The Role of Language in Equity-Centered Classrooms
14. Interrupting Inequity in Real Time: What Educators Can Do
15. Teaching the Whole Child: Trauma-Informed and Equity-Aligned
16. Equity-Centered Lesson Planning: A Step-by-Step Framework

17. Reimagining Classroom Management Through an Equity Lens
18. Digital Tools That Support Equity and Student Voice
19. Centering Black and Brown Joy in Curriculum Design
20. Equity in Action: Case Studies from Real Classrooms
21. The Educator's Identity: Why Who You Are Shapes What You Teach
22. Reclaiming Time: Equity-Centered Scheduling and Pacing
23. Student-Centered Learning as a Path to Equity
24. The Hidden Curriculum: Naming and Navigating Power
25. Equity and Excellence: Why We Must Refuse the Either/Or
26. Teaching as Advocacy: Mobilizing Educators for Change
27. Designing Assessments That Honor Multiple Ways of Knowing
28. The Role of Reflection in Equity-Centered Practice
29. Building Community Partnerships for Equitable Learning
30. Equity-Centered Professional Development: What Works
31. Sustaining the Work: Wellness and Equity for Educators

Universal Blog Series Template for Educators

1. Introduction

- Brief overview of the topic, tip, figure, or theme being featured.
- Why this subject is relevant to educators today — especially in equity-centered, narrative-driven classrooms.
- A warm invitation for readers to reflect, engage, and apply the insights.

2. Exploring the Meaning

- Breakdown of the core idea, quote, poem, or strategy.
- Connection to broader educational philosophies, historical movements, or pedagogical frameworks.
- Optional: Include cultural, literary, or scholarly context to deepen understanding.

3. Classroom Applications

- How educators can bring this idea into their teaching practice.
- Example activities, lesson ideas, rituals, or discussion prompts.
- Suggestions for adapting the concept across grade levels, disciplines, or learning environments.

4. Real-World Impact

- Stories or reflections from educators, students, or community members.
- How this idea has inspired change, fostered belonging, or supported student success.
- Optional: Include quotes, testimonials, or links to related resources.

5. Conclusion

- Final reflections on the power of the featured idea in shaping intentional, inclusive education.
- Encouragement for educators to personalize the insight and share their own stories.
- Optional call to action: journal prompt, comment invitation, or downloadable resource.

Further Reading

[The Best Educators Strive to Create Equity-Centered Classrooms](#)

[Unlock Your Doctoral Success: Coaching & Resources That Work](#)

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<https://jamesdavisandassociates.com/the-best-educators-strive-to-create-equity-centered-classrooms/>

