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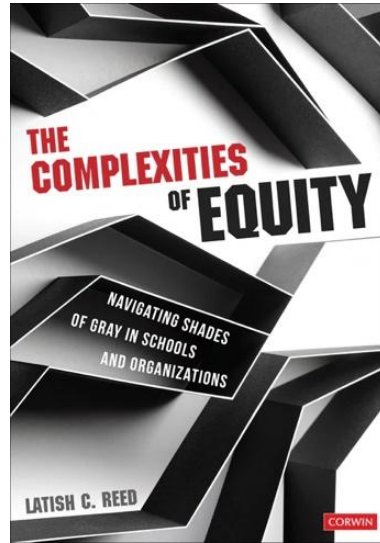
**Reed, L. C. (2025).** *The complexities of equity: Navigating shades of gray in schools and organizations.* Corwin.

200 pp.

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Based on her experience of being an education graduate, a researcher, and an equity leader, Latish C. Reed develops the Equity Empowerment Continuum (EEC) and explains its four phases in *The Complexities of Equity*. Reed attempts to provide a conceptual framework to empower readers to advocate for equitable outcomes amid challenging realities. Through the book, she categorizes and explains how equity is still sought in U.S. schools and organizations. With the experience of being the inaugural equity administrator in the Milwaukee Public Schools district, Reed visualizes where U.S. institutions stand on achieving equity and how the situation can change. She emphasizes the importance of EEC in equity work:



The EEC is a tool that helps you think about what you will do and how. It is a framework that unpacks and analyzes the opportunities at hand for making meaningful progress. It will help you see where you are in your equity work and where you want to go, and it will help us consider the steps necessary for empowering more impactful actions. (p. 50)

The cover of the book consists of four colors resembling the four phases of equity situations explained in EEC- White, Light Gray, Dark Gray, and Black – see above. White represents absence of action or actively deepening inequities, while Black represents Large-scale laws of the land that provide the foundation for equity work. Between them are two phases; Light Gray representing superficial or performative actions that mildly address inequities, and Dark Gray referring to pushing the boundaries within the organization to create equitable changes. Reed believes the EEC is a way to recognize and navigate the real threats that exist

within specific contexts and only when someone can see and consider their position in the continuum, “the arc” bends closer to justice.

Reed attempts to provide a conceptual framework to empower readers to advocate for equitable outcomes amid the persistent and deeply rooted inequities that characterize U.S. schooling. These “challenging realities” include internal contradictions (p. 45), status quo gaze (p. 47), coordinated effort to stop equity progress (p. 66), and comprehensive codification (p. 127). EEC appears to be a self-exploratory and action-based tool that helps educators and leaders locate their position within these equity contexts.

Each chapter has a specific agenda. First, it acknowledges the problem, explores it, and then uses the EEC framework to discuss potential solutions. In Chapter 1, Reed argues that to address inequities in any institution, one has to understand how individuals decide to act. And for that, one must explore who the individuals are. Then she explains how identity, context, experiences, and timing (ICE-T) can be the foundation of any individual’s decisions and actions. Reed uses her academic, personal, and professional experiences to establish and explain what her visible and invisible attributes are, and how she faced inequities in different contexts. Thus is the foundation laid as she proceeds to the framework in the next chapters.

In Chapter 2, Reed introduces her Equity Empowerment Continuum (EEC). She believes that internal contradictions and status quo gaze are the two major barriers to equity work, and that EEC can explain how inequity can be addressed, analyzed, and challenged. The most interesting thing here is her selection of colors for the phases, and how she attempts to build a counternarrative against the existing practices. Though Reed’s Equity Empowerment Continuum has conceptual similarities with existing equity frameworks like Equity Audit or Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) models, it differs from these by locating positionality and progression first. EEC invites individuals and institutions to find themselves along a continuum of self-awareness rather than focusing on outcomes. Reed connects self-inquiry with structural critique to offer a framework to those who want a way out from intention to action in equity work.

