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Did You Know | Why It Matters | For Equity Now

Acknowledging Difference and Disrupting Systemic Oppression is Inclusive, Not Divisive

[Image description: Paper doll cut out, separated and burned in the middle by a lit matchstick whose tip is in the shape of a human facial profile, signifying divisiveness and subsequent destruction.]

We must merge our traditional sense of schooling with the real world. What we do in school must not insult the child's past, but must build upon his past and encourage future learning.

- Sigmund Boloz

# Did You Know
Centering Educational Equity is Inclusive

There is currently a national debate surrounding what can and cannot be taught in K-12 public schools. States such as Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Iowa, New Hampshire, Arizona, and South Carolina recently passed legislation banning teaching and discussions surrounding the history of U.S. systemic racism, bias, privilege, discrimination, and oppression while many other states and school boards have put guidelines in place surrounding race discussions in schools (Gibbons, 2021). This legislation is a result of a 2020 executive order, since rescinded, which sparked a national critique and proposed banning of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; George, 2021). Critics of CRT believe the intellectual framework is divisive: that teaching an accurate historic depiction of our country that centers the voices, perspectives, and contributions of those that have been historically marginalized and silenced is inherently racist, threatens progress against racism, and is not substantial to content that is academically rigorous (Banerjee, 2021).

In this *Equity Dispatch* we remember that centering equity and being able to recognize, name, and address the history of systemic racism and oppression in the United States is inclusive, not divisive. Centering equity, and striving towards inclusivity via curricula, instruction, pedagogy, and practices, benefits all education stakeholders within a community. By centering equity, educators increase safety—minimizing threats of identity-based exclusion, harassment, discrimination, violence, and harm (stopbullying.gov, 2021). Secondly, students, families, and staff within a schooling community need caring, safe, and inclusive communities to thrive. When human needs of experiencing authentic love, trust, acceptance, positive connectivity, dignity, and respect are met, students can maximize an ability to fully participate in, and benefit from learning and growth opportunities (Maslow, 1987). Additionally, when educators begin to think about the intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1989) students possess, there is an ability to move beyond socialization into a status quo which often results in the erasure of the historical and lived experiences, values and cultures of students who embody non-dominant identities requiring them to "subtract" important aspects of their identities (Valenzuela, 1999), and instead center and demonstrate a true valuing of the rich diversity students bring into the classroom as assets.

Embracing differing perspectives welcomes an environment that cultivates students as leaders and productive members of a more socially just society and future. Pedagogies such as Multicultural Education (Banks, 2019; Bennett, 1986), Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014, Paris, 2012; Vavrus, 2008), Universal Design for Learning (Hall et al., 2012; King-Sears, 2009; Rose, 2000), Emancipatory Education (Biesta, 2017; Hart, 1990; Saxe, 2012; Winarti, 2018), and Abolitionist Teaching (Love, 2019) have a long history of providing direct tools and strategies for teachers to ensure equity, inclusivity, and acceptance, embracing student differences. The historical lineage of this work exists because educators must feel empowered to

teach in a way that centers the lived experiences and funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2009) of students, important historical contributions of those who possess non-dominant identities, and increase student opportunity to think freely, question critically, and challenge injustices and imbalances in power to build stronger communities (Summers, 2019). When centering equity in this way, at the core of school and schooling, students receive their right to safe and inclusive schooling where they are seen, heard, acknowledged, and valued (Chavous et al., 2008; Skelton, 2020).
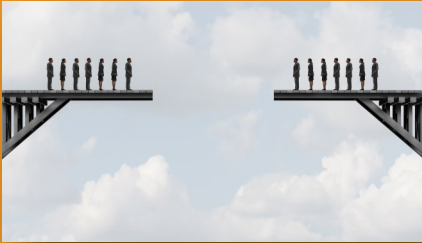
Why It Matters
Remaining Divisive Deters Educators from Authentically Centering Equity

[Image description: A bridge, with a large gap in the middle. There are groups of people on both sides.]

Schools and schooling have historically included a transmission of values which dehumanize and inflict harm onto students that do not fit the dominant standards of "normal" (e.g., White, cis-male, heterosexual, non-dis/abled) (Stovall & Annamma, 2021). To redress exclusion and harm, educators must be given an opportunity to engage in meaningful and authentic discourse and (un)learning, which center equity and challenge pre-conceived values and beliefs surrounding ideas of student success, teaching, and learning. This includes, but is not limited to, engaging in a process of interrogating current school policies, practices, and language that are often rooted in power and privilege attributed to race, ethnicity, sex, gender expression, socio-economic status, and ability (Paris, 2017).

By asking the questions like who is currently benefiting from the way things are in schools, and who is not (Radd & Macey, 2013), educators can begin to think of meaningful ways to disrupt inequities. Within open, vulnerable, honest, and uncomfortable dialogues educators can begin to challenge the status quo and create more equitable schooling environments. Here, instead of seeing students who possess non-dominant social identities (e.g., students of Color, students from disinvested communities, LGBTQI+ students, students with dis/abilities, transnational students) kept on the margins, we would see increased access, representation, meaningful participation, and ultimately high outcomes for *all* students (Chen et al., 2014; Fraser, 1998; Mulligan & Kozleski, 2009; Paris, 2012).