Reed uses Chapter 3, 4, 5, and 6 to explain White, Light Gray, Dark Gray, and Black Phases, respectively. She uses easy-to-understand real life examples and specific identifiers for each phase so that readers can connect the phases to their experiences. Her pointing out avoidance to be one of the main reasons for existing inequity shocks readers as almost everyone can identify with intentionally avoiding or being at least resistant in tense work environments. Using examples like the spread of HIV and the misinformation related to it, George Floyd’s murder and consequences in work and educational settings, Reed knocks on doors that needed that knocking. She explains how efforts for equity still are stopped and how much more impact such efforts could have if people were properly informed. In Chapter 4, Reed compares many organizations’ efforts to “Diet Equity,” where both are labeled as good for consumers, but the ingredients that make them impactful are always missing. This intention to make an appearance of change, rather making true change, is disturbing. The author argues that organizations often attempt to appear socially conscious and oriented toward

social justice but do not consider the inequitable actions that already exist within. Chapters 5 and 6 are about the phases in which justice is on the way. Reed uses Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign as an example of how someone can maximize their spheres to achieve something incredible. She emphasizes not only controlling or influencing that which someone can control but also attempting to have an impact outside of one's typical sphere of control. Taking initiatives, even when one needs not, can make all the difference in achieving justice. This chapter also sheds light on how important it is to create and preserve written accountability (e.g. equity policy). Chapter 6 starts with how Reed flips the negative characteristics that are often associated with the color black and uses them to indicate progress. She mentions aspirations, timely movements, and comprehensive codification to a sustained phase where justice is served.

Chapter 7 brings up the most important question: How and to what degree will someone act to achieve an equitable end? With structured suggestions, Reed explains how EEC can be a way to decide and act. This chapter takes readers to the actionable part of this journey towards equity.

This book can be a thoughtful addition when there is a palpable need for equity study. For people, including educators, who want to challenge the education landscape in all its aspects, this book will benefit them deeply. This book is an excellent opportunity to dive into everyday equity situations as author Leed designs examples and reflection activities that can be a useful tool to interrogate actions that are attempting to move an organization closer to justice. Though educators are the main audience for this book, other professionals can connect with its content and apply it to their fields.

The author acknowledges how complicated pursuing equity can be and covers the most impactful aspects of building the groundwork to fight for it. Although Reed successfully combines her personal and professional experiences to formulate strategies for facing inequity, sometimes the experiences related seem quite unfocused. Her role as an equity leader is relevant, but readers may find it frequently mentioned in later chapters while she already established it in the first few chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 seem to be a little off track, as some content there may have been discussed in previous chapters. The cohesiveness is admirable, but readers might find consistency with the equity scenarios more effective.

Reed analyzes culture and the broader context of her work by using her own experiences with historical and contemporary events so that readers can identify and reconsider what such events might mean in their lives. *The Complexities of Equity* does not provide direct strategies to achieve equity. It explains the problem, digs deep into it, and finds why a particular equity situation is the way it is, leading to a "how to challenge it" to create a better scenario. Use of phase vignettes, probing questions, and chapter-wise reflections make the book readable and lead the reader to a deeper understanding of the complex world of inequity. This book can be the perfect tool to begin to address equity issues, not only from an individual perspective but also at an institutional level. Reed's work can be a genuine guide for schools and organizations that are putting effort into ensuring an equitable and inclusive environment for all.

### About the Reviewer

**Md Mamunur Rashid Zaber** is a doctoral student in the School of Teaching and Learning, Illinois State University. His research focuses on curriculum studies, multilingual education, and teacher resilience. With more than five years of university teaching experience in Bangladesh, he is committed to culturally responsive pedagogy and advancing equity for linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Zaber's scholarly interests include exploring how educational policies and teaching practices shape teacher identity and student engagement in multilingual contexts. His work bridges research and practice, reflecting a deep interest in global perspectives on education and social justice.



### About the Book Author

**Latish C. Reed** has a career that spans more than two decades as a college admissions counselor, teacher, teacher-leader, school administrator, assistant professor of leadership, and organizational equity leader. She served as the inaugural equity administrator in the Milwaukee Public Schools, where she led equity policy development and professional learning to support district-wide improvement. Beyond education, she has shared her expertise with corporate, healthcare, and government professionals, consulting on critical equity issues to foster inclusive environments across sectors.



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