Teaching Accurate History

The quality of education, and what students learn in school, is crucial to the citizens they become and their future impact on the American democracy (Garland, 2021). Individuals with a culturally rich and historically accurate education tend to have more political knowledge and are politically active, whereas research has found that those who do not receive historically accurate education are less likely to be inclusive and/or embrace cultural differences (Garland, 2021). The goal of teaching accurate history, such as systems of white supremacy that have marginalized and oppressed Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) is to empower students of all racial and ethnic

backgrounds to understand and analyze the historical lineage of oppression in our nation to appropriately grow into active citizens who will disrupt and rebuild more equitable structures and a just society. However, some believe that in engaging students in critical dialogue surrounding race, teachers are imposing individual political views, moral beliefs, and inflicting unnecessary pain and guilt onto students holding dominant identity markers.

As a result, we find a continued debate regarding what should and should not be taught within the realm of public education as it relates to providing comprehensive and accurate information about our country, and global communities which includes the experiences of marginalized groups. As stated in our introduction, many states are restricting teaching about ways in which minoritized groups have been oppressed and continue to face marginalization. This creates a distracting and unproductive conflict that keeps those with dominant identities (particularly based on race) in a stance of opposition. By pointing fingers and fighting each other, rather than acknowledging socio-historical realities that are still permeating society, individuals who possess both dominant and non-dominant identities are kept from engaging in the real work of disrupting and dismantling inequities and working towards creating just, inclusive and equitable learning and living communities for everyone. Instead of operating from a place of fear and/or avoidance, we ask educators to embrace the current challenges in this moment of history as opportunities. Here there is freedom to welcome and embrace authentic and transformative critical action.

For Equity Now
Remain Focused in the Pursuit of Educational Equity and Inclusivity

[Image description: Elementary-aged, feminine–presenting person of color smiling while holding a magnifying glass to one eye. A teacher and other students can be seen in the background.]

Educate Yourself on What it Means to Center Equity

The process of centering equity requires deep learning and unlearning. Inequities persist because of the ways each of us has been socialized to perpetuate a status quo that benefits some and marginalizes others. Consider how you will educate yourself to understand not only the fundamentals of educational equity, but also the history of inequity within your local context.

- The Fundamentals of Educational Equity

   This *Equity Digest* provides a place to begin for education stakeholders as we review the fundamentals of educational equity and why it is so important in ensuring the success of all students.

- Centering Equity in Educator Professional Learning

   This *Equity Dispatch* discusses ways in which professional learning can be designed

and carried out to promote educators' deep understanding of educational equity and therefore, better situate educators to provide every learner with access to a high-quality education in an inclusive environment, regardless of educational content area.

- [On Educating Culturally Sustaining Teachers](#)

  This *Equity by Design Research Brief* examines culturally sustaining pedagogies and teacher learning. It also further examines the curricularization of racism, asset pedagogies, and assimilationist teaching in order to curricularize equity.

Consider How You Will Communicate your Purpose and Rationale for Equity Work

Within the current socio-political context, it is critical to consider how you will communicate your purpose and rationale regarding centering equity for transformative change. How will your communications cultivate a culture within your organization that is working in unison towards equity-centered goals?

- [Promoting Equitable Learning Communities via Equity-Oriented Strategic Planning](#)

  This professional learning series is designed to engage teams in equity-oriented strategic planning. Participants will examine critically, intersections of policies, procedures, structures, and practices pertaining to major domains effecting student outcomes within participants' educational contexts. Teams will chart and evaluate initial courses of action necessary for advancing educational equity at the systemic level; and leave this series with knowledge and skills needed to scale-up equity-oriented strategic planning throughout system domains.

- [Constructing Social Justice in Education](#)

  This edition of the *Equity Dispatch* explores how educators can create spaces in order to grapple with and define what social justice means in their context(s) during professional development, committee work, teaching, strategic planning, and collaboratively reflecting, and interfacing with parents/caregivers and community partners. Discussions of social justice in education must move beyond the misperceived barrier that pressures of academic achievement are at direct odds with curriculum and practices which focus on social justice. Definitions of social justice must move beyond work-force oriented perspectives on schooling, which stresses education for jobs, to one where the traditional model of schooling becomes a pathway in developing agency and learning toward self-determination. There exists a great opportunity in seeing educational practice as sites of justice, not merely injustice. By viewing students as well as educators as equal participants, students are afforded the opportunity to be active global citizens and persistent critical thinkers.

- [Policy Equity Analysis Toolkit](#)

  The purpose of this toolkit is to provide a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and processes for engaging in an equity-oriented policy review and analysis.

Ensure You are Engaging in Authentic Transformative Change

It is not just thinking about how you will center equity and it is more than talking about centering equity. What critical action will educators engage in to ensure you are actively and authentically disrupting inequities within your organization?

- Commit to (Re)commit: Making Equity Work Personal

  Re-committing to equity work means that equity-oriented educators must reflect on the impact of historical and systemic inequities on minoritized students, accepting that transformative change towards equity takes time and unrelenting and continuous hard work, and it means being willing to pursue educational equity even in the face of fierce opposition.

- Leadership Practices for Transformative Change Towards Equity

  As educators across the nation ready their schools and classrooms to welcome a new year, there will undoubtedly be renewed pledges to ensure that all students experience high-quality opportunities to learn and succeed. This *Equity Dispatch* discusses how education leaders can better realize educational equity by engaging in asset-based, systemic-wide approaches to transformative change (GLEC, 2011).

- Transformative District Change Requires an Equity-Focused School Board

  In this *Equity Digest*, we discuss the power of local school boards to impact students' education experiences, the benefits of an equity-centered school board, critical reflection as a tool for the development of a critical lens, and key questions to ask school board candidates to ensure they represent the best interests of all members of the school community.

Meet the Authors

